

WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL

POLICY STATEMENT ON UNSERVICED SETTLEMENTS – KILBEGGAN 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 Loughnavalley

Loughnavalley is located approximately 5 miles/8km to the south west of Mullingar along the R390 to Athlone. The physical and natural centre of the settlement appears to be clustered around the cross roads within the centre of the settlement where the R-390 meets the L-1902 and within close proximity are the facilities of the pub/shop, church, cemetery, school and community centre. There is potential for a compact settlement wrapped around this natural focal point of activities and within the 30mph speed limit.

Loughnavalley is characterised as a tight cluster settlement with quite a unique 'sense of place' and strong character due to the strong traditional vernacular design of its established structures. More recently some modern suburban type houses both two storey and single storey have been inserted into the fabric of the village and extending out of the village primarily on the R390 Mullingar Road. Some of the structures of note include the arrangement of buildings on the southwest corner of the crossroads, and is anchored by a recorded protected structure (Ref. B350). Fox's Shop and public house opposite is a protected structure (Ref. B303). The settlement due to the presence of strong character buildings is particularly vulnerable to insensitive additions and cognisance should be taken of the traditional buildings and their setting when considering additional limited housing development.

There are no water, foul sewerage or storm water sewerage networks in Loughnavalley. There are possible future implications for the settlement with regard to options for a future definitive Mullingar – Athlone regional road link. The 'Ballymore' route is one such option.

The limited level of services and previous ribbon development allowed extending from the settlements focus area suggests that a tight village consolidation envelope should be drawn to preclude further incursions into the open countryside and to form a distinct core area where the available services can be accessed easily.

As such Loughnavalley 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). However, the format of development should reflect the traditional village designs especially on road frontages or when they form part of the external view of the settlement as opposed to turning the area into a greenfield suburb. Any development should also respect local archaeological features and open spaces and views onto and from such. The potential for the expansion of vital community and social infrastructure e.g. the school will be protected. The identified development limits should ensure the existing development is contained and that the population growth within the settlement level is consistent with viability of existing and future services.

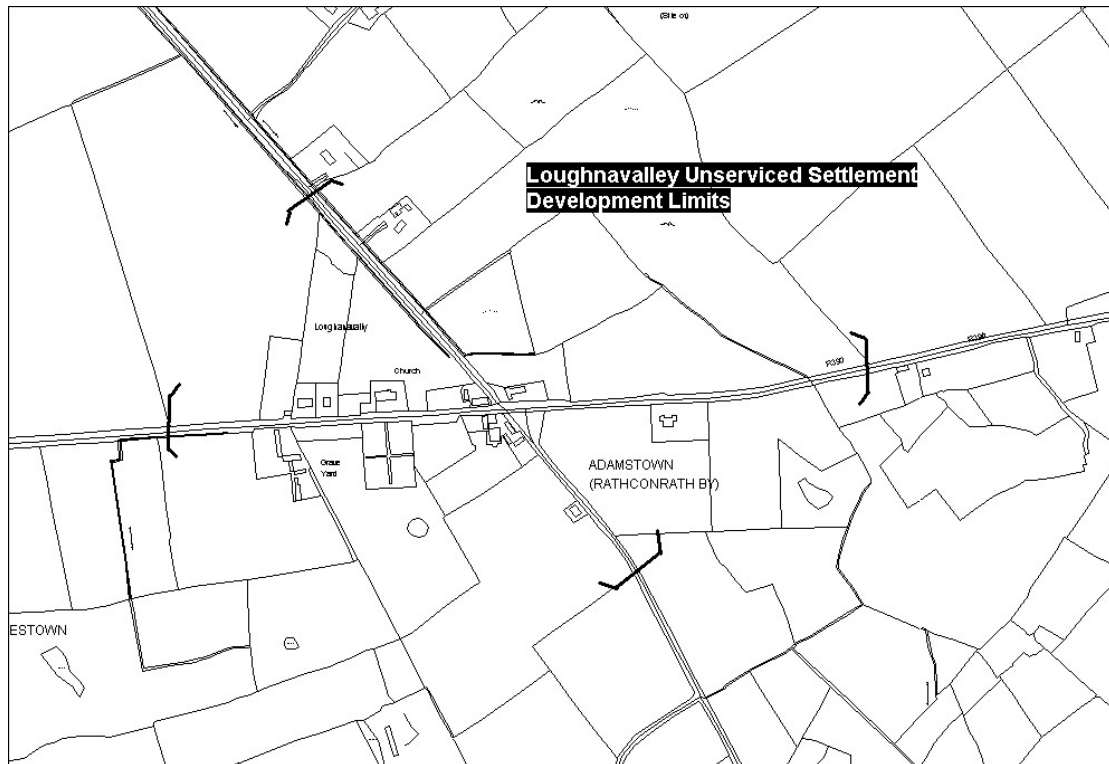
There are some opportunities to allow for infill between existing buildings and in backlands within the settlement and shall be subject to the considerations

and policy objectives stated within the County Development Plan and the “Unserviced Settlement Policy Guidance”, which accompanies this planning assessment.

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 unserviced settlements apply to Loughnavalley.

Due to the special ‘sense of place’ and special character of Loughnavalley it is recommended that potential applicants seek the opportunity to discuss their proposals at an early stage with planner/architect through the pre-planning advice process.



Planning Assessment of Mount Temple:

Mount Temple is located approximately 6 miles north west of Moate and 7 miles east of Athlone along a regional route. The village consists of a natural core area containing a number of key community facilities. In recent years it has seen an extensive amount of ribbon development along approach roads and has been coming under increasing pressure from single-site housing.

There are a number of attractive properties in the village, which were built in the early part of the century. These dwellings lend character to the village as do the presence of a considerable number of mature trees and attractive planting and landscaping. There is a school, shop/filling station, pub, church and golf course in the village. The church is a particularly important feature in defining the village core. An important consideration is that the nucleated nature of the village is maintained and any further ribbon development, which would detract from the overall character of the village, be discouraged.

At a visual level the settlement consists of an existing core, which focuses around the church and school. The remainder of the settlement is made up almost entirely of new and recent single storey housing, which are dispersed in a linear pattern along all the access roads into the area for a considerable distance. This form of development can be described as ribbon development. Located within the vicinity of the settlement are a number of key archaeological monuments, protected structures and a golf course. Consideration of the impact of further development on such features as well as the impact on the overall surrounding landscape has meant that the development limits have been adjusted accordingly in order to ensure the protection of these important elements and allow for the character of the landscape to be respected within this village-type setting.

The existing settlement is quite well served with regard to community facilities the church being a particularly important feature for the area. There may be some potential to consider alternative types of developments within the settlement area such as townhouses, etc which may provide for a more self-contained village-type character as well as being more proactive in avoiding the excessive commuter driven urban generated development being witnessed in so many other settlements in the vicinity of Athlone.

The planning authority recommend that no further ribbon development be permitted on approach roads into the settlement unless they are as a result of intrinsic local need. This should ensure the existing development is contained and will in time develop further around the existing settlement.

The boundaries of the village development limits will provide for opportunities for infill along the route through the village and hopefully make more economical use of development land where possible. There are a number of opportunities to allow for infill between existing buildings and some backlands within the newly formed envelope but subject to the considerations and policy objectives stated within the County Development Plan.

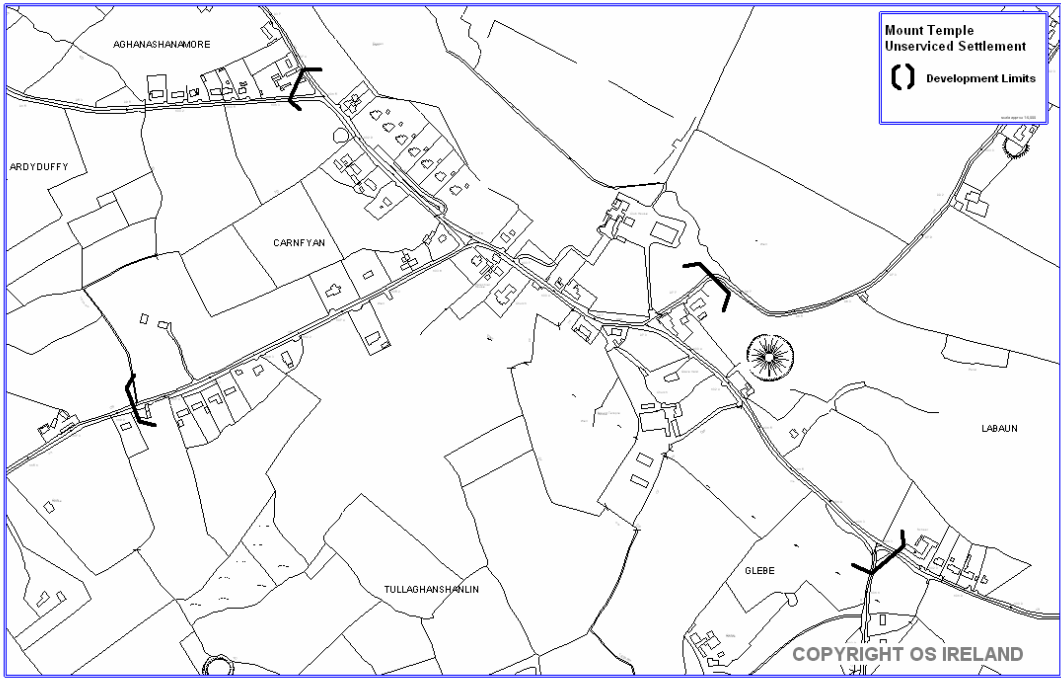
Development within the locality of Mount Temple will be encouraged within the settlement limits and will be resisted outside these limits unless extenuating circumstances exist i.e. a specific and particular rural generated need is required for the specific location such as working on the land. No urban generated residential sites will be allowed outside the development limits. Any residential development outside the development 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, which would disrupt further the character of the existing village type settlement of Mount Temple and 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 Mount Temple.



Planning Assessment of Tang:

Tang is located approximately 10 miles north of Athlone on the N55 (national secondary route) with a number of local roads exiting to the east and west. The settlement contains a school and church located along the N55. There is also a disused national school, which is being extended and converted for use as a community centre. There are also a number of disused or derelict buildings in the immediate area. The majority of the development in the area is dispersed along an arterial road south of the church, which displays a significant amount of linear or ribbon, single house development.

The N55 is heavily trafficked therefore further housing development along this road should be severely restricted. It is Council policy under section 2.6.4 of the County development plan 2002 to restrict development along national routes. Where possible access should be taken off one of the local roads where access is already established or shared entrances may also be used. Further access points should be discouraged onto the N55.

Further large-scale residential development of the area would be considered unsustainable given the significant commuting distance to Athlone and its proximity to the national route. The limited size of the designated development sites has reflected this.

The planning authority recommend that no further ribbon development be permitted on approach roads into the settlement, other than development to be permitted in development sites 2, 3 and 4. There is an opportunity to allow for infill and this has been specified in development site 1. The development of these sites shall be subject to the considerations and policy objectives stated within the County Development Plan.

Development within the locality of Tang will be encouraged within the designated sites and will be resisted outside the areas unless extenuating circumstances exist i.e. a specific and particular rural generated need is required for the specific location such as the working of the land. No urban generated residential sites will be allowed outside the designated sites. Any residential development outside these areas would be discouraged on the basis that it would be unjustified and unsustainable development 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, which Tang is lacking in and further large-scale developments should be concentrated in the priority towns and villages identified in the development plan.

Any development of Tang, particularly the development of site 1, could necessitate the revision of the current speed limit. The development of all of

the specified sites will increase the amount of traffic accessing the N55 and number of turning movements. A revised speed limit of 30mph, through the settlement would be recommended.

There is no public mains water supply for the settlement. All current developments have their own independent water supply. There is no form of wastewater treatment, all developments are currently served by individual waste water treatment systems. (Septic tanks)

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

