

**Westmeath County
Council**

**Ballymore Village
Plan
2004-2010**

September 2004

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Preamble

The principal zoning plans for the County are substantially completed with residential and other major land use zonings in place. Whilst the focus for major and large-scale development attention should be concentrated on these lands, priority villages such as Ballymore still play an important role in the sustainable and consolidated development of the rural community. It is not the intention of this Plan to promote major growth within Ballymore but growth, which will consolidate the village and allow its appropriate and measured expansion in accordance with the services and facilities it provides.

1. Strategic aim of a Ballymore Village Plan:

To provide a plan for the consolidated and sensitive development of Ballymore to cater for its development needs of the settlement's population and its role in servicing the surrounding area for the next 6 years, while maintaining and enhancing the village's character and sense of place.

1.1 Policy Context

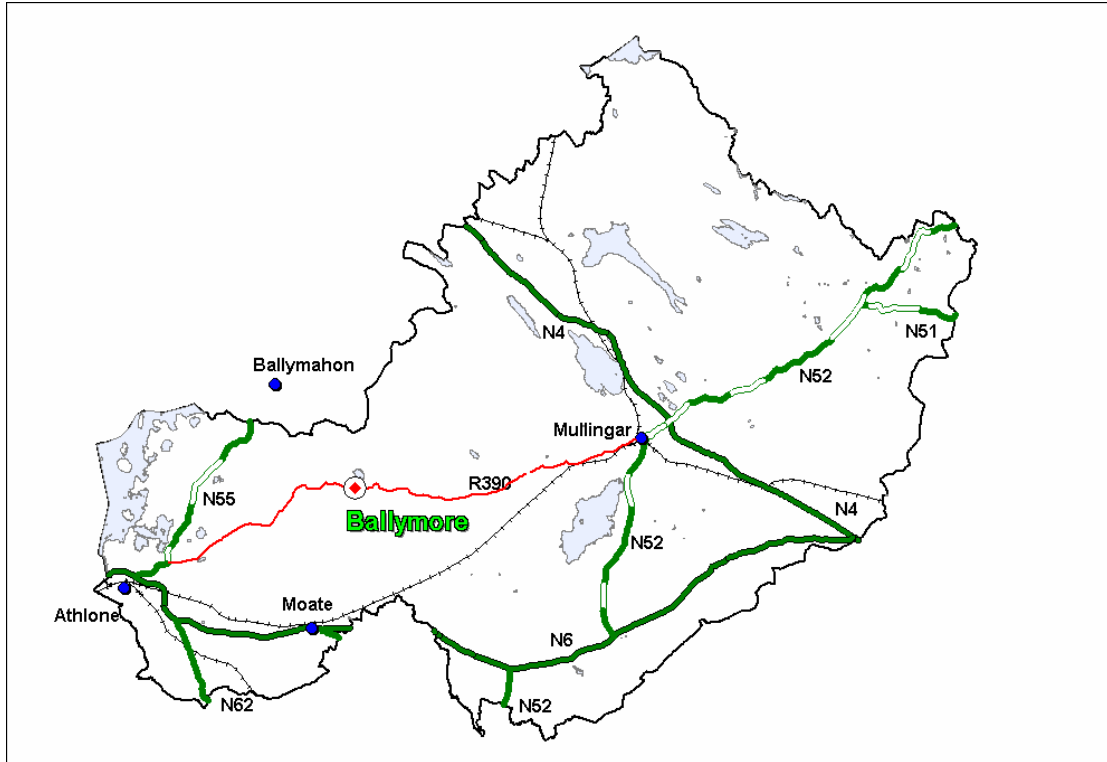
Ballymore is scheduled as a 'priority settlement' within the 'Settlement Strategy' in the 2002-2008 County Development Plan, and it is proposed to present a draft plan for consideration. Special mention should be made to the contribution of the local community and their eagerness to engage in the plan process as the local community council has previously produced a plan for the village. The current development plan being prepared by Westmeath County Council affords an opportunity for the community council plan to contribute to a statutory development plan for Ballymore.

It should be noted that the County Development Plan offers additional and more detailed guidance regarding development control standards for issues such as layout and design of residential developments, archaeology, car parking requirements etc.

2. Profile of Ballymore

2.1 Location

Ballymore is located on the R-390 between Athlone and Mullingar. It is by road 14.2 miles east of Athlone, 15.4 miles west of Mullingar, 7.5 miles north of Moate and 7 miles south east of Ballymahon.



2.2 Description

The picturesque settlement of Ballymore has two distinct character areas. The western part of the village has a spacious setback 'mall' feel to it, while the eastern end has a tighter traditional village street frontage.

The settlement has a disjointed urban structure - being primarily comprised of the two loose linear elements extended east to west over one mile. The resultant villagescape is very intermittent in nature, exacerbated by the varied setbacks and building lines, varied boundary/frontage treatments, varied building heights - ranging from the vernacular 2 storey, 1 ½ storey to modern insertions of bungalows and 2 storey houses. There are a number of high quality vernacular village buildings.

The locality has a high incidence of visible archaeology and indeed a large area centred on the eastern end of the settlement is a zone of archaeological potential. With the ruins of St Owen's church and graveyard and the remnants of the tower of St Plary's Priory (Nunnery/Monastery) and their surrounding open settings both marking the natural centre of the settlement. (A zone of archaeological potential is depicted on the map of the village)

2.3 Population

The settlement in 1996 had a population of 212 the figure for 2003 was 239 persons, an increase of 12.7%.

The immediate rural area surrounding the village (Ballymore DED) has seen a population rise of 26.4%, while the six mile area around the settlement has seen a 10% rise compared to a 13.8% rise for Westmeath and 6.8% for the country for the period of 1996 to 2002. In terms of household formation in 1996 there were 71 permanent private households (averaging 3.14 persons per household).

The population profile of Ballymore is comparable to that of Westmeath, in terms of male/female population and age group cohorts.

2.4 Existing Village Functions:

Including a RC Church & Graveyard; National School (74 pupils); small Garda Station; a small health centre; a funeral parlour/undertakers; a Community Hall; a Post Office; a filling Station/shop, Agricultural supplies store; six pubs and number of shop units.

It is noticeable that there has been some rationalisation of town functions and services with some either closing or not being in full use, i.e. the restaurant is not currently in use and couple of former shops are closed and at least one pub is closed.

While a hard court play area has been constructed in the middle of the Market Hill housing estate area, the village lacks the provision of a formal children's play area, or recreational playing field. The Community Hall hosts a number of evening activities for the community. The GAA grounds and pitch are located overlooking Lough Suedy north of the settlement.

2.5 Cultural/Historical Profile & Assets

A substantial area including the east of Ballymore is a Zone of Archaeological Potential. Immediately visible from the village is the ruins of St Owens (CoI) and graveyard, and south across the R390 is the keep belonging to St Plary's Monastery.

3. Infrastructure

3.1 Sanitary Provision

The sewage treatment plant, which discharges to a tributary of the River Tang in the South Inny Catchment, came into operation in 1986 and is located to south of the village off the L-1304 (Moate Road). It has a current capacity for the equivalent of 500 persons, and at the moment only serves a council housing scheme and a limited number of dwellings. The Ballymore Serviced Land Initiative has been approved and proposes an upgrade to a 1000 population equivalent. It is envisaged that this upgrade will serve the requirements of the village over a 20-year timeframe. Design documents have

been submitted for the approval of the County Council and the DoEHLG. The estimated cost is €0.6+ million and is part funded by the DoEHLG, the County Council and developers.

3.2 Water Supply

Ballymore was connected to the Mullingar Regional Water Supply Scheme and is deemed adequate both in terms of quality and quantity.

3.3 Roads- Public Transport- Movement

The R390 represents an alternative route between Mullingar and Athlone. The priority road linkage would be via the N52 and N6 road network.

If the Athlone to Mullingar rail line is reopened as envisaged by the 2003 Strategic Rail Review, there is a possibility that Ballymore could benefit from a reopening of the Moate halt, this would be the closest possible rail link to Ballymore.

There is poor footpath coverage throughout or approaching the settlement although significant upgrading of the existing footpaths on the main street was made under the 2003 village renewal scheme. There are currently no cycle or bridle paths serving the locality.

The village is served by the Bus Eireann service between Athlone and Mullingar, which goes from Ballymore to both locations 2-3 times daily, making commuting to Athlone/Mullingar possible.

4. Development Profile

The settlement is not currently experiencing any high degree of pressure for development. A number of single house permissions (approx 20) have been granted since 1996. In terms of housing developments, the biggest recent settlement is at Market Hill, which is a council development of 26 houses (including 9 OPDs). The next proposal for social housing for Ballymore is in 2006 when 8 houses are proposed. It is envisaged that these houses will either be provided on the same land holding or could equally be provided under Part V at other locations within the village.

To the eastern end of the settlement 21 dwelling units were permitted but have not been constructed (Planning Reg. Ref. 00/995) although it appears preliminary works have commenced on site.

Of particular note was a scheme of 37 houses that was refused by An Bord Pleanála, (01/1150 – PL. 25 129324). It is located in central area between two distinct areas of the village.

It is important to note that the above housing developments were considered in the absence of any village plan, and before the adoption of the current 2002-2008 County Development Plan although the Bord's decision was made after the adoption of the County Development Plan.

5. Proposed Development Strategy

5.1 General Strategy

Within the time frame of a 6-year plan and regarding Ballymore's existing physical and community fabric, it is considered that the settlement is not a suitable location for any significant scale of commuter-driven development. In line with the *Strategic Aim* of the Ballymore Plan the focus shall be for a more restrained growth pattern consistent with demand and needs of the local community.

In the context of the County's "settlement strategy" and the existing adopted village plans it is the contention of the Executive of the County Council that adequate land has been zoned for large-scale population increases suggested by the National Spatial strategy (NSS) to achieve critical mass in the Midlands Region. The focus for development in Ballymore is more restrained than adopted zoning plans in other locations within the County. The objective is to allow for development at an appropriate scale and at a pace, which is acceptable to the local population.

5.2 Detailed Strategy

Due to Ballymore's established pattern of development and resultant village form, a sensitive approach will be adopted to its growth. In light of previous community input, a strong design approach will be adopted for Ballymore's development, especially in reinforcing and consolidating its streetscape. Design reference for future development will be taken from the character and detailing of established structures.

In terms of the overall village structure it is proposed to focus development on the consolidation of its constituent parts but seeking to retain important visual breaks to the visually sensitive settings of St Owens and Plary Priory, which are considered as important character settings. This approach is critical for the continuity of the established settlement pattern. If development is to take place it will be encouraged to respect and reflect, not only the village's character buildings, but sensitive open spaces, archaeology and monuments.

It is also proposed to focus development primarily on developing and consolidating the village streetscape by reflecting the established village design, detailing and finishes on new development. Extensions to the village into "greenfield" areas will be confined primarily to 'backland' or 'mews' type developments.

To further help maintain the character of the rural settlement it is proposed that existing hedges and trees be retained as part of any new developments. The existing field patterns shall be used to define the future development growth pattern of the settlement. Rear lanes shall be retained as future 'green lanes' to act as linkages from the village to the countryside, and to provide linkages between developments, and to serve settlement-wide permeability.

Boundary walls where used will be consistent with character of the village, and will be supplemented by hedges and trees as necessary.

The Plan identifies a development area, which has been selected and designated on the basis that it will provide an adequate and appropriate supply of development sites within the plan timescale to allow the village to grow in accordance with the services that are available.

The following policies will need to be applied to all new development within the village to ensure certainty and consistency and in the interests of orderly planning and sustainable development.

Policy 1: Outside the designated development area 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 village community. Development appropriate for 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, a development area has been defined. In general terms development is acceptable within this area identified on the accompanying plan but outside, 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 or those developments that benefit the local economy and supply of employment opportunities having regard in the first instance to the visual qualities and character of the village and the open rural aspect of the surrounding countryside.

Policy 2: Development, which will adversely affect the setting of the village will not be permitted. Where development is likely to form the edge of the village, an integral and substantial landscaping scheme incorporating peripheral planting will normally be required.

The interface between the village and the countryside is sensitive and requires careful treatment. Any new development should protect and enhance the setting of the village and landscaping proposals can ensure the integration of new development into the village, screen views, and provide shelter and enclosure.

Policy 3: Within the designated development areas development will be permitted where it involves infilling, conversion, residential development, the use of derelict or underused land or premises and where the development meets all of the following criteria:

- 1. It will not result in the loss of land of recreation or amenity value;**
- 2. 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;**
- 3. It will provide an acceptable residential environment;**
- 4. 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;**
- 5. It will not damage the character and amenity of existing residential areas;**
- 6. It will not create unacceptable problems; and**
- 7. It will not result in the loss of or damage to spaces identified as being of importance.**

As well as the village having the capacity to absorb additional housing development the appearance of development and its impact upon both the rural setting and the distinct character of the village will be of paramount importance. Where the village's particular character, visual appearance or integrity can best be enhanced by development it will be generally supported but the village's capacity to absorb additional development will be carefully monitored to ensure it is not to the detriment of the character and intrinsic rural feel of the village.

5.3 Residential Development Strategy

Ballymore is not considered an appropriate centre for large volumes of residential development but residential development would be recommended on an appropriate scale as suggested by the identified development area.

The focus as above will be in consolidating the village streetscape, and this will be the primary 'zone' for residential development for the plan period. This will be in the form of small groups of town houses or individual village 'cottage style' housing (these will primarily be 2 storey or 1 ½ storey in scale.)

In terms of housing developments, it is proposed that where appropriate, allowance will be made for small groups of houses in the traditional village format, and accessed from street frontages or side lanes.

As above, it should be noted that 21 units have permission in the east end of the village and as yet have not been developed and there are a small number of dwellings under construction.

To avoid confusion regarding social and affordable housing the lands within the proposed development boundaries will be considered as zoned lands in respect of Section 96 of the Planning and development Act 2000 (as amended 2002).

Original buildings and derelict buildings should be retained and reused where possible and would, where buildings are considered to be of merit, be considered a preferable form of development to demolition and redevelopment.

5.4 Retail/Commercial/Tourism

There will be general presumptions in maintaining existing services and retail and commercial expansion would be of a scale to cater for the future needs of a growing village and rural hinterland. The main street and village frontage presents opportunities where commercial/retail activities will be considered. Any retail proposals must have regard to the countywide Adopted Retail Strategy.

The village of Ballymore has much to offer in terms of local amenity within close proximity and tourist related development including overnight accommodation would be a welcome benefit to the area in general.

5.5 Light Industry/Employment

There will be favourable consideration of an area for employment purposes, which could provide for incubator units/business start-ups, as well as allowing some change of use of larger sheds/stores in backland/off street situations. However these should at all times respect residential amenities. It is not proposed that Ballymore host any large individual industrial unit but opportunities, which provide employment locally and the rural character and visual amenities of the village are not compromised will be supported.

Again the main street and frontage properties will offer the best opportunities for commercial enterprises or offices especially where they are able to utilise older and disused properties and these will offer suitable sites for appropriate employment uses.

5.6 Community/Recreational

It is proposed to allow for the future expansion of the school, the graveyard and an area to the rear of the community centre by having specific zonings for them. The zonings are indicative only, but the policy will be such that if and when opportunities arise for the expansion of such facilities the needs of these community uses have been taken account of and the opportunity for their expansion will not be precluded by other uses.

A public park is to be allowed for and it is hoped that any future development in the village can assist in its provision. Its suggested location is to the rear of the Community Hall with possibilities for smaller formal play areas throughout the village such as that located at Market Hill housing estate.

An objective will be to provide a walkway along the approximate line of the river and to allow for a route link with Lough Suedy and GAA grounds is also proposed.

5.7 Preservation/Conservation

Whilst there are no buildings listed within the Council's Record of Protected Structures in Ballymore there are a significant number of character buildings of local importance, which should where possible be retained, the wide 'mall' feel to the west end of the village is in itself an important character area, which if developed unchecked would have its character undermined.

The importance of the existing trees and their contribution to the overall environment should be enhanced by the consideration of a Tree Preservation Order for a group of lime trees in the 'Mall' in the west end of Ballymore.

Significant local monuments, preserved views, archaeology and the Lough Suedy National Heritage Area all require special protection and will have to be considered in the assessment of any planning application within the village.

