

**WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL**

UNSERVICED SETTLEMENTS - MULLINGAR AREA

# POLICY STATEMENT ON UNSERVICED SETTLEMENTS

## 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 Unserved Settlements

Unserved 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 Unserved 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 The Downs:**

The Downs is located approximately 4 mile/6.4km to the east of Mullingar and is bisected by the N4 dual carriageway. The physical and natural centre of the settlement since the road improvements are at the cross roads of the R-156 to Killucan 400m from the exit of the N4 where the settlements services are also located i.e. primary school (S N Na nDdun,103 children), GAA facility and shop. These facilities are located within a 40 mph speed limit. There are 25 houses contained within the settlement.

The Downs is characterised by single site housing spreading NE along the R-156 regional road in a loose linear pattern originating from the central crossroads. There are few 'character' buildings around the 'core' but essentially the format is a sporadic assortment of suburban housing types, which disallows little 'sense of place' or characteristics that could be said to be particular to The Downs.

The existing settlement has limited services and as such cannot provide sustainable large-scale residential development or population growth. There are no foul or surface water sewerage networks available in the Downs. It is possible that the Killucan junction with the N4 will have to be improved, so at some future date there may be some implications for The Downs and the regional road traffic that goes through the community.

The settlement is serviced by a Group Water Supply Scheme. 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. There is a footpath associated with the school, but pedestrians mostly have to use the ad hoc arrangement of parking strips. There is a streetlight over the cross-roads.

The lack of services and previous ribbon development allowed extending from the settlement's focus area suggests that a tighter village envelope should be drawn to consolidate the settlement to preclude further incursions into the surrounding open countryside, especially along the regional road, and rather to form a distinct core area where the available services can be accessed easily in terms of walking distance (maximum 400m/5 minute walk).

The Downs 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 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 Downs into a greenfield suburb. The potential for the expansion of vital community and social infrastructure e.g. school and GAA facility 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 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.

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 the Downs.

In addition to Policies 1- 5:

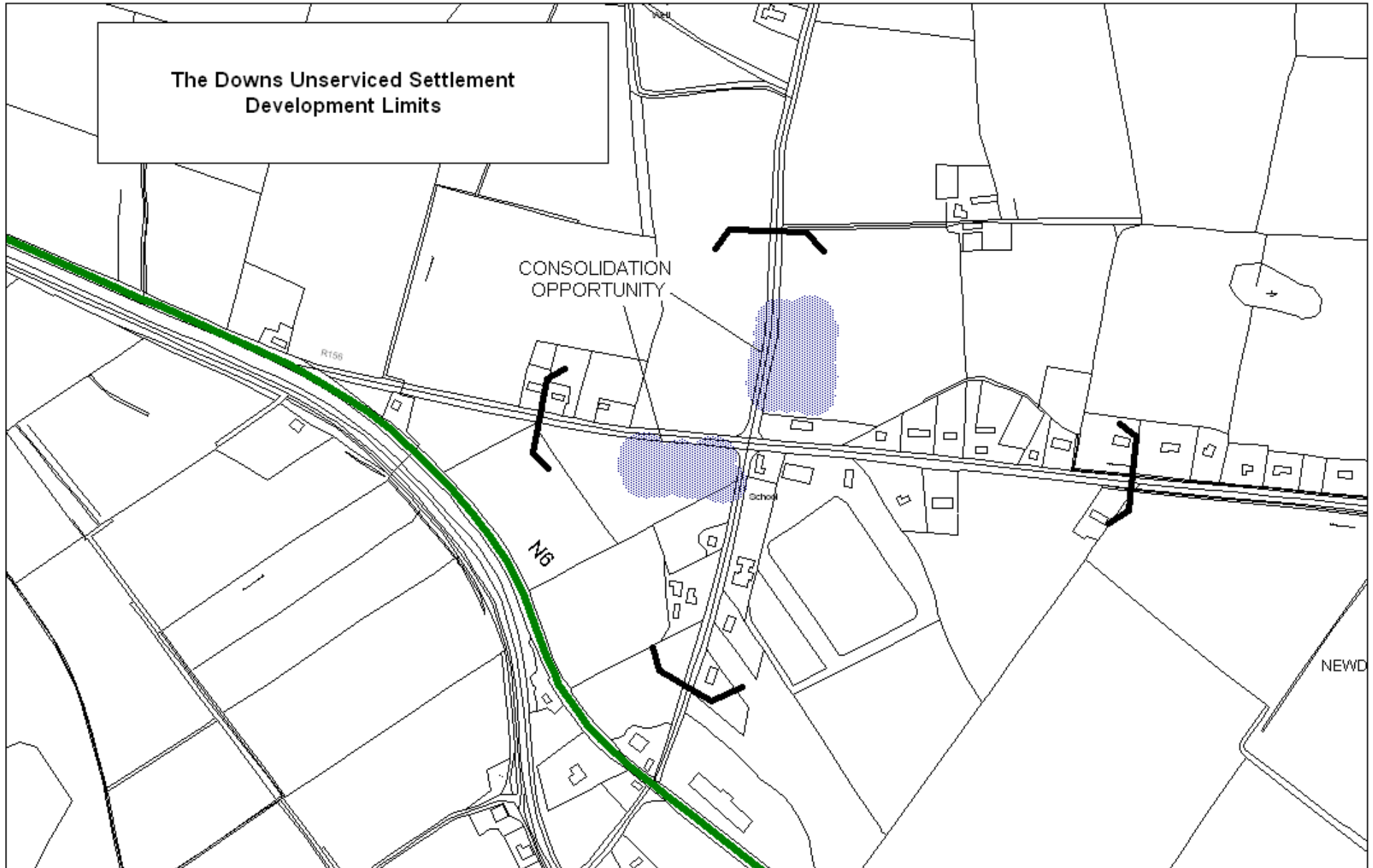
A) Having regard to the acknowledged need to ensure development is appropriate to the scale of the existing settlement and can be absorbed:

- The Planning Authority may permit an increase of up to 50% of the existing number of dwellings, until the end of 2010, at which time the need to allow additional units will be examined.
- Multiple unit proposals shall not exceed 3 dwellings in number.
- To ensure appropriate scale of development, the development limits shown on the attached map should not be interpreted as an overall envelope for widespread development. Guidance at (B) below, which aims to protect settlement form, will also be used as a tool to inform appropriate scale of development.

B) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, the following guidance on preferred location of new development shall apply:

- Proposed infill development between existing dwellings, which would consolidate the settlement, will be considered foremost.
- Frontage development within identified limits will also be considered, providing it does not detract from settlement form.
- Small, multiple unit proposals of not more than 3 dwellings on somewhat larger sites must consolidate the settlement and will be most favourably considered at the settlement core (or in the absence of a clear settlement core, at locations close to services e.g. school, church, shop) as indicated on the attached map.

- Proposed development that would lead to road safety issues, or reduce the carrying capacity of important road links, will not be considered favourably.
  - Development that would result in the opening up of large tracts of land (which are not currently expressed as part of the settlement and would therefore detract from its character and create an incursion into the open countryside) will not be considered favourably.
- C) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, applications for multiple unit schemes must be accompanied by a design statement that demonstrates how the proposal continues the established character of the settlement. This information may also be requested by the Planning Authority where individual proposals raise design concerns, or are located prominently.



## **Planning Assessment of Gainestown:**

Gainestown is located approximately just over 2.5 miles/ 4.2 km south of the edge of Mullingar. The linear settlement is bisected by the R-400 regional road, which links Mullingar and Rochfortbridge. There is a school and church located in the immediate area although in a somewhat dispersed manner. Beside the school, which 'announces' Gainestown, is a 7ha multi-pitch soccer facility, which is home to Mullingar Athletic. The settlement stretches along the regional road, which has a 40mph speed restriction, and contains 23 houses.

Gainestown is characterised mainly by a north-south linear strip of sporadic single site developments, particularly single-storey housing, along the western frontage of the R400. It has no particular centre, with the church nearby (to the north on the L-5135 local road), the school and sports facility. The mixture of designs, boundary treatments, parking strips and varying footpaths adds to the disjointed nature of the settlement. There are, however, some modest roadside cottages that provide an element of character. Gainestown is just north of the former Gaybrook demesne and is likely to have been an intensification of a fringe area housing associated with the demesne. The high quality associated landscape and setting of the parkland has been eroded by suburban type developments and groupings. National monuments are evident in the surrounding landscape.

There is a high level water supply scheme at this location. However, 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. The R-400 passing through the settlement has a particularly poor alignment, which is not conducive in consolidating the settlement. There is a limited amount of footpath combined with ad hoc parking strips. There is some street lighting.

As such Gainestown 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. However, it does have the opportunity to develop within the identified "development limits" as mapped (and attached). The form of development should consolidate existing patterns and 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. 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 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.

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 agreed overall policy statement on unserviced settlements apply to Gainestown.

In addition to Policies 1- 5:

A) Having regard to the acknowledged need to ensure development is appropriate to the scale of the existing settlement and can be absorbed:

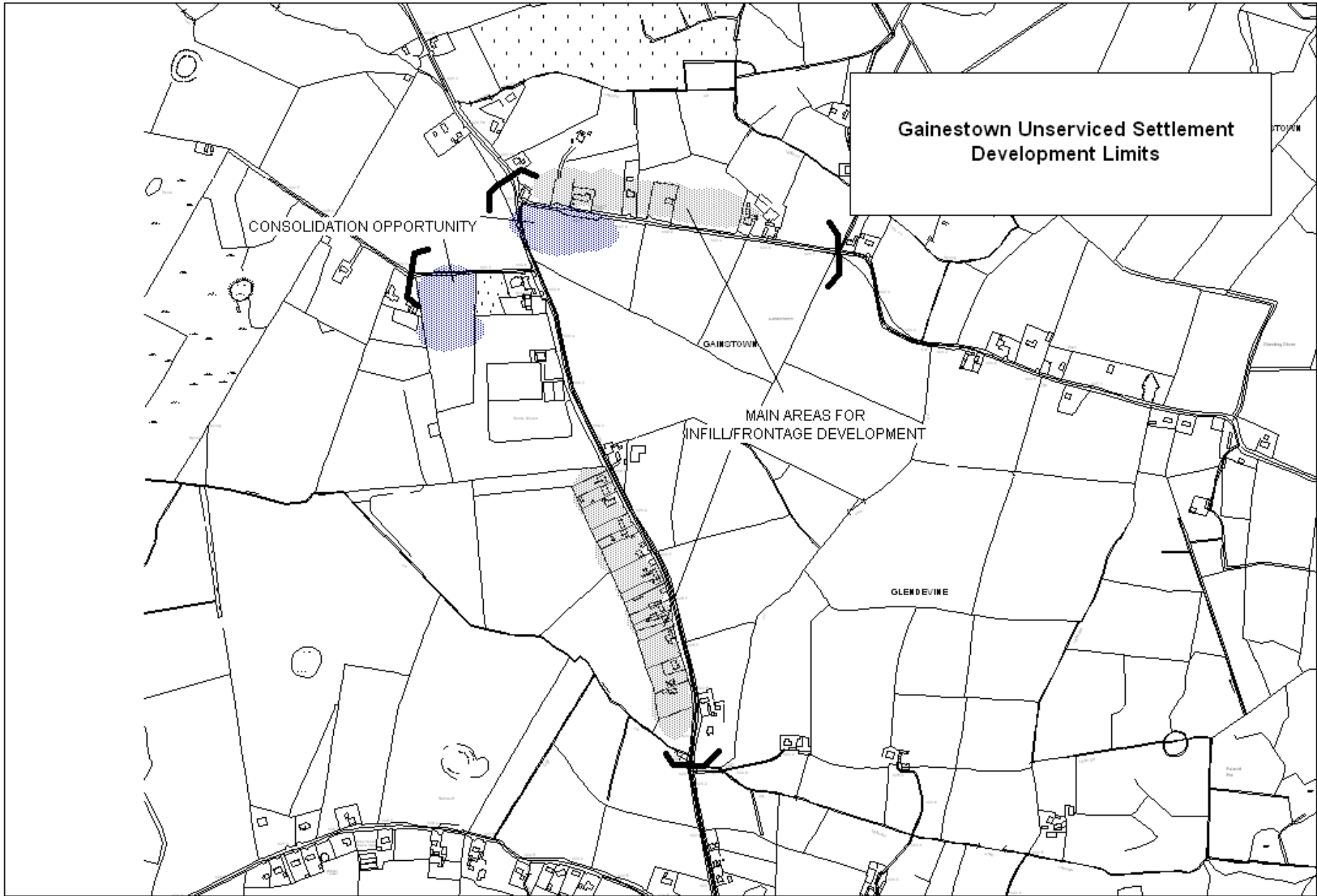
- The Planning Authority may permit an increase of up to 50% of the existing number of dwellings, until the end of 2010, at which time the need to allow additional units will be examined.
- Multiple unit proposals shall not exceed 3 dwellings in number,
- To ensure appropriate scale of development, the development limits shown on the attached map should not be interpreted as an overall envelope for widespread development. Guidance at (B) below, which aims to protect settlement form, will also be used as a tool to inform appropriate scale of development.

B) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, the following guidance on preferred location of new development shall apply:

- Proposed infill development between existing dwellings, which would consolidate the settlement, will be considered foremost.
- Frontage development within identified limits will also be considered, providing it does not detract from settlement form.
- Small, multiple unit proposals, of not more than 3 dwellings, on somewhat larger sites must consolidate the settlement and will be most favourably considered at the settlement core (or in the absence of a clear settlement core, at locations close to services e.g. school, church, shop) as indicated on the attached map.
- Proposed development that would lead to road safety issues, or reduce the carrying capacity of important road links, will not be considered favourably.
- Development that would result in the opening up of large tracts of land (which are not currently expressed as part of the settlement and

would therefore detract from its character and create an incursion into the open countryside) will not be considered favourably.

- C) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, applications for multiple unit schemes must be accompanied by a design statement that demonstrates how the proposal continues the established character of the settlement. This information may also be requested by the Planning Authority where individual proposals raise design concerns, or are located prominently.



## **Planning Assessment of Rathconrath:**

Rathconrath is located approximately 13 miles/21km west of Mullingar on the busy R-390, which is a regional connection to Ballymahon and Roscommon Town and is part of the adopted strategic link between Mullingar and Athlone. The settlement largely sits on the northern road frontage between its 40mph speed limits. The cluster sits in a natural basin which is enclosed with national monuments some relating to the Norman settlement, all of which are set within an undulating pastoral landscape. Facilities include a renowned local shop/pub of particular local importance and a disused post office, which is in a state of disrepair. The settlement due its distance from Mullingar has a role as a service and community focal point for the surrounding rural area, and contains 19 houses.

Rathconrath is characterised by its obvious historical landscape and small groupings of vernacular buildings including the grouping associated with Gunnings pub. Developments are hemmed in by low stone walls. Recently a small very suburban scheme of 8 no. detached 2 storey dwellings has been constructed in the centre of the settlement and now dominates the character of the settlement.

There is no foul or surface water sewerage in Rathconrath. Most of the water mains are group water schemes. As such Rathconrath cannot provide sustainable large-scale residential development or population growth and any further development should only be on a single house basis. However, it does have the opportunity to develop within the identified “development limits” but especially around the cluster’s functionally core, as mapped (and attached). 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 rather than ‘suburbanising’ it. Development will not be allowed to undermine the setting of Rathconrath’s visible history. 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.

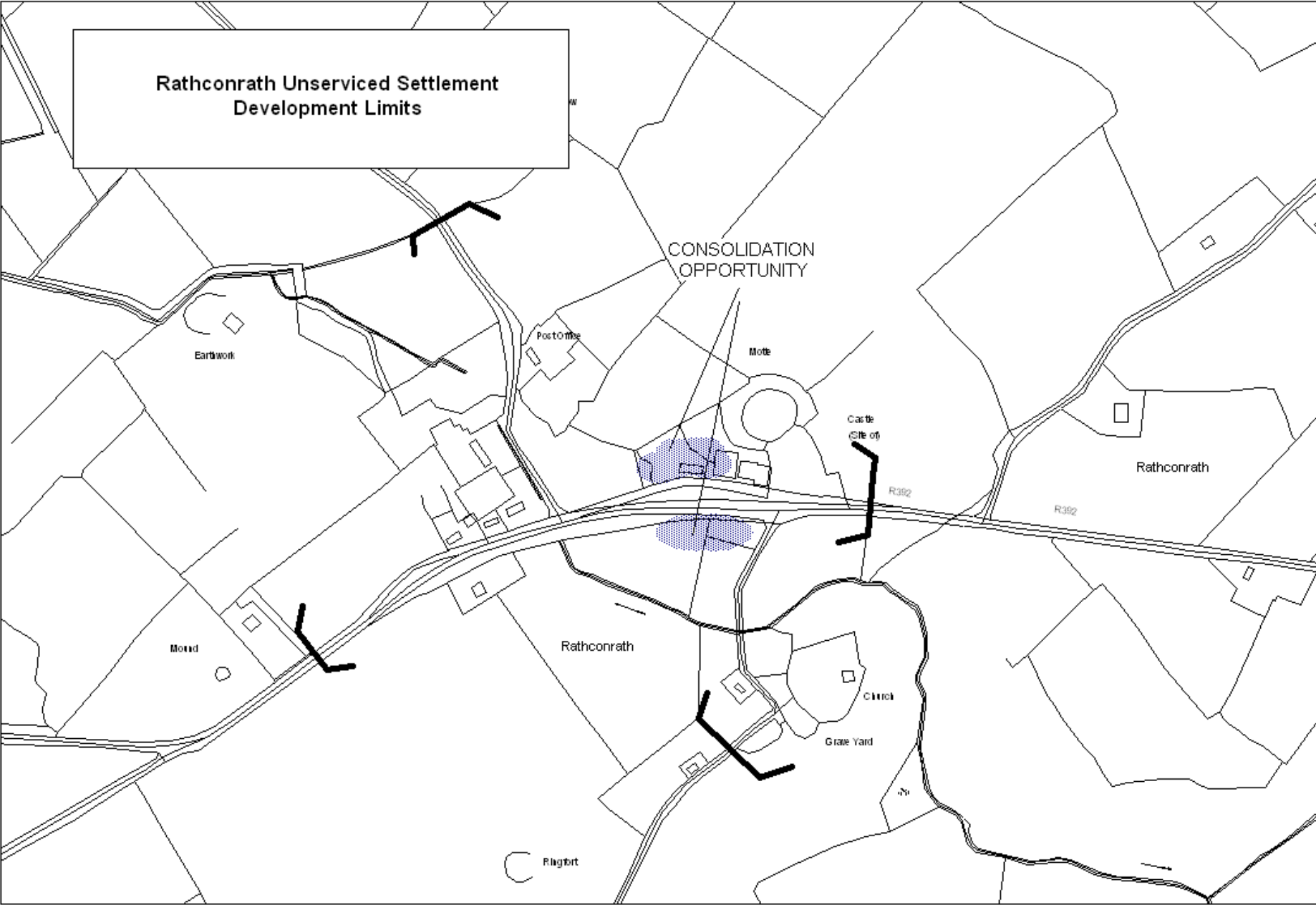
There are a significant number of opportunities to allow for infill between existing buildings and some backland locations within the settlement. Development shall be subject to the considerations and policy objectives stated within the County Development Plan and the “Unserviced Settlement Policy Guidance”, 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 Rathconrath.

In addition to Policies 1- 5:

- A) Having regard to the acknowledged need to ensure development is appropriate to the scale of the existing settlement and can be absorbed:
- The Planning Authority may permit an increase of up to 50% of the existing number of dwellings, until the end of 2010, at which time the need to allow additional units will be examined.
  - Multiple unit proposals shall not exceed 3 dwellings in number,
  - To ensure appropriate scale of development, the development limits shown on the attached map should not be interpreted as an overall envelope for widespread development. Guidance at (B) below, which aims to protect settlement form, will also be used as a tool to inform appropriate scale of development.
- B) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, the following guidance on preferred location of new development shall apply:
- Proposed infill development between existing dwellings, which would consolidate the settlement, will be considered foremost.
  - Frontage development within identified limits will also be considered, providing it does not detract from settlement form.
  - Small, multiple unit proposals, of not more than 3 dwellings, on somewhat larger sites must consolidate the settlement and will be most favourably considered at the settlement core (or in the absence of a clear settlement core, at locations close to services e.g. school, church, shop) as indicated on the attached map.
  - Proposed development that would lead to road safety issues, or reduce the carrying capacity of important road links, will not be considered favourably.
  - Development that would result in the opening up of large tracts of land (which are not currently expressed as part of the settlement and would therefore detract from its character and create an incursion into the open countryside) will not be considered favourably.
- C) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, applications for multiple unit schemes must be accompanied by a design statement that demonstrates how the proposal continues the established character of the settlement. This information may also be requested by the Planning Authority where individual proposals raise design concerns, or are located prominently.



## **Planning Assessment of Taughmon:**

Taughmon is located over 5.3miles/8.5km north of Mullingar 1mile/1.7km south of Crookedwood on the R-394, which bisects the settlement. The place sits on a promontory with spectacular views of the High Amenity Area around Crookedwood to the north and Knockatee to the south. The settlement is a rather undefined cluster of linear housing, gravitating around a functional centre consisting of a primary school, graveyard with the church opposite. Local area functions and community infrastructure is spread along the R-394. The settlement has a close functional and community relationship with Crookedwood, which hosts the GAA club, a pub, and formerly the Post Office. Donnelly's Filling Station with its small shop is on the Mullingar approach at Monilea. 15 houses are contained within the settlement.

Taughmon is characterised by a small strip of varied suburban type bungalows, overpowering the traditional rural elements defined by some older vernacular cottages and farm clusters. Due to the settlements elevation, new development could be particularly prominent if not carefully located within the cluster. Critically there is no speed limit in the settlement, which will be a restrictive factor for any future developments. There area a small amount of footpaths and some street lighting associated with the church. The water supply in Taughmon is considered satisfactory, however, the outfall in relation to same is poor.

As such Taughmon cannot provide sustainable large-scale residential development or population growth and any further development should only be on a single house basis. However, it does have the opportunity to develop sufficiently within the identified "development limits", especially around the cluster's functional core, 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 proposed new development will address external views of the cluster. 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 a significant number of opportunities to allow for infill between existing buildings and some backland locations within the settlement. Development 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 unserved settlements apply to Taughmon.

In addition to policies 1 – 5:

- A) Having regard to the acknowledged need to ensure development is appropriate to the scale of the existing settlement and can be absorbed:
- The Planning Authority may permit an increase of up to 50% of the existing number of dwellings, until the end of 2010, at which time the need to allow additional units will be examined.
  - Multiple unit proposals shall not exceed 3 dwellings in number.
  - To ensure appropriate scale of development, the development limits shown on the attached map should not be interpreted as an overall envelope for widespread development. Guidance at (B) below, which aims to protect settlement form, will also be used as a tool to inform appropriate scale of development.
- B) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, the following guidance on preferred location of new development shall apply:
- Proposed infill development between existing dwellings, which would consolidate the settlement, will be considered foremost.
  - Frontage development within identified limits will also be considered, providing it does not detract from settlement form.
  - Small, multiple unit proposals, of not more than 3 dwellings, on somewhat larger sites must consolidate the settlement and will be most favourably considered at the settlement core (or in the absence of a clear settlement core, at locations close to services e.g. school, church, shop) as indicated on the attached map.
  - Proposed development that would lead to road safety issues, or reduce the carrying capacity of important road links, will not be considered favourably.
  - Development that would result in the opening up of large tracts of land (which are not currently expressed as part of the settlement and would therefore detract from its character and create an incursion into the open countryside) will not be considered favourably.
- C) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, applications for multiple unit schemes must be accompanied by a design statement that demonstrates how the proposal continues the established character of the settlement. This information may also be

requested by the Planning Authority where individual proposals raise design concerns, or are located prominently.

