

**Westmeath County Council**

**Local Agenda 21 Strategy**

**“Leading by Example!”**

## **Introduction.**

Westmeath County Council recognises the importance of Local Agenda 21 and has designated a member of staff as a Local Agenda 21 Officer. The Council established a Working Group to, support the work, and, highlight the importance of sustainable development for the future of the County. The Working Group was established to encompass as broad a cross section of the Council operations and comprises of the following;

- ❑ Sean O’Laoide, Veterinary Officer, Mentor.
- ❑ Paul Smyth, Administrative officer, Community and Enterprise, Convenor.
- ❑ Eamonn Keaveney, Environmental Awareness Officer.
- ❑ Grahame Niven, Senior Executive Engineer, Corporate Affairs.
- ❑ Bernadette Guest, Heritage Officer.
- ❑ Diarmuid Murphy, Executive Planner, Forward Planning.

The Working Groups brief is to prepare a document to look at the practical workings within the organisation vis-à-vis compliance with Local Agenda 21 objectives.

## **Sustainable Development**

Brundtland describes sustainable development as “ development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

## **What is Local Agenda 21?**

Local Agenda 21 was conceived at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. The Summit, a meeting of World Leaders, agreed on a number of issues including Local Agenda 21. The major aims of the Earth Summit were:

- Reducing consumption of energy and raw materials in addition to the pollution and waste it produces.
- Protecting fragile eco-systems and environments.
- Bringing about a fairer distribution of wealth with particular emphasis on the rights of poor and disadvantaged people.

Building on from this the World Summit on Sustainable Development\* (WSSD) was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. The W.S.S.D. aimed to move the issue of sustainable development from "words" to "action" and to get Governments, businesses and individuals to take action towards a more sustainable way of living.

The ten key themes discussed were:

- Making Globalisation Work for Sustainable Development
- Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Livelihoods
- Changing Unsustainable Patterns of Consumption and Production
- Promoting Health through Sustainable Development

- Access to Energy and Energy Efficiency
- Sustainable Management of Ecosystems and Bio-diversity
- Managing the World's Freshwater Resources
- Finance and Technology Transfer
- Sustainable Development Initiatives for Africa
- Strengthening the System of International Governance for Sustainable Development

In addition the United Nations Secretary General Koffi Annan also identified three broad issues for the Summit:

- eradication of poverty
- globally sustainable production and consumption
- protection of natural resource base of economic and social development especially in developing countries

*In short Local Agenda 21 is the practical application of the principle of sustainable development at local level.*

## **Foreword**

A County wishing to achieve a good quality of life for its people needs to realise the correct balance between economic, social and environmental issues at the same time as guaranteeing the same opportunities for future generations. This presents a number of challenges to Westmeath. Actions by individuals, however small, contribute to the overall effort to make the County a better place. It is important that everyone is aware that their actions can directly contribute to the aims of sustainable development..

This Plan has been prepared in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government “Towards Sustainable Local Communities. Guidelines on Local Agenda 21”. This Plan represents the organisations response to the Local Agenda 21 challenge. However, it will benefit and influence a future County Plan which will be prepared in consultation with the community, business sector, voluntary groups and other public sector organisations within the County.

## **Economic Issues**

The County Development Plan and the Village Plans contain the principal drivers for the Local Authority vis-à-vis employment. The County Development Plan has specific objectives with regard to the provision of employment opportunities and the co-operation between the Council and the various statutory employment agencies namely I.D.A., E.I. ,County Enterprise Board etc. The Village Plans have specific employment objective that “employment opportunities should be provided locally to offer greater opportunity for residents to find work locally and to reduce the need to travel to work”. This objective is met by the zoning of lands in the designated towns and villages and in some instances through the direct provision by the local authority of serviced sites.

The County Development Plan also has specific objectives with regard to the encouragement of agricultural diversification using existing farm buildings and employing members of farm families.

### **Social Issues**

The revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy, Building an Inclusive Society (2002) indicates that local authorities will develop social inclusion strategies at local level. The broad intention being to give local government a much stronger role in influencing and co-ordinating local development initiatives, including social inclusion. Social Inclusion can be defined as a series of positive actions;

- to achieve equality of access to goods and services,
- to assist all individuals participate in their community and society,
- to encourage the contribution of all persons to social and cultural life
- to be aware of, and to challenge all forms of discrimination.

Social inclusion incorporates the need to ensure that minority groups, people of different nationalities, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, people with disabilities, the elderly, children and young people are recognised as valuable members of the community. It is essential that all people are provided with equal opportunities to participate in the life of their locality and do not suffer from discrimination.

### **Local Authorities Social Inclusion Strategy (LASIS)**

Westmeath Local Authorities (*Westmeath County Council and Athlone Town Council*) with the assistance of the Combat Poverty Agency are in the process of developing a Westmeath Local Authorities Social Inclusion Strategy (LASIS). A Steering Group was established to oversee the development of the strategy, made up of representatives of the local authorities (*Core Group for the project*), the Combat Poverty Agency and some local development agencies that have a focus on social inclusion.

The focus of the Westmeath Local Authorities Social Inclusion Strategy (LASIS) is to 'roll-out' the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) at a local level. A key aspect of the process will also be to ensure that Social Inclusion, as a cross-cutting theme is embedded in the Corporate Plan of the Westmeath Local Authorities, due to be completed before the end of 2004.

As part of the development of the Local Authorities Social Inclusion Strategy (LASIS), a process for the development of a poverty profile for the county and consultation with stakeholders, is being undertaken in order to identify possible priorities and actions for the future.

### **Environmental Issues**

#### **Core Aspects**

The introduction of an Environmental Management System (EMS) throughout the Council will be a key driver and form the template for an integrated approach to the

Local Agenda 21 Plan. There will be aspects of the plan which will be specific to each functional area.

### **Implementation of an Environmental Management System**

The implementation of an EMS will take the following approach:

- Securing senior management commitment to environmental probity
- Appoint environment manager/environmental management team
- Review of Legislation and impacts.
- Develop an Environmental Policy.
- Set Objectives and Targets.
- Develop an Action Plan.
- Implementation of the programme – structure, responsibilities, documentation & operational control, records system.
- Monitoring and evaluation.
- Corrective procedures & emergency response procedures,
- Internal audit, review and external verification of the system.
- Communication and Training.
- Certification to ISO 14001/EMAS

The decision to seek certification is optional and will be considered in the light of the overall benefits for the organisation. The EMS once set up can be integrated with a Health and Safety Management System and/or Quality Management System.

The main areas to be covered will include: Waste, Water, Energy, Transport, Building Design, Procurement, Hazardous Chemicals, Legislative Compliance, Staff Training and Awareness.

### **Functional Areas**

- *Environment*
  - ✓ Waste
  - ✓ Bio-diversity
  - ✓ Water Quality
- *Water Services*
  - ✓ Drinking Water Treatment
  - ✓ Waste Water Treatment
- *Economic Development and Planning*
  - ✓ Forward Planning
  - ✓ Enforcement and Control
- *Housing, Social and Cultural*
  - ✓ Housing Construction

- ✓ Housing Management and Maintenance
- *Transportation and Infrastructure*
  - ✓ *Road Infrastructure*
  - ✓ *Drinking Water Treatment Infrastructure*
  - ✓ *Waste Water Treatment Infrastructure*
  - ✓ *Fleet and Machinery Procurement and Maintenance*
- *Community and Enterprise*
  - ✓ Social/ Community Development
  - ✓ Economic Aspects

## **Policy Guidelines**

### **Local**

Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008.  
Westmeath County Development Board Strategy 2002 – 2012.  
Westmeath Local Authorities Corporate Plan 2001 – 2004.  
County Westmeath Heritage Plan 2003 – 2007.  
Mullingar Integrated Area Plan.  
Town Renewal Plans Castlepollard, Kilbeggan and Moate.  
Westmeath Local Authorities Housing Strategy 2002 - 2008

### **Regional**

BMW Region Development Strategy 2000 – 2006.  
Draft Regional Planning Guidelines.  
Midland Region Waste Management Plan.

### **National**

National Strategy for Sustainable Development.  
National Development Plan 2000 – 2006.  
National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020.  
Social Housing Design Guidelines (D.O.E.H.L.G. 1999).  
“Towards Sustainable Local Communities” Guidelines on Local Agenda 21  
(D.O.E.H.L.G. 2001).

### **International**

For further information on the Johannesburg Summit [www.johannesburgsummit.org](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org) \*

## Action Plan

<b>Industrial and Enterprise Development</b>			
<b>To develop and implement a Work-plan for Industrial and Enterprise Development 2004- 2006.</b>			
<b>Aim</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target date</b>
<b>Develop and implement a workplan</b>	Community and Enterprise, Corporate Affairs and the Areas	Provision of nursery units to accommodate new business start ups;	Ongoing
		Promoting the development/provision of new industrial estates/business parks in Mullingar/Athlone;	Ongoing
		Acquisition of serviced land in selected towns and villages to accommodate industrial projects.	Ongoing

<b>Local Authority Social Inclusion Strategy</b>			
<b>To develop and implement a Westmeath Local Authorities Social Inclusion Strategy .</b>			
<b>Aim</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target date</b>
<b>Develop and implement a social inclusion strategy</b>	Community and Enterprise	Develop an integrated and focused social inclusion strategy	December 2004
		Prepare a detailed poverty profile of County	December 2004

<b>EMS</b>			
To develop and implement an Environmental Management System across the Council's sections and offices.			
<b>Aim</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target date</b>
<b>Secure Senior Management commitment to environmental probity</b>	Senior Management Group	Approve/ Commencement of EMS	July 2004
<b>Carry out a review of Council's environmental impacts</b>	Environmental Awareness Officer	Identify impacts and establish register of effects	September 2004
<b>Develop an Environmental Policy</b>	Environmental Awareness Officer	Set out Environmental priorities and commitment to environment from Council	September 2004
<b>Establish Environmental Management Team</b>	Environmental Awareness Officer	Identify key staff members to implement EMS	September 2004
<b>Prepare a register of environmental legislation/regulations relevant to the organisation</b>	Environmental Awareness Officer	Research legislation and set up register	September 2004

<b>Waste</b>			
To implement a Programme for Waste minimisation and sustainable management of waste arising within the Council's offices.			
<b>Aim</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target date</b>
<b>Waste minimisation Reduce</b> <b>Reuse Recycle</b>	Council Wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry Out a waste audit of Council offices</li> <li>• Implement a programme of waste minimisation and recycling</li> <li>• <b>Reduce</b> Target materials with Prevention and Reduce strategy – e.g., paperless office , email memos, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Reuse</b> Reuse scrap paper, ban plastic cups, reusable lunch boxes etc.</li> <li>• <b>Recycle</b> Identify waste collector service and costs. Set up system for segregation of materials (Paper, cardboard, glass, cans, aluminium, wood, printer cartridges, etc.)</li> </ul>	Commence July 2004  Commence September 2004
<b>Composting</b>	Environment Department/Areas	Commence an in house composting project for horticultural waste (grass, plant waste, etc.), and staff biodegradable waste (teabags, fruit peels, etc.)	Commence August 2004
<b>Waste minimisation - Staff Awareness</b>	Environment Department	Awareness Training programme – staff seminars Ongoing Awareness programme for staff - Posters, Emails, notice board, website, etc. Competition for best idea for in house Reduce, Reuse, Recycle	September 2004  Ongoing  July 2004

<b>Energy</b>			
To implement a Programme for energy conservation, cost savings and wise use of energy within the Council's offices.			
<b>Aim</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target date</b>
<b>Energy Conservation - Energy Audit</b>	S.E.E. Corporate Affairs. Environmental Awareness Officer	Carry out energy audits in offices, etc. Calculate consumption and possible savings Identify priority implementation measures	January 2005
<b>Energy Conservation - Staff Awareness</b>	S.E.E. Corporate Affairs Environmental Awareness Officer	Awareness Training programme – staff seminars Ongoing Awareness programme for staff	January 2005 Ongoing
<b>Water</b>			
To implement a Programme for water conservation and wise use of water within the Council's offices.			
<b>Water Conservation - Water Usage Audit</b>	Water Services Department	Carry out water consumption audits in offices, etc. Calculate consumption and possible savings Identify priority implementation measures	April 2005
<b>Water Conservation - Staff Awareness</b>	Water Services Department	Awareness Training programme – staff seminars Ongoing Awareness programme for staff	April 2005 Ongoing
<b>Procurement</b>			
<b>Green Procurement Policy</b>	S.E.E. Corporate Affairs Environmental Awareness Officer	Research and develop a Green Procurement Policy for the Council	December 2004

<b>EMS</b>			
To implement an Environmental Management Programme across the Council's sections and offices.			
<b>Aim</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target date</b>
<b>Implement EMS programme</b>	Environmental Management Team/ Environmental Awareness Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set objectives and targets</li> <li>• Draw up environmental management programme to implement objectives</li>   <li>• Establish management structure, responsibilities and resources</li> <li>• Set up document control system</li> <li>• Establish operational control system</li> <li>• Set up monitoring system</li> <li>• Set up a system for corrective action</li> <li>• Establish emergency response procedures</li> <li>• Set up a records system</li> <li>• Set up an auditing system</li> <li>• Establish a procedure for review</li> <li>• Establish a system for environmental reporting</li> </ul>	<p>October 2004 to December 2004</p> <p>Commence January 2005 and ongoing thereafter</p>
<b>Integrate EMS with Health &amp; Safety Management System and or Quality System</b>	Environmental Management Team/ Health and Safety Officer	Integrate Health & Safety and other management systems with EMS	Ongoing

# Appendix

## Moving Towards Best Practice

### Housing

- A policy is in place to move away from solid fuels in houses built by and provided by the Council.
- Social housing is now fitted with natural gas in advance of mains supply natural gas. The Council has agreed with the supplier to provide a bottle supply which will be switched over to gas mains when it becomes available.
- Experiments are underway to use off-peak electricity for heating.
- The Housing Section introduced an initiative to work to the new standard well in advance of the effective date of the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004 for the New Building Regulations.
- An existing stock survey has been carried out and a rolling program of retrofitting insulation and double glazing will take place until all relevant properties have been upgraded.
- Developing estates which will include Private, Social and Affordable Housing to create a dynamic mix of the three different type of housing which leads to the sustainability of that community. (Westmeath Local Authorities Housing Strategy 2002 - 2008 )
- The Housing Liaison Officer promotes the Development of Residents Association .
- In new estates landscaping is treated as a separate and vital contract. Our in-house Horticulturist is responsible for sustainable user- friendly and inventive landscaping of the green areas. (Social Housing Design Guidelines (D.O.E.H.L.G. 1999). )
- The Council encourages tenant participation in the Tidy Towns estates competition.
- Encouragement of Backland and Infill Development. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )

### Efficient Use of Resources /Eco-Efficiency

- Liaison continues with the Electricity supplier to maximise the use of off-peak and preferential rate supply on the basis of volume consumption.
- A fully qualified technician has been employed to inspect all oil burning units within the Councils buildings. This practice will be maintained on an annual and immediate response basis if required.
- A policy is promoted of procuring locally produced goods (immediate locale or national) which have no environmental downside in terms of their use or ultimate disposal.
- Suppliers of regular and hazardous materials are required to justify their product in terms of the criteria stipulated by environmental guidelines or legislation.
- The developer of the new County Building will be required to construct an environmentally sustainable building to meet very high standards benchmarked against international standards as set down in the BRE AAM Assessment.
- A crew of in-house mechanics maintains an emission monitored and fuel-efficient fleet of vehicles and machines.
- Routes for refuse collection are managed to maximise the efficiency of the route and minimise fuel use.

### Alternative Modes of Transport

- The Council encourage the use of public transport, cycling and walking as methods of transportation that minimise traffic pollution and maximise energy conservation. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- Promote walking and cycling by maintaining and enhancing existing facilities to provide a convenient, safe and pleasant environment. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- The proposed new headquarters building will provide covered and secure parking for bicycles. Shower facilities will also be available for those walking, running or cycling to work.

### **Social/ Community Development**

- Direct provision of Community facilities in Council estates. (Social Housing Design Guidelines (D.O.E.H.L.G. 1999). )
- The Council seeks to ensure that large residential developments and extended housing areas especially on urban edges make provision for local community facilities, in the form of readily accessible mixed use function centres, community facilities and primary schools. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- Creating the greatest possible opportunity for pedestrian access to community facilities, jobs and work and public transport.
- The Council inspects sites with Residents Associations and initiated clean-ups of a number of Estates.
- Providing opportunities for more active lifestyles by maintaining and enhancing sporting facilities in the County, creating networks of community green-linkages in towns and villages, developing cycle and pedestrian networks and facilitating access to the countryside. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- Tree planting and or amenity enhancement schemes that are initiated as a joint venture between the local authority and community groups.

### **Economic Development**

- Supporting the County Enterprise Board and Westmeath Community Development Ltd. in the preparation of the brochure “Westmeath a Place to Do Business”. (Westmeath County Development Board Strategy 2002 – 2012. )
- Encouraging and implementing the Mullingar Integrated Area Plan. (Mullingar Integrated Area Plan.)
- Encouraging and implementing the Town Renewal Plans in Castlepollard, Kilbeggan and Moate.
- Supporting with the County Enterprise Board and Westmeath Community Development Ltd. the “Westmeath Farmers Market” (Westmeath County Development Board Strategy 2002 – 2012. )

### **Heritage and Bio-diversity**

- Promoting the appropriate management of hedgerows. (County Westmeath Heritage Plan 2003 – 2007)
- Planting of native species in landscaping and roadside schemes. (County Westmeath Heritage Plan 2003 – 2007)
- Preparing an inventory of Council owned buildings and promote best practise with regard to architectural heritage such as retention of original design and materials e.g. discouraging the use of uPVC windows. (County Westmeath Heritage Plan 2003 – 2007)
- Information seminars organised on protected structures and traditional building skills.
- Working with developers to promote protection of flora, fauna and natural habitats.

### **Planning and Development**

- Resisting scattered settlement patterns which are costly to service. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- Using sustainability principles for Urban and Rural Development. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- Encouraging effective use of dwellings. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- Encouraging a growing urban-based apartment market, particularly in Mullingar and Athlone which can be developed at high densities particularly near transportation nodes. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )

- The Council encourages good quality housing at densities capable of maximising the use of scarce land resources while at the same time providing sufficient open space and amenities to support such development. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- Developing the Housing Strategy. (Westmeath Local Authorities Housing Strategy 2002 – 2008)
- Encouraging best practice design in the built environment. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- Using planning controls to prevent contamination of land. (Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008. )
- The Village Design Statements for Killucan/Rathwire, Streete and Tyrellspass have been prepared.

### **Water Services**

- Implementation of comprehensive and ongoing Water Conservation Programme
- Universal metering of all water consumers.
- Provision of wastewater collection and treatment systems to EU Wastewater and Water Framework Directive requirements.
- Implementing management practices at all plants to minimise resource and energy consumption.

**The list above is included to provide some examples of best practice and is not to be taken as prescriptive or exhaustive.**