



## PART 5 UNSERVICED SETTLEMENTS

### 5.1 Context

The County Development Plan 2002 – 2008 identified a series of 12 unserviced settlements in proximity to Athlone and Mullingar. The function and objective of the unserviced settlement policy is twofold. In the first instance, it is to direct rural residential development in a sustainable pattern, concentrating development in designated centres to sustain rural communities and rural facilities such as schools and shops. Secondly, it is to cater for the demand for rural housing from individuals that do not satisfy adopted 'local need' criteria.

The unserviced settlement policy is therefore an important link in sustaining rural population levels, rural communities and rural services in accordance with the strategic settlement direction. Coupled with policies to provide serviced sites in towns and policies to encourage re-use of vacant rural buildings, the unserviced settlement policy will ensure a vibrant and sustainable rural community while protecting the open countryside from over saturation of urban generated and suburban designed residential development.

It is proposed to extend the series of unserviced settlements to 23 for the period 2008 – 2014. The designated unserviced settlements are as follows:

- **Athlone Area;** Baylin, Castledaly, Toberclaive, Ballynahown,
- **Coole Area;** Streete, Crookedwood, Drumcree, Castletown-Finnea, Lismacaffrey, Archerstown
- **Kilbeggan Area;** Loughnavalley, Dysart, Moyvore, Mount Temple, Tang, Horseleap, Streamstown
- **Mullingar Area;** The Downs, Rathconrath, Taghman, Gainstown, Ballinea and Milltown

### 5.2 The Role of Unserviced Settlements

The purpose of the unserviced settlement policy is to provide opportunities for rural residential development outside the network of Villages and Towns, but in a co-ordinated and sustainable pattern to sustain rural services and facilities. The unserviced settlements are not designated to provide multiple housing units for urban generated commuter based developments. Developments more appropriate in scale and design to towns and villages higher in the settlement hierarchy will be directed to villages and towns with the infrastructural capacity to accommodate such development.

Some of the designated settlements display tightly knit built forms with identifiable centres, generally defined by the church or local school and shop rather than a more typical sporadic linear pattern of development. Introducing single site housing on 0.2ha plots will not reflect the scale and form of such settlements, and will ultimately undermine the character and fabric of the village and the elements that make it an attractive location in the first instance. In such instances, it is policy to encourage the consolidation of the settlement centre, and proposals for infill development representing more than one unit will be considered where such development will enhance street pattern or consolidate a settlement core.

### 5.3 Planning Assessments

A planning assessment has been undertaken for the 14 unserviced settlements designated under the 2002 – 2008 Development Plan. It is policy to ensure such a framework is in place for all designated unserviced settlements prior to any development being permitted under the unserviced settlement policy. The purpose of the planning assessment is to survey each settlement in terms of existing facilities, outstanding planning permissions, recent developments, visual characteristics, important open space areas, speed limits, and water supply and sewerage schemes and identify opportunities in terms of the settlements capacity to absorb additional residential development.

<b>O-US1</b>	To complete a detailed planning statement for the Unserviced Settlement of Mount Temple.
--------------	--

#### 5.4 Development Limits

Development limits will be established to ensure that any development does not become too dispersed or lead to unsustainable and undesirable ribbon development. The “development limits” will not affect those households who display the local need criteria from building outside these limits. The development limits will be designated on the basis of the suitability and capacity for new residential development, within which development for single houses, or in exceptional circumstances small schemes will be allowed. The limits establish the defined area within which development will be considered acceptable. They will provide opportunities to facilitate infill development, and could allow some limited backland development, but only where there are no detrimental effects upon the amenities of existing residents or the visual amenities of the settlement.

The impact of the number of new houses in a location without proper services, i.e. water and waste, is a serious planning consideration. It needs to be further emphasised that the risks to public health and the danger of pollution will be major considerations in any new planned development. So even though areas or sites may be within the defined development limits, this does not automatically qualify them for planning permission because the detailed considerations of water supply and drainage capacity of the ground along with the amenity and design considerations will need to be fully considered and addressed.

The development limits, will be selected and designated on the basis that they provide an adequate and appropriate supply of development sites, within the Plan timescale, to allow the settlements to grow in accordance with the services that are available.

**P-US1** In advance of any permissions being granted in any designated unserved settlement, it is policy to complete a planning assessment and establish the ‘development limits’.

**P-US2** It is important that the capacity of the settlement and the development limits are established before any development is permitted. This is in order to retain the local distinctiveness and established character of the settlement, and to ensure that new development respects and reflects the established form.

**P-US3** Any proposed development within the unserved settlements, will be judged on their appropriateness and whether they would be more suitably located in the higher order settlements within the County’s overall “settlement strategy”.

As stated, the function of the unserved settlements is to sustain the existing rural facilities, i.e. shop, post office, church, school etc., and to cater for the demand for single site housing in a rural setting close to the principal towns of Athlone and Mullingar and other local service towns, rather than provide a location for urban generated commuter based volumes of housing.

Outside the designated development limits, development will normally be restricted to that required for the purposes of agriculture, or that required to meet the social and economic needs of the settlement community. Development appropriate to the enjoyment of the scenic and natural environmental qualities and character of the countryside, and other developments having a rural character may also be acceptable.

To guide and control new development, ‘development limits’ have been defined. In general terms, development is acceptable within these limits but outside them, in order to maintain the character of the countryside, development will be strictly controlled. In effect, only those types of development, which draw on the character of the countryside itself, its beauty, culture, history and wildlife will normally be permitted. The limits will not preclude the development of local need housing outside of these limits as defined within the County Development Plan.

Development that will adversely affect the setting of the settlement, will not be permitted. Where development is likely to form the edge of a settlement, an integral and substantial landscaping scheme incorporating peripheral planting will normally be required. The interface between the settlement and the countryside is sensitive and requires careful treatment. Any

new development should protect and enhance the setting of the settlement and landscaping proposals can ensure the integration of new development into the settlement, screen views, and provide shelter and enclosure.

Within the designated development limits, development will be permitted where it involves infilling, conversion, single site housing development, the use of derelict or underused land or premises and where the development meets all of the following criteria;

- It will not result in the loss of land of recreation or amenity value,
- It will not have an adverse effect on areas or buildings of historic or architectural importance, or sites of nature conservation value or archaeological importance,
- It will provide an acceptable residential environment,
- It will not be on a site where there is an unacceptable risk to the health and safety of residents through contamination, pollution or risk of pollution,
- It will not damage the character and amenity of existing residential areas,
- It will not create unacceptable problems, and
- It will not result in the loss of or damage to spaces identified as being of importance.

Development schemes for multiple unit housing will not normally be considered in the settlement, however the following exceptions may apply;

- Where the integrity and fabric of the village is enhanced by such a scheme,
- Where the scheme provides for the needs of the local community, and can reduce the demand for housing outside the development limits in the open countryside,
- To monitor and assess the impact of the unserviced settlement policy over the term of the Plan,
- An increase of up to 50% of the existing number of dwellings, until the end of 2010, may be permitted at which time the need to allow additional units will be examined,
- Multiple unit proposals shall not exceed 3 dwellings in number,
- To ensure an appropriate scale of development, the development limits to each settlement should not be interpreted as an overall envelope for widespread development. Guidance below, which aims to protect settlement form, will also be used as a tool to inform appropriate scale of development.

In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, the following guidance on preferred location of new development shall apply;

- Proposed infill development between existing dwellings, which would consolidate the settlement, will be considered foremost,
- Frontage development within identified limits will also be considered, providing it does not detract from settlement form,
- Small, multiple unit proposals, of not more than 3 dwellings, on somewhat larger sites must consolidate the settlement and will be most favourably considered at the settlement core (or in the absence of a clear settlement core, at locations close to services e.g. school, church, shop),
- Proposed development that would lead to road safety issues, or reduce the carrying capacity of important road links, will not be considered favourably,
- Development that would result in the opening up of large tracts of land, (which are not currently expressed as part of the settlement and would therefore detract from it's character and create an incursion into the open countryside) will not be considered favourably.

In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, applications for multiple unit schemes must be accompanied by a design statement that demonstrates how the proposal continues the established character of the settlement. This information may also be requested by the Planning Authority where individual proposals raise design concerns, or are located prominently.

Development that fails to reflect the established character of the settlement in terms of design, materials and proportioning will be resisted. Guidance on appropriate design is contained in the Westmeath Rural Design Guidelines, 2005.

### 5.5 CLÁR Areas

The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) was launched in 2001 and is a targeted investment programme in rural disadvantaged areas, introduced on foot of commitments in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, it operates in tandem with Rapid, a similar programme for investment in urban areas. CLÁR provides funding and co-funding to Government Departments, State Agencies and Local Authorities in accelerating investment in selected priority developments. These investments support physical, economic and social infrastructure across a variety of measures. To date, Westmeath has benefited from Clár co-funding for works including non-national road improvements, group sewerage schemes and Village enhancement programmes.

A first round of designated areas were identified in 2001, following a review of population statistics from 1996, the areas were identified resulting from historical population decline between 1926 – 1996, an arc to the north and west side of County Westmeath was designated for inclusion. Following an analysis of the Preliminary 2002 Population Census data, the CLÁR areas were reviewed and extended in January 2003 arising from the commitment in the Agreed Programme for Government. The new areas are either contiguous to existing CLÁR areas or have a minimum population of 1,000 and are not based primarily on population decline, however, the extended Clár areas reflect closely areas that, generally, have not experienced growth in line with average growth county wide, with exceptions such as Riverdale (ded) which experienced a 37.5% population increase between 2002 and 2006 and Newtown and Kilbeggan, which also experienced growth over the same period, 17.7% and 23.4% respectively.

Policies within the strategic settlement direction seek to provide a variety of housing options to sustain rural communities, such as facilitating the re-use and adaptation of existing vacant rural houses, identifying a series of unserviced rural settlements and encouraging rural residential development in areas that are identified as structurally weak rural areas.

Rural housing policies will act in tandem with rural enterprise policies that encourage on farm diversification, sustainable rural tourism and appropriate rural enterprise, to sustain and maintain vibrant and attractive rural communities, but within a managed countryside that protects amenities and the natural beauty of the rural area.