

Background

The Development Plan is Westmeath County Council's blueprint for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County. It sets out development policies and objectives for the term 2008 to 2014. The Plan seeks to develop and improve in a sustainable manner the social, economic, cultural and environmental assets of the county.

The Plan Area

The Plan covers the administrative area of County Westmeath but excludes Athlone Town Council which is a separate Planning Authority; the Westmeath County Development Plan covers an area of 189,965ha.

Legal Preamble

The legal basis for this County Development Plan is laid out in the Planning and Development Acts 2000 - 2006. Section 11(1) of the Act requires that the Planning Authority, not later than 4 years after the making of a development plan, is to prepare a new development plan for its area. Section 12 of the Act schedules the statutory provisions for making a development plan. The process of reviewing the County Development Plan 2002 and preparing a new County Development Plan for the period 2008 - 2014 has been on-going since the 25th March 2006 and has now arrived at the publication of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2008 to 2014.

Plan Layout

The Development Plan comprises a written statement and maps.

Part One of the Plan sets out strategic guiding principles and the goals and aims of the Plan, and how they are to be implemented. The National, Regional and Local policy context for the preparation of the Plan is detailed.

Part One also develops the Gateway principle and details the basis of the collaborative approach to the development of the Midlands linked gateway between Westmeath County Council and Offaly County Council. It also sets the Plan in its policy and geographical context, provides a socio-economic profile of the County and identifies the County's resources and assets.

Part Two of the Plan is broken down into separate chapters providing and defining policies and objectives relating to policy areas such as Housing, Economic Development, Infrastructure, Open Space and Retailing in the County.

Part Three contains the Town Plans of Mullingar, Athlone Environs and Moate.

Part Four includes the schedule of Village Plans for those villages identified as Tier 3 and Tier 4 settlements in the settlement hierarchy.

Part Five contains the Councils policy statement on Unserviced Settlements, those settlements identified in Tier 5 of the settlement hierarchy.

Part Six sets out the land use zoning categories of the Plan and contains the Zoning Matrix.

Part Seven contains particular development management standards for both urban and rural Westmeath.

Part Eight contains the Schedules and Appendices. The Schedules provide lists of amenity projects, Record of Protected Structures, Listed Views, Tree Preservation Order list etc. The Appendices contain background information and details which should be consulted before making a planning application.

The Plan has a sufficient inbuilt flexibility to allow the Planning Authority to carry out its functions and implement the Plan having regard to future legislation and Government policy guidance. Further, the County Development Plan will constantly be reviewed and monitored,

so as to effectively anticipate new opportunities or threats to the orderly development of the County, which may require a redirection of some aspects of the Plan.

How to Use the Plan

The Plan can be read either as an entire document on planning in Westmeath up to 2014 or as a reference manual for particular topics or development proposals. It is important to note that in forming development proposals or assessing such proposals, many policies and objectives in Part Two of the Plan will apply to all types of development and these need to be taken into consideration.

Policies and Objectives

The Development Plan is the Councils policy making and objective setting development framework document from 2008 – 2014.

Policies are broad statements that set preferred courses of action. Policies are choices made to carry out the goals in the foreseeable future. Policies need to be specific enough to help determine whether a proposed project or program would advance community values expressed in the goals.

Objectives are specific statements that carry out a plan in the short term. Objectives are measurable benchmarks that can be used to assess incremental progress in achieving the broader purposes expressed in policies.

Policies scheduled in the Plan have been highlighted, each policy is identified with an independent number for referencing purposes and in all cases is preceded with the letter 'P' (policy), for example P-IF10, relates to a specific policy in the Infrastructure chapter. Similarly, all objectives contained in the Plan have been individually referenced, all being preceded with the letter 'O' (objective).

Monitoring and Review

Section 15 of the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2006 places a general obligation on the Planning Authority to take such steps within its powers as may be necessary for securing the objectives of the development plan.

The Council will both monitor changes in the planning environment and review the effectiveness of the County Development Plan's policies and proposals, amending them where necessary.

The Planning Authority will use existing monitoring methods and develop new ones, as well as identifying further development indicators that will provide accurate information to enable an integrated review process to be applied to the adopted Plan and to prepare for subsequent Plans.

Monitoring of the (SEA) Environmental Report will be carried out as part of the overall monitoring of the implementation of the County Development Plan 2008 – 2014.