

WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL

POLICY STATEMENT ON UNSERVICED SETTLEMENTS – ATHLONE AREA

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present an agreed approach to unserviced settlements as identified within the County Development Plan. There are currently 12 unserviced settlements identified in the vicinity of both Athlone and Mullingar. This background paper covers the approach and development control considerations for all the unserviced settlements identified in the County Development Plan to ensure consistency across the County. The Plan refers also to additional unserviced settlements, which will be identified during the Plan period and it is intended that if and when such centres are identified the approach to development as discussed in this policy document will apply.

Context

As part of the County Council's objective to facilitate residential development within appropriate locations the County Development Plan identified "unserviced settlements".

The Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 "Settlement Strategy" identified a number of unserviced settlements where residential development would be deemed acceptable and facilitated on the basis of their function. In general terms this means residential development would be acceptable related to the existing facilities within the immediate locality, such as a school, a church or a shop.

The overall Settlement Strategy is based on the principles of sustainability (economic, social and environmental) and hence the majority of new housing development would, in the first instance be directed towards the largest centres of Athlone and Mullingar. This would be in accordance with the Council's objective of encouraging development in towns and serviced villages with the capacity to absorb further development.

There is at the same time pressure to develop individual houses outside the serviced and unserviced towns and villages of Westmeath. Where development is proposed outside the identified settlement hierarchy and in more isolated rural locations (i.e. one off rural houses) there are specific criteria for which to determine the need for individual residential development. These criteria relate to the individual's ability to express a specific local need for developing at such locations.

The function and objective of the unserviced settlement is twofold, firstly to sustain the existing rural facilities i.e. school, shop etc. in a sustainable manner and secondly to cater for the demand from the one-off houses that do

not meet the local need criteria or do not wish to be located within the larger towns and villages under the settlement hierarchy.

The Purpose of Unserviced Settlements

Unserviced settlements are **not** appropriate for large-scale residential schemes and any such schemes, which would be considered unsustainable commuter-based developments, should be directed towards the priority towns of Mullingar and Athlone in the first instance or towards priority villages which have defined residential zoning limits and have suitable infrastructure to support such developments.

It was initially considered that the only form of residential development considered appropriate in unserviced settlements would be single houses as they are the only scale of development that could be supported by the existing service infrastructure.

However, as we have surveyed and considered each of the unserviced settlements it is apparent that certain settlements display tightly knit village patterns and to encourage the development of large site single house schemes would undermine the very fabric and character of some of the settlements.

Where it is considered that, the character of a settlement may be undermined by a single site house flexibility will need to be shown by applicants to ensure a more sensitive development is obtained in keeping with the character of the settlement. The over-riding concern is that these settlements do not become targets for multiple unit (volume) house builders. A side effect of volume house building is the opportunities to strengthen local communities by providing housing for local families are diminished. It must be remembered that unserviced settlements are identified to provide for those households currently living or working in other locations or more urban areas such as Athlone and Mullingar who want to build in the countryside but do not currently meet local need requirements whilst helping to sustain the existing communities and the locally available facilities.

Planning Assessment of Unserviced Settlements

Each settlement has been surveyed in terms of existing facilities, outstanding planning permissions, recent developments, visual characteristics, important open space areas, speed limits, water supply and sewerage schemes and assessed in terms of its capacity to absorb additional residential development.

Development Limits

Development limits have been identified within the unserviced settlements to ensure that any development does not become too dispersed or lead to unsustainable ribbon development. The “development limits” will not affect those households who display the local need criteria from building outside these limits.

The development limits have been identified 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 placed on each route into the settlements establish the defined area within which development will be considered acceptable. They will provide opportunities to provide 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 and 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.

These development limits have been selected and designated on the basis that, in the opinion and best advice of the executive, 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.

The individual assessments for each unserved settlement will form the basis of development control decisions and will add certainty to the decision making process and remove any uncertainty, which may have arisen in the past.

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

Policy 1: 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".

It must be remembered that 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 rather than provide a location for urban generated volume housing.

Policy 2: 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 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, 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.

Policy 3: Development, which 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.

Policy 4: 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:

- 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.**

Policy 5: Development schemes for multiple unit housing will not normally be considered in the settlement, the following exceptions may apply:

- 1. Where the integrity and fabric of the village is enhanced by such a scheme.**
- 2. 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.**

As well as the settlement 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 settlement will be of paramount importance. Where the settlement's particular character, visual appearance or integrity can best be enhanced by a multiple house scheme consideration will be given to such an approach but ultimately based on the settlements capacity to absorb additional development, which may give rise to reviewing the development limits for the entire settlement.

Planning Assessment of Baylin:

Baylin is located approximately 7 miles east of Athlone where the Regional route (L-1427) meets the local road (L-5455). The physical centre to the settlement would appear to be the primary school (the only apparent community facility within the existing settlement). Baylin is characterised by single site particularly single-storey housing, which is spread in a linear pattern from all main routes into the settlement.

At a visual level the settlement is made up almost entirely of new bungalows, and other individual house types, which are dispersed in a linear pattern along all the access roads into the area for a considerable distance. The settlement is located within the vicinity of a NHA/SAC which is located southwards of the settlement i.e. Carn Park Bog. An open area exists in the settlement, which allows for a prominent view onto this impressive unspoilt landscape and it is considered important from an amenity perspective that this be preserved. To the north of the settlement is located a national monument and a protected structure Tyford House (ref. No. B288). It will be important to protect both these elements.

The existing settlement has no services apart from the school and it would appear that it is predominantly a commuter driven urban generated development settlement. This is hardly surprising given its relative proximity to Athlone combined with its lack of community services. As such it cannot provide sustainable large-scale residential development or population growth and any further development should only be on a single house infill basis. The planning authority recommend that no further ribbon development be permitted on approach roads into the settlement and to this end the designated development limits have been identified and mapped (as attached). This should ensure the existing development is contained and hopefully will allow for the critical mass, which may in the future potentially provide for additional services and facilities for the settlement.

Due to the proliferation of one off houses in the settlement and their development over time in an uncoordinated manner, the settlement has little or no open space. To this end consideration must be had for existing important open space areas.

The identified "development limits" will provide for opportunities for infill along the main road and lesser roads making more economical use of land where possible. There are a number of opportunities to allow for infill between existing buildings but subject to the considerations and policy objectives stated within the County Development Plan.

Development within the locality of Baylin will be encouraged within the designated development limits and will be resisted outside these areas unless extenuating circumstances exist i.e. a specific and particular rural generated need is required for the specific location such as working on the land. No urban generated residential sites will be allowed outside the designated development limits. Any residential development outside these limits would be

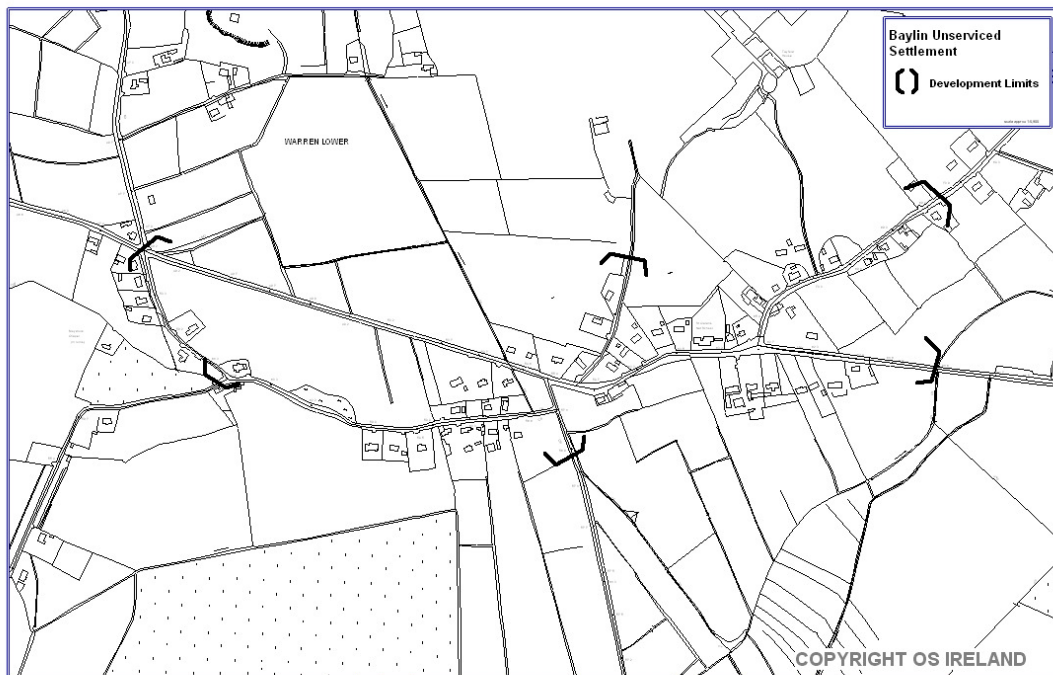
discouraged on the basis that it would be unjustified and unsustainable development outside the settlement and should otherwise be located within the priority towns and villages listed within the Westmeath County Development Plan. This would be in accordance with the proper and sustainable planning as defined within the National Spatial Strategy and the County Development Plan.

It would be inappropriate to allow further large-scale residential development without the balance of available services and facilities within the settlement and any large scale developments should be concentrated in the priority towns and villages identified in the development plan. Any future development in the area must be considered subject to the provision of adequate infrastructure in relation to wastewater treatment facilities and the provision of a suitable, viable water supply.

The provision of housing in such unserved settlements is an alternative to housing in the countryside and not an addition.

These development limits have been selected and designated on the basis that, in the opinion and best advice of the executive, 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.

Policies 1-5 included within the overall policy statement on unserved settlements apply to Baylin.



Planning Assessment of Castledaly:

Castledaly is located approximately 9 miles from Athlone, south of the N6 on a county/regional road. The R444 regional road runs through a large part of the settlement. There is a school, playing field, church and pub and petrol station located in the immediate area although in a somewhat dispersed manner. The settlement mainly stretches along the county road and is well defined with a number of services. This is something that is not always evident in other settlements of a comparative size within the county. Castledaly is characterised by some sporadic single site particularly single-storey housing along road frontages.

The settlement has two main focal points; the first on the main road, through the settlement on the R-444, around the entrance to the demesne / shop / GAA pitch and pub, the second focal point is at the school / church and community centre.

There is a significant opportunity to capitalise on the existing facilities and services within the settlement, but care must be taken to protect the existing protected structure of Kilcleagh House (now known as Castledaly manor). The demesne (Castledaly Manor) and stable block has been developed into a tourist accommodation facility, providing a bar / restaurant and overnight accommodation.

This is a significant feature and beneficial tourism asset to the area and it is important that it and its woodland type setting are not compromised with respect to any future development of the village.

There is no public mains water supply. All current developments have their own independent water supply. There is no form of wastewater treatment, all developments are currently served by individual wastewater treatment systems. Any further development in the area must be considered subject to the provision of adequate infrastructure in relation to wastewater treatment facilities and the provision of a suitable, viable water supply.

As such Castledaly cannot provide sustainable large-scale residential development or population growth and any further development should only be on a single house basis or in clusters but it does have the opportunity to develop quite substantially within the identified "development limits" as mapped (and attached). The identified development limits should ensure the existing development is contained and that the population develops within the settlement ensuring the viability of existing and future services.

There are a significant number of opportunities to allow for infill between existing buildings within the settlement and shall be subject to the considerations and policy objectives stated within the County Development Plan and the "Unserviced Settlement Policy Guidance", which accompanies this planning assessment.

Development within the locality of Castledaly will be encouraged within the designated development limits and will be resisted outside these limits unless extenuating circumstances exist i.e. a specific and particular rural generated need is required for the specific location such as working on the land. Any residential development outside the settlement and designated sites will be discouraged on the basis that it would be unjustified and unsustainable development outside the settlement and should otherwise be located within the priority towns and villages listed within the Westmeath County Development Plan. This would be in accordance with the proper and sustainable planning as defined within the National Spatial Strategy and the County Development Plan.

Further large-scale developments should be concentrated in the priority towns and villages identified in the development plan.

The provision of housing in such unserved settlements is an alternative to housing in the countryside and not an addition.

These development limits have been selected and designated on the basis that, in the opinion and best advice of the executive, 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.

Policies 1-5 included within the overall policy statement on unserved settlements apply to Castledaly.

