

CHAPTER 9

Rural Development Strategy

9.1 Introduction

Rural Meath is home to a diverse range of land uses including agriculture and equine industries, centres of local food production, recreational and tourist activities, established villages and rural housing. These combine to provide both residents and visitors with a quality environment to live, work and enjoy.

This Chapter sets out the policies required for the sustainable development of rural Meath, in a manner that is consistent with the guidance, strategies and policies at National and Regional level.

This Chapter is based on the following important principles:

- The specific land use requirements of agricultural activity will be accommodated as a first priority.
- A focus on supporting vibrant rural communities centred on a network of rural nodes is a cross cutting theme of this Plan.
- Rural Meath is an important national and international tourism and heritage asset and its environmental assets will be protected.
- Encouragement and support for restoration and refurbishment of the existing built fabric in rural areas.
- Large numbers of dispersed 'urban generated houses' in rural areas have had a detrimental effect on landscape and open countryside. This pattern of development does not support the long term viability of rural areas, individual villages and rural nodes.
- The current level of rural housing development in the County is unsustainable.
- The requirement to transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society, necessitates consideration of the spatial pattern of development focusing on elimination of unnecessary trips.
- The imperative to reverse the unsustainable levels of out-bound commuting from the County which have been identified as the highest in the Country in the last intercensal period.

9.1.1 Land Use Zoning

All areas outside the development boundaries of all settlements listed in Volume 2 and the rural nodes listed in this chapter, have a Rural Area (RA) land use zoning objective. This objective seeks to protect and promote in a balanced way, the development of agriculture, forestry and sustainable rural-related enterprise, community facilities, biodiversity, the rural landscape, and the built and cultural heritage.

The rural nodes have a land use zoning objective Rural Node (RN) which seeks to provide for small scale infill residential development, small scale employment opportunities, community facilities and supporting services serving local needs while maintaining the rural nature of the node.

For the purposes of rural housing assessment in the Rural Area (RA Zone) and the Rural Node (RN Zone) a rural pressure areas map has been prepared. This map identifies two rural housing category areas- Rural Category 1- Areas under Strong Urban Influence and Rural Category 2- Strong Rural Areas.

Please refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives, for more information on uses permitted in Rural Areas and Rural Nodes.

9.2 Statutory Context

Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended provides the statutory context.

Sustainable Rural Housing, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2005

The Circular letter PL2/2017, issued by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in May 2017, advised local authorities that the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines are currently being revised to ensure the rural housing policies and objectives contained in local authority Development Plans comply with Article 43 of the EU Treaty on the freedom of movement of citizens. This Plan will be varied, if necessary, to ensure compliance with any revised Guidelines, when finalised.

9.3 Policy Context

Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework (NPF), 2017, (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government).

The National Planning Framework acknowledges that *“rural areas have a major role to play in Ireland 2040 and encourages Local Authorities to ensure that connectivity gaps are addressed and that planning and investment policies support job creation in the rural economy”*.

Improved coordination of existing investment programmes dealing with social inclusion, rural development and town and village renewal are sought, as is planning for the future growth and development of rural areas.

In terms of rural housing, the National Planning Framework (NPF) distinguishes between commuter areas and other rural regions throughout the Country.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) recognises the *“significant pressures from urban generated pressures in commuter areas and highlights how commuter-generated housing in rural areas accessible to cities and towns, has affected the character and cohesion of some locations. It seeks to manage the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.”*

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031 (RSES)

The RSES recognises the major contribution that the rural areas make towards regional and national development in economic, social and environmental terms. The RSES aims to strengthen the fabric of rural Ireland, supporting rural towns and communities as well as the open countryside, improving connectivity, and supporting job creation, particularly in a more diverse range of sectors.

The RSES supports the consolidation of the town and village network, to ensure that development proceeds sustainably and at an appropriate scale, level and pace in line with the Core Strategies of the County Development Plans.

The RSES requires that planning for rural areas must provide a balance between managing demand in the most accessible rural areas in proximity to Dublin and larger towns, whilst supporting the sustainable growth of rural economies and rural communities. It requires that the Core Strategies for County Development Plans identify areas under strong urban influence in the hinterlands of settlements and set the appropriate rural housing policy response to avoid ribbon and over spill development from urban areas, support revitalised towns and villages, achieve sustainable compact growth targets and protect

the rural resource for rural communities.

It also highlights the fundamental importance of planning the distribution of activity (for example where people live and work) in a manner which reduces the need to travel and achieves a move towards a low carbon society having regard to the impact which transport has on carbon emissions.

RSO 3 seeks to support rural communities and states as follows: *“Support sustainable rural development by managing urban generated growth in areas under strong urban influence and by encouraging sustainable growth in areas which have experienced decline or stagnation”*

RSO 9 seeks to support the transition to low carbon and clean energy as follows: *“Pursue climate mitigation in line with global and national targets and harness the potential for a more distributed renewables focused energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050”*

There are a number of applicable Regional Policy Objectives and these are as follows:

RPO 6.4:

“Local Authorities shall identify measures in LECPs for regeneration in small towns and villages cores.”

RPO 6.5:

“Local Authorities shall explore projects in LECPs for the enhancement of the competitiveness of their rural areas by supporting innovation in rural economic development and enterprise through the diversification of the rural economy into new sectors and services, including ICT-based industries and those addressing climate change and sustainability. Cross-boundary and inter-regional partnerships are encouraged and they will be supported.”

RPO 6.6:

“Support Local Authorities to explore mechanisms for the emergence of a diversified sectoral mix in rural areas. This includes the identification of appropriate locations to drive regeneration of these rural towns and villages for example by the provision of serviced sites for housing and co-working/incubator space near Institutes of Technology to facilitate technological spill overs through greater connections and linkages.”

RPO 6.7:

“Support Local Authorities to develop sustainable and economically efficient rural economies through initiatives to enhance sectors such as agricultural and food, forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting the natural landscape and built heritage.”

RPO 4.77

“In Development Plan policy Local Authorities shall prioritise the regeneration of rural towns and villages through identification of significant regeneration projects for rural villages and rural areas which could harness untapped assets with community and wider private and public sector support and investment including the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund”.

RPO 4.78

“Development plans should support the development of a “New Homes in Small Towns and Villages” initiative which would augment the delivery of actions by Local Authorities, Irish Water, communities and other stakeholders in the provision of services and serviced sites to create “build your own home” opportunities within the

existing footprint of rural settlements to provide new homes to meet housing demand.”

RPO 4.79

‘Local authorities shall identify and provide policies that recognise the contribution that small towns, villages and rural areas contribute to social and economic wellbeing. As part of this policy provision that seeks to support and protect existing rural economies such as valuable agricultural lands to ensure sustainable food supply, to protect the value and character of open countryside and to support the diversification of rural economies to create additional jobs and maximise opportunities in emerging sectors, such as agri-business, renewable energy, tourism and forestry enterprise is supported.’

RPO 4.80

‘Local Authorities shall manage urban generated growth in Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence (i.e the commuter catchment of Dublin, large towns and centres of employment) and Stronger Rural Areas by ensuring that in these areas the provision of single houses in the open countryside is based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic or social need to live in a rural area, and compliance with statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements.’

RPO 4.81

‘In rural areas outside the rural areas under Strong Urban Influence Local Authorities shall encourage sustainable growth in areas that have experienced decline or stagnation, facilitate the provision of single houses in the countryside based on siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements.’

RPO 4.82

“Local Authorities shall ensure that economic development that is urban in nature should be in the first instance located in urban areas.

RPO 4.83

“Support the consolidation of the town and village network to ensure that development proceeds sustainably and at an appropriate scale, level and pace in line with the Core Strategies of the County Development Plans.”

RPO 4.84:

‘Support the rural economy and initiatives in relation to diversification, agri business, rural tourism and renewable energy so as to sustain the employment opportunities in rural areas. In keeping with the NPF, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly will support the longer term strategic planning for industrial peatland areas. This may include support, where appropriate, for a Transition Team in place and preparation of a comprehensive after use framework plan for the peatlands and related infrastructure, which addresses environmental, economic and social issues, including employment and replacement enterprise reflecting the current transition from employment based around peat extraction.’

Realising our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development 2017, (Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs)

This Government strategy is aimed at delivering real change for people living and working in rural Ireland. The objective of the Action Plan for Rural Development is to “unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports, at national and local level, which will ensure that people who live in rural areas

have increased opportunities for employment locally, and access to public services and social networks”.

A number of key initiatives proposed as part of the Strategy include the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the Delivery of the 2014-2020 EU LEADER Programme. The Action Plan for Rural Ireland builds on the commitments contained in the Charter for Rural Ireland (referenced below) and sets out a clear roadmap for its implementation.

Charter for Rural Ireland, 2016, (formerly the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government)

This Charter contains a number of commitments which help to establish the foundations for the rejuvenation of the rural economy and rural society as a whole. The Charter is “a statement of Government commitment to support Rural Ireland’s regeneration and to underpin the future sustainable development of Ireland’s rural communities.”

Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine)

This programme is based on the EU framework for rural development and the objective of the programme is to foster the development of rural areas through innovation, locally based, bottom up development strategies. In the County the Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) and Leader are the programme implementation bodies.

Rural Economic Development Policy Statement and Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ)

The Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) was established in 2012

following the severe impact of the economic downturn on rural areas. The REDZ (Rural Economic Development Zone) initiative was a recommendation contained within the CEDRA and is intended to complement the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and cater for projects between the towns and surrounding hinterland that maximise local assets in areas such as tourism, culture, heritage and other areas that support rural economic activity.

Funding was allocated for 18 pilot initiatives across the country¹. Under the REDZ Scheme the Council/Meath Enterprise was successful in its application in 2015 and 2016 to develop a Digital Hub at the Kells Enterprise Centre in two phases. This Hub is marketed to new start up companies to function as incubation space and as a location for training programmes in digital innovation, Phase 1 is now complete. The Kells Electoral Area was designated as a Redz Zone (refer to chapter 4 Economy and Employment Strategy).

9.4 Rural Development Strategy Vision

‘To support agriculture and horticulture as the pre-dominant land uses in rural areas and to encourage the continued sustainable development and economic viability of rural communities and rural areas by supporting a network of rural villages and nodes without compromising the physical, environmental, natural and heritage resources of the County.’

Policy

It is the policy of the Council:

¹ <https://www.chg.gov.ie/rural/rural-development/rural-economic-development-zone-redz/>

RUR POL 1

To support the continued vitality and viability of rural areas by promoting sustainable social and economic development.

Objectives

It is the objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 1

To recognise the strategic roles the County will play, in a Regional and National context, in terms of recreation, heritage conservation, protection of natural resources, safe-guarding food production, rural employment creation, and to ensure compatibility between this Plan and Regional and National strategies.

RUR OBJ 2

To identify and protect rural resources, such as locally and regionally important aquifers and water sources, from development which would prejudice their sustainable future usage.

RUR OBJ 3

To identify and protect, known or potential aggregate resources, where feasible, from development which would prejudice their sustainable future usage.

RUR OBJ 4

To support the vitality and future viability of rural communities by ensuring a functional relationship between housing in rural nodes and rural villages and the rural areas in which they are located.

RUR OBJ 5

To protect and enhance the visual amenity of rural areas through sensitive design of domestic and agricultural buildings.

RUR OBJ 6

To prioritise the regeneration of rural towns and villages through identification of significant regeneration projects for rural villages and rural areas which could harness untapped assets with community and wider private and public sector support and investment including the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

RUR OBJ 7

To explore mechanisms for the emergence of a diversified sectoral mix in rural areas. This includes the identification of appropriate locations to drive regeneration of rural towns and villages for example by the provision of serviced sites for housing and co-working/incubator space.

RUR OBJ 8

To identify and provide policies that recognise the contribution that small towns, villages, nodes and rural areas contribute to social and economic wellbeing. As part of this policy provision that seeks to support and protect existing rural economies such as valuable agricultural lands to ensure sustainable food supply, to protect the value and character of open countryside and to support the diversification of rural economies to create additional jobs and maximise opportunities in emerging sectors, such as agri-business, renewable energy, tourism and forestry enterprise.

RUR OBJ 9

To develop sustainable and economically efficient rural economies through initiatives to enhance sectors such as agricultural and food, forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting the natural landscape and built heritage.

RUR OBJ 10

To ensure that economic development that is urban in nature should be in the first instance located in urban areas.

RUR OBJ 11

To support the consolidation of the town, village and node network to ensure that development proceeds sustainably and at an appropriate scale, level and rate in line with the Core Strategy.

RUR OBJ 12

To ensure that plans and projects associated with rural development will be subject to an Appropriate Assessment Screening and to ensure that those plans or projects which could, either individually or in-combination with other plans and projects, have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (or sites) undergo a full Appropriate Assessment.

RUR OBJ 13

To support the development of a "New Homes in Small Towns and villages" initiative which would augment the delivery of actions by Local Authorities, Irish Water, communities and other stakeholders in the provision of services and serviced sites to create "build your own home" opportunities within the existing footprint of rural settlements to provide new homes to meet housing demand.

9.5 Rural Settlement Strategy

9.5.1 Local Context

The Council recognises the long tradition of people living in rural areas of the County and promotes sustainable rural settlement as the key component of delivering viable rural communities.

In recent years, Meath has experienced significant pressure to accommodate rural housing which has resulted in the open rural character of many areas being eroded by piecemeal housing development. This level of residential development threatens the initiation and future viability agricultural enterprises, agricultural related/processing enterprises, quarrying and extractive industries and newly emerging technological industries on appropriately zoned lands.

It is also clear that the capacity of the environment and the road network to accommodate further new residential development is reaching its limit in many areas of the County. There is a concern that if rural housing continues to be permitted at the current levels, that irreversible damage will be done to the rural environment including water quality and landscape character. The opportunities for farm families to continue to live/work within their own communities is likely to be compromised.

Therefore, there is a necessity to carefully manage future rural housing development in County Meath. The provision of more sustainable housing options for rural communities will be facilitated by the Plan through building up the capacity of rural villages and rural nodes to accommodate the future

house needs of rural dwellers not engaged in agriculture or rural economic enterprises, which will sustain their futures.

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 2

(i) To manage residential development in Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence by ensuring that in these areas the provision of single houses in the open countryside facilitates farm families to continue to live and/or work within their own communities.

(ii) To manage residential development in Strong Rural Areas by ensuring that in these areas the provision of single houses in the open countryside facilitates farm families and those with demonstrable intrinsic links to the rural area to continue to live and/ or work within their own communities.

RUR POL 3

In Areas under Strong Urban Influence and Strong Rural Areas the provision of more sustainable housing options for rural communities will be facilitated by the Plan through building up the capacity of rural villages and rural nodes to accommodate the future house needs of rural dwellers not engaged in agriculture or rural economic enterprises, which will sustain their futures.

9.5.2 Rural Area Categories in County Meath

Based on analysis of population densities, population change, commuting patterns², it is clear that there are 2 distinct rural categories in Co. Meath. These are as follows:

- **Rural Housing Category 1: Rural Areas Under Strong Urban Influence**
- **Rural Housing Category 2: Strong Rural Areas**

(Please refer to Map 9.1 - Rural Development Pressure Map which sets out the extent of Category 1 and Category 2).

Rural Housing Category 1: Rural Areas Under Strong Urban Influence

This area is characterised by a rapidly rising rural population, a significant proportion of which are commuting outside of the County for work. The County's outbound commuting rates³ are the highest in the Country and it is a key tenet of the Council's Economic Strategy to address this issue with the creation of 'live work' communities in suitable locations within the County.

Rural Housing Category 1 spans a large geographic area of the County, comprising the commuter-belt and peri-urban⁴ areas. Continued high levels of single rural houses in these locations would inhibit the growth of the County's urban areas, cause further deterioration of rural amenities, contribute to the continuing decline of rural villages and nodes and create significant sustainability challenges.

Rural Housing Category 2: Strong Rural Areas

The level of individual housing development activity in these areas tends to be lower than

that within Rural Housing Category 1.

Rural Housing Category 2 is primarily located to the north west of the County and includes rural areas outside Oldcastle, Kilmainhamwood, Crossakiel, Nobber, Carnaross and Moynalty. In these areas, the focus of urban generated housing should be in the network of settlements to support the development of services and infrastructure and to take pressure off development in the open countryside.

9.5.3 Rural Housing Policy

This section sets out the policies for rural housing in the two distinct categories referred to above (i.e. Rural Housing Category 1 and Rural Housing Category 2, (refer to map no. 9.1X)).

All rural housing proposals will be assessed having regard to, inter alia, the protection of key economic, environmental, natural and heritage assets, such as the road network, water quality, important landscapes, habitats, biodiversity and likely future impacts of climate change.

Applications for rural dwellings will be considered, having regard to the requirements set out in Tables 9.1a) and 9.1b) Schedule of Local Need and where it is demonstrated that the development would not prejudice the environment and the rural character of the area.

Please note that the requirements pertaining to rural dwellings in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Brú na Bóinne are set out in Chapter 8 Cultural and Natural Heritage and Appendix 8.

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

² Data provided by AIRO (All Island Research Observatory)

³ POWSCAR Data Census 2016

⁴ Peri Urban areas are parts of the open countryside that have been subjected to very high levels of urban generated adjustment.

RUR POL 4

To recognise and promote the value of agricultural land to ensure sustainable food supply and the landscape value of the rural area.

RUR POL 5

All applications for rural dwellings in the case of Applicant 1 and Applicant 2 in the Rural Area under Strong Urban Influence (Rural Housing Category 1) shall include detailed documentary evidence of compliance with the rural housing policy as set out in RUR POL 14 as follows:

- Set out clearly your relationship to the land owner i.e mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, guardian;
- Completed Local Housing Needs Assessment Form;
- Land Registry Certificate and land holding maps of all land holdings in family ownership in County Meath;
- Documentary evidence of date of acquisition/purchase of land holding;
- Details of all places of residence of the applicant over the previous 10 years (7 years if engaged in farming activity on the lands);
- Documentary evidence of Intrinsic Links to the area which shall include, where applicable, : Copy of applicant entry on Electoral Register, Evidence of attendance at Local School confirmed in writing by the School, Evidence of Membership of local community/

sports groups; letter from a Financial Institution confirming address, Utility bills confirming address.

The Planning Authority may seek additional information to that set out above if considered necessary.

RUR POL 6

All applications for rural dwellings in the case of Applicant 1 and Applicant 2 in the Rural Area located in Strong Rural Areas (Rural Housing Category 2) shall include detailed documentary evidence of compliance with the rural housing policy as set out in RUR POL 14 as follows:

- Set out clearly your relationship to the land owner i.e mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, guardian, (if applicable);
- Completed Local Housing Needs Assessment Form;
- Land Registry Certificate and land holding maps of all land holdings in family ownership in County Meath, (if applicable);
- Documentary evidence of date of acquisition/purchase of family land holding;
- Where the applicant is not the owner, a letter confirming details of the relationship between the applicant and the landowner signed by both parties is required;
- Land Registry Certificate and land holding maps of all land holdings in

the landowner's ownership in County Meath, if applicable;

- Details of all places of residence of the applicant over the previous 10 years (5 years if engaged in farming on the lands);
- Documentary evidence of the applicants Intrinsic Links to the area which shall include, where applicable, : Copy of applicant entry on Electoral Register, Evidence of attendance at Local School confirmed in writing by the School, Evidence of Membership of local community/sports groups; letter from a Financial Institution confirming address, Utility bills confirming address.

The Planning Authority may seek additional information to that set out above if considered necessary.

RUR POL 7

All Applications for rural dwellings based on established rural businesses shall include detailed documentary evidence of compliance with the rural housing policy as set out in RUR POL 14 as follows:

- Documentary evidence that the rural business is planning compliant, has been established and operating for a minimum of 5 years;
- Details of principal occupation and documentary evidence that principal income is derived from the business;
- Completed Local Housing Needs Assessment Form

- Land Registry Certificate and land holding maps of all land holdings in family ownership in County Meath;
- Documentary evidence of date of acquisition/purchase of family land holding;
- Details of all places of residence of the applicant over the previous 10 years;
- Documentary evidence of the applicants Intrinsic Links to the area which shall include, where applicable, : Copy of applicant entry on Electoral Register, Evidence of attendance at Local School confirmed in writing by the School, Evidence of Membership of local community/sports groups; letter from a Financial Institution confirming address, Utility bills confirming address.

The Planning Authority may seek additional information to that set out above if considered necessary.

RUR POL 8

To require all applicants in areas Under Strong Urban Influence who are seeking to build their home on their family land holding for their own full time occupation shall be required to demonstrate that they have not been previously granted permission for a one off rural dwelling in Meath and have not sold this dwelling or site to an unrelated third party.

RUR POL 9

To require all applicants in Strong Rural

Areas who are seeking to build their home on their family land holding for their own full time occupation shall be required to demonstrate that they have not been previously granted permission for a one off rural dwelling in Meath and have not sold this dwelling or site to an unrelated third party in the last 10 years.

RUR POL 10

To restrict residential development on a landholding, where there is a history of development through the speculative sale or development of sites, notwithstanding the applicant's compliance with the local need criteria.

RUR POL 11

To recognise that exceptional health circumstances, certified by relevant documents, from a registered specialist medical practitioner and a disability, may require a person to live in a particular environment. Housing in such circumstances should be facilitated close to existing services and facilities in Rural Nodes within 12 km radius of their existing dwelling. All planning permissions for such housing shall be subject to a seven year occupancy clause. In all cases the Planning Authority reserves the right to request such additional certification considered necessary to establish the bona fides of the applicant's unambiguous compliance with the requirements of this policy.

RUR POL 12

To recognise that unavoidable exceptional financial circumstances, certified by relevant documents including in all such cases a letter from the relevant financial institution confirming the requirement to sell an existing rural home, may occur. Housing in such circumstances facilitated close to existing services and facilities in Rural Nodes within 12 km radius of their existing dwelling. All planning permissions for such housing shall be subject to a seven year occupancy clause. In all cases the Planning Authority reserves the right to request such additional certification considered necessary to establish the bona fides of the applicant's unambiguous compliance with the requirements of this policy.

RUR POL 13

To recognise that in limited exceptional circumstances unacceptable housing scenarios certified by relevant documentation, may occur. This policy is applicable to persons who have grown up and spent substantial periods of their lives (10 years) living in the rural area of Meath as members of the rural community. Housing in such circumstances shall be facilitated close to existing services and facilities in Rural Nodes within 12 km radius of their existing dwelling. All planning permissions for such housing shall be subject to a seven year occupancy clause. In all cases the Planning Authority reserves the right to request such additional certification considered

necessary to establish the bona fides of the applicant’s unambiguous compliance with the requirements of this policy.

RUR POL 14

In order to satisfy the rural housing policy for a rural dwelling in Co. Meath in all areas, an applicant shall:

(A) Meet one of the following categories of applicant:

Category 1. A member of a farming family who is actively engaged in farming the family landholding.

OR

Category 2. A member of a farm family who wishes to reside on the family landholding.⁵

AND

(B) Meet one of the local need criteria set out in Table 9.1 (a) and 9.1 (b) Schedule of Local Need.

Table 9.1 (a) Schedule of Local Need

Category of Applicant 1	
<p>A member of a farming family who is actively engaged in farming the family landholding. The applicant must demonstrate a genuine local need to reside in the area through direct and active involvement in the running of the family farm. The farm must be in the ownership of the applicant’s immediate family⁶ for a minimum of ten years preceding the date of the application for planning permission.</p>	
Local Need Criteria	
Rural Housing Category 1: Rural Areas Under Strong Urban Influence	Rural Housing Category 2: Strong Rural Areas
<p>(i) Persons engaged full time in agriculture (including commercial bloodstock/horticulture), wishing to build their home in the rural area on the family landholding and who can demonstrate by way of documentary evidence that they have been engaged in farming at that location for a continuous period of over 7 years, prior to making the application. The family farm shall be in all cases in excess of 25 acres and in its entirety within the family’s exclusive ownership for a minimum of 10 years.</p>	<p>(i) Persons engaged full time in agriculture (including commercial bloodstock/horticulture), wishing to build their home in the rural area on the family landholding and who can demonstrate by way of documentary evidence that they have been engaged in farming at that location for a continuous period of over 5 years, prior to making the application. The family farm shall be in all cases in excess of 25 acres and in its entirety within the family’s exclusive ownership for a minimum of 10 years.</p>

⁵ In Rural Housing Category 2: Strong Rural Areas, where no land is available in the family ownership, a site within a 5km radius of the original family home may be considered.

⁶ Immediate family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister or guardian.

Table 9.1 b) Schedule of Local Need

Category of Applicant 2	
A member of a farm family who wishes to reside on the family landholding. <i>The applicant must demonstrate a genuine local need to reside on the family lands by reason of immediate family ties.⁷</i>	
Local Need Criteria	
Rural Housing Category 1: Rural Areas Under Strong Urban Influence	Rural Housing Category 2: Strong Rural Areas
(i) Persons who have grown up and spent substantial periods of their lives (10 years) living in the rural area of Meath as members of the rural community and who seek to build their first home in the rural area on their original family landholding which shall be in all cases in excess of 25 acres and in its entirety within the family's exclusive ownership for a minimum of 10 years.	(i) Persons who have grown up and spent substantial periods of their lives (10 years) living in the rural area of Meath as members of the rural community and who seek to build their first home in the rural area on their family landholding and who currently live in the area. Where no land is available in the family ownership, a site within a 5km radius of the original family home may be considered.
(ii) Emigrants returning to build a dwelling on the family farm, who have grown up and spent substantial periods of their lives (10 years) on their original family landholding which shall be in all cases in excess of 25 acres and in its entirety within the family's exclusive ownership for a minimum of 10 years.	(ii) Emigrants returning to build a dwelling who have grown up and spent substantial periods of their lives (10 years) living in the rural area of Meath, as members of the rural community who have left the area but now wish to return to reside near to, or to care for immediate family members, returning to build on the family landholding or on a site within a 5km radius of the original family home.
(iii) Persons who can satisfy the Planning Authority by way of documentary evidence that their rural business is planning compliant, has been established and operating for a minimum of 5 years.	(iii) Persons who can satisfy the Planning Authority by way of documentary evidence that their rural business is planning compliant, has been established and operating for a minimum of 5 years.

* Where an applicant has resided in a rural area in excess of the previous 15 consecutive years, in a dwelling attached to their business, such as farmer, and the business inclusive of the dwelling house is being sold for retirement or other circumstances, such applications will be considered on their individual merits in both rural areas, where the applicant satisfied the local housing need criteria.

** The needs of persons with exceptional health circumstances in both rural areas are also recognised (subject to submitting the necessary supporting medical documentation certified from a registered specialist medical practitioner). However, the preferred location is Rural Nodes. Please refer to RUR POL 11 in this regard.

⁷ Immediate family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister or guardian.

9.5.4 Rural Nodes

The housing needs of those members of the rural community who are not part of the agricultural/horticulture community as set out at section 9.3 will be facilitated in the extensive network of rural nodes.

The majority of rural nodes, (see Table 9.2) comprise largely of unserved rural areas with limited social and community infrastructure. Rural nodes are designated for limited development at a sustainable scale for immediate local need through the development of clusters. It is anticipated that each rural node can cater for a small population increase from their current population base over the period of the Plan.

Consideration of planning applications for development within the nodes will have regard to the role and form of the node within the wider rural area with particular care being taken that these settlements do not compete with designated villages in the services they provide or the role and function they play within the rural area.

Detailed siting and design guidance including best practice examples and layouts in terms of the development of the rural nodes will be provided in the Meath Rural House Design Guide when reviewed.

The Council will support infill development on appropriate sites in rural nodes which make the most sustainable use of serviced land and existing public infrastructure. The Council will also promote the clachan tradition of clustering houses together in the modern context. Cluster Housing Schemes in rural nodes should be developed in a sustainable way respecting the unique aspects of the village and the site itself, whilst also responding to current economic and

social needs.

Residential use of the upper floors of commercial properties is positively encouraged and can make a positive contribution to the regeneration of rural nodes. Where external alterations are proposed to facilitate the conversion of existing premises to residential use these will only be permitted where they are in keeping with the host building and the character of the surrounding rural area in terms of design, scale and use of materials.

Ashbourne MD - Rural Nodes

Ardcath

Bellewstown

Clonalvy

Curragha

Cushinstown

Edoxtown

Lismullin

Oberstown

Kells MD - Rural Nodes

Ballinacree

Ballinlough

Castletown

Cortown

Dromone

Drumbarragh

Fordstown

Kilallon

Kilbeg

Kilberry

Kilskeer
Meath Hill
Newcastle
Oristown
Rathkenny
Rathmore
Teervurcher
Wilkinstown

Laytown-Bettystown MD - Rural Nodes

Yellow Furze
Grangegeeth
Lobinstown
Monknewtown
Newtown

Navan MD - Rural Nodes

Bective
Bohermeen
Boyerstown
Robinstown

Ratoath MD - Rural Nodes

Batterstown
Culmullin
Drumree
Dunsany
Kilcloon
Kiltale
Moynalvy

Ratoath MD - Rural Nodes

Ballinabrackey
Castlejordan
Coole
Dunderry
Kilbride
Killyon
Hill of Down
Rathcore

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 15

To ensure that the provision of housing in all rural nodes shall be reserved for persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community. In all cases applicants shall certify to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority that they have been a rural resident for a minimum of 5 years. The node shall be within 12 km of their current place of residence.

Detailed documentary evidence shall be submitted to support the foregoing applications as follows:

- Completed Local Housing Needs Assessment Form;
- Details of all places of residence of the applicant over the previous 5 years;
- Documentary evidence of the applicants Intrinsic Links to the area which shall include, where applicable:

Copy of applicant entry on Electoral Register, Evidence of attendance at Local School confirmed in writing by the School, Evidence of Membership of local community/sports groups; letter from a Financial Institution confirming address, Utility bills confirming address.

- Health/ Financial/Unacceptable accommodation circumstances (Refer to RUR Pol 11- 13.)

The Planning Authority may seek additional information to that set out above if considered necessary.

Objectives

It is the objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 14

To support rural nodes located across the County in offering attractive housing options to meet the needs of the established rural communities and to support existing local community facilities such as schools, post offices, recreational facilities and childcare facilities etc.

RUR OBJ 15

To seek to ensure that new residential development in rural nodes is in accordance with 'the Meath Rural Design Guide' and is of a design and layout compatible with the character of its setting including the requirement to provide footpaths where appropriate.

RUR OBJ 16

To promote the development of central brownfield sites in rural nodes, if existing, as appropriate. Suburban type developments or multiple housing developments will not be permitted.

RUR OBJ 17

All development in rural nodes should take cognisance of the prevailing scale, pattern of development and services availability.

RUR OBJ 18

To promote the development of local craft/artisan facilities in Rural Nodes, of a design and layout reflective of its rural setting.

RUR OBJ 19

To promote the provision of childcare facilities within rural nodes to meet local demand and encourage the location of such facilities near schools where possible.

RUR OBJ 20

To encourage the provision of local small scale convenience shops, exclusive of service stations, at an appropriate scale in rural nodes where there is a clear deficiency in retail provision, subject to the protection of residential amenity and the rural character of the area.

RUR OBJ 21

To require the provision of high quality, durable, appropriately designed, secure boundary treatments in rural nodes reflective of the rural environment in all developments.

RUR OBJ 22

To promote the retention of field boundaries and mature trees and hedgerows to protect the rural character of the area.

RUR OBJ 23

To ensure that proposals for infill development take account of the character of the area and where possible retain existing features such as building line, height, railings, hedgerows, trees, gateways etc.

RUR OBJ 24

To require that infill proposals accord with the relevant Development Management Standards contained in this Plan and should contribute positively to the renewal of these areas and to the established character and amenities of the area.

RUR OBJ 25

To promote residential use above shops and other business premises subject to compliance with the relevant Development

Management Standards contained in this Plan.

RUR OBJ 26

To promote the clachan tradition of clustering houses together in rural nodes while respecting the unique aspects of the node and the site itself. An overall indicative scheme layout shall be provided as part of the first planning application on the subject landholding.

RUR OBJ 27

To require the provision of footpaths and public lighting as part of residential development in rural nodes, as appropriate.

RUR OBJ 28

To require a minimum site area of 0.2 hectares (0.5 acres) for each residential unit in rural nodes where serviced by an individual waste water treatment plant.

9.5.5 Occupancy Conditions

The Council is required to attach occupancy conditions in accordance with the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines and Circular SP 5/08 issued by the then Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 16

To attach an occupancy condition to all rural dwellings, including those located in Rural Nodes, in Rural Area RA and Rural Node RN zones pursuant to Section 47 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, restricting the use of the dwelling to the applicant, as a place of permanent residence. The period of occupancy will be limited to a period of **7 years** from the date of first occupation.

9.5.6 Development Assessment Criteria

Meath County Council has produced a Rural Housing Design Guide which provides guidance on good siting and design principles to rural dwellings in the countryside and rural nodes. It is the intention of the Council that rural dwellings constructed in Rural Area and Rural Node Zones will be of an excellent standard, will compliment the character of the landscape, and will contribute in a positive manner to the built heritage of the County.

The Council will take into account the following matters in assessing individual proposals for dwellings in Rural Areas and Rural Nodes:

- The suitability of the site in terms of access, wastewater disposal and house location relative to other policies and objectives of this Plan; The siting and design of new buildings to ensure that they integrate harmoniously with their surroundings and thereby protect the amenity and character of the landscape of the County.

- Local circumstances such as the degree to which the surrounding area has been developed and is trending towards becoming overdeveloped;
- In the rural area, the degree of existing development on the original landholding from which the site is taken including the extent to which previously permitted rural housing has been retained in family occupancy. Where there is a history of individual residential development on the landholding through the speculative sale of sites, permission may be refused;
- The extent of ribbon development as defined in Appendix 4 of the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines.

Please refer to Appendix 13 'The Meath Rural House Design Guide' 2009 for further guidance on siting and design of rural buildings.

RUR OBJ 29

To require that all planning applications for rural dwellings in Rural Area RA and Rural Node RN zones shall be accompanied by sufficient information prepared by a competent person as follows:

- Certification that wastewater proposals are compliant with relevant National Standards;
- Certification that access arrangements is compliant with relevant National Standards;
- Certification that all lands necessary to achieve access arrangements in accordance with relevant National Standards are within the application red

line boundary and sight distance splays are correctly illustrated in accordance with relevant National Standards;

Existing trees and hedgerows are retained where possible;

Landscaping scheme with a detailed schedule of planting, any tree which fails shall be replaced.

9.6 Agriculture

The County's rich pasturelands support a wide variety of farming types. Agriculture has traditionally been the most important contributor to the rural economy of the County. While it may now provide less employment, it still remains important as a significant source of income and employment in rural areas. Furthermore, it is recognised that the agriculture sector plays an important role in environmental management and landscape protection and can play a central role in maintaining and enhancing the quality of the rural countryside.

EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is being reviewed and will inform the future output and production activities of the sector. In order to meet this challenge farms will need to become more viable entities which are, adaptable to change and which will be subject to more environmentally sustainable practices.

9.6.1 Employment in Agriculture

The agri-food sector continues to play an integral part in Ireland's economy and is our largest indigenous industry, contributing

173,400 direct jobs and generating 10.4% of merchandise exports in 2016.⁸

The Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 (LECP), indicates that the number of people working in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (AFF) in the County has reduced significantly. In 1991 there were 5,823 working in the industry, this figure has been steadily reducing, in 2011 there were 3,748 employed in this sector and this has fallen to 2,862 in 2016.

To sustain rural communities in the changing economic climate, farm diversification and new employment opportunities will therefore be required. The government has acknowledged the specific issues posed by Brexit to the rural economy and is seeking to support vulnerable businesses in their response to the changing economic climate through initiatives such as the Brexit fund⁹ and the implementation of Food Wise 2025¹⁰.

In recent years there has been significant growth in the demand for fresh local produce. Developments in horticulture and in value added food and agricultural enterprises are sectors with opportunities for growth. Specialist beef production and intensive dairying are the most common types of farming in the County.

The County is the country's second most important centre for the bloodstock industry, after County Kildare. The equine industry is a significant contributor to the rural economy of the County and has the potential to attract and generate further investment and provide both direct and indirect employment. Therefore in recognition of the equine industry, the Council will support the growth and development in the sector. According to the 'Directory of the Turf' there were 51 stud farms in Meath in 2017. Fairyhouse, Navan and Bellewstown are the three racehorses in the County.

⁸ <http://npf.ie/wp-content/uploads/Project-Ireland-2040-NPF.pdf#page=78>

⁹ See Chapter 4 Economy & Employment for further details

¹⁰ Food Wise 2025 sets out a strategic plan for the development of the agri-food (including seafood) sector over for the period up to 2025 and is the successor to the Food Harvest 2020 strategy <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/foodindustrydevelopmenttrademarkets/agri-foodandtheeconomy/foodwise2025/report/FoodWise2025.pdf>

Racing takes place annually at the beach in Laytown. Tattersalls Bloodstock Auctioneers is a highly prominent equine enterprise in Ratoath. Fairyhouse Racecourse and Tattersalls Bloodstock Auctioneers have the potential to create a significant equine hub in the County.

Agriculture will continue to be an important component of the economy. The agricultural sector must adapt to the challenges posed by modernisation, restructuring, market development and the increasing importance of environmental issues. An economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, sensitive exploitation of natural resources and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, are essential components for the development of the rural economy.

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 17

To maintain a vibrant and healthy agricultural sector based on the principles of sustainable development whilst at the same time finding alternative employment in or close to rural areas to sustain rural communities.

RUR POL 18

To encourage and facilitate agricultural diversification into agri-businesses such as organic foods, rural tourism and small to medium sized enterprises subject to the retention of the holding for primarily agricultural use and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

RUR POL 19

To protect the economic and social benefits of local country markets devoted to the sale of local agricultural and craft produce and to support their role as visitor attractions.

RUR POL 20

To work with the Department of Agriculture, Teagasc and all other stakeholders to support the agricultural and agri-business sector, as appropriate, to continue participation in what is likely to be a more challenging export market post Brexit.

RUR POL 21

To work with the the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly and other relevant stakeholders in identifying areas of high value agricultural land in the County to address the need for sustainable food supplies. The consideration of future climate scenarios and water availability for agricultural purposes shall form part of this assessment.

RUR POL 22

To promote and support the County's horse racing facilities which promotes the viability and attraction of these facilities to patrons, enhancing the tourism offer available.

RUR POL 23

To promote and support the continued development of the equine industry in the County, including training, breeding, racing and other equine related activities.

RUR POL 24

To promote the diversification of activities that relate to the equine industry in the County such as horse riding schools, horse/pony trekking tours and equestrian centres.

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 30

To facilitate the development of agriculture while ensuring that natural waters, wildlife habitats and conservation areas are protected from pollution.

RUR OBJ 31

To facilitate the development of agriculture while ensuring that natural waters, wildlife habitats and conservation areas are protected from pollution.

9.6.2 Agricultural Development

9.6.2.1 Agricultural Buildings and Structures

The provision of well located structures and facilities necessary for good and environmentally sound agricultural practice shall be supported by the Council.

The Planning Authority will apply the following considerations when assessing applications for agricultural development:

- Safe access – adequate sightlines from the points of access onto public roads;
- Visual impact – new buildings should be located within or adjoining existing farmyard complexes where possible. Structures not forming part of a farm complex should be integrated into the landscape by means of appropriate siting, external colouring and screening.
- Environmental Protection-an effective means of farm waste management
- Is the building/structure necessary for the efficient use of the agricultural holding?

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 25

To facilitate the development of environmentally sustainable agricultural activities, whereby watercourses, wildlife habitats, areas of ecological importance and other environmental assets are protected from the threat of pollution, and where development does not impinge on the visual amenity of the countryside. Developments shall not be detrimental to

archaeological and heritage features of importance.

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 32

To require the provision of buildings to a design, materials specification and appearance and at locations which would be compatible with the protection of rural amenities. Particular attention will be paid to developments in sensitive landscapes as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment (Refer to Appendix 5)

RUR OBJ 33

To require an effective means of farm waste management to ensure nutrient balancing between application of farm wastes to land and its balanced uptake by agricultural use of land.

RUR OBJ 34

To permit development on established agricultural or forestry holdings where it is demonstrated that;

- a)** It is necessary for the efficient use of the agricultural holding or enterprise (by way of documentary evidence)
- b)** The appearance, character and scale are appropriate to its location,
- c)** The proposal visually integrates

into the local landscape and additional landscaping is provided where necessary,

- d)** The proposal will not have an adverse impact on the natural or built heritage,
- e)** The proposal will not result in a pollution threat to sources of potable water, water courses, aquifers or ground water,
- f)** Proper provision for disposal of liquid and solid waste is provided.
- g)** The proposal will not result in a traffic hazard.

Where a new building is proposed applicants must also provide the following information:

- i)** Outline why there is no suitable existing building on the holding that cannot be used
- j)** Design, scale and materials which are sympathetic to the locality and adjacent buildings.
- k)** The proposal is located within or adjacent to existing farm buildings, unless it has been clearly demonstrated that the building must be located elsewhere for essential operational or other reasons.
- l)** Ensure that the proposal will not seriously impact on the visual amenity of the area of the natural surrounding environment and that the finishes and colours used blend into the surroundings.
- m)** Where possible, the development is grouped with existing buildings in order to reduce their overall impact in the interests of amenity

RUR OBJ 35

In case of new farm enterprises (and in addition to compliance with RUR OBJ 32 above) a clear evidence base shall be provided which outlines a justification for the proposal and demonstrates how it forms part of a comprehensive business plan supported by Teagasc (Food Development Agency).

RUR OBJ 36

To encourage proposals for farm shops where it can be clearly demonstrated that:

- a)** the products to be sold are primarily produce grown on the farm holding;
- b)** the scale and scope of the retailing proposed will not harm the viability or retail facilities in any nearby town or village;
- c)** and the proposed shop is operated by the owner of the farm and is ancillary to the main use of the property for agricultural activities

Refer to Chapter 11 Development Standards and Land Use zoning objectives for further details.

9.6.2.2 Intensive Agriculture

The requirements of the preceding section will be applied to intensive agri-business proposals in the pig and poultry sectors. While the Council recognises the role of this sector to contribute towards national economic targets and the economic well being of the County in general, it is vital that the environmental qualities of the County are recognised in such proposals and

protected accordingly. The scale and intensity of such activities within a limited area and the appropriateness of the activity in relation to the quantum of waste generated and its effect on the area is an important consideration in assessing development proposals for intensive agriculture. This applies in particular where the management of nutrients would be located in areas identified as major aquifers and which would be vulnerable to contamination of groundwater.

9.6.2.3 Alternative Agri-Enterprise

The Council will support proposals for agri-tourism developments such as farmhouse guest accommodation, equestrian centres, outdoor pursuit centres and other similar activities including small-scale craft activities where normal development criteria in relation to satisfactory access, appropriate location and design and waste management are observed¹¹.

9.6.2.4 Allotments

Allotments are becoming increasingly popular and play an important function in serving communities. Private landowners have a role in providing this resource and service which promotes sustainable living. Allotments shall be located such that they do not have an adverse impact on the safety and capacity of the surrounding road network, and shall be designed and sited to have a minimal impact on the surrounding landscape.

Policy

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 26

To support the development of

¹¹ Detailed policies on economic development in rural areas are included in Chapter 4 Economy & Employment.

appropriately located allotments, in areas which have good access to and are proximate to built-up and residential areas.

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 37

Facilitate the development of allotments of an appropriate scale and in accordance with current guidelines, which meet the following criteria:

- (i) The lands are situated within or immediately adjacent to the edge of towns/villages or are easily accessible to the residents of a particular town or village; and
- (ii) Adequate water supply and adequate parking facilities can be provided.

9.7 Forestry

Forests and woodlands play an important role in terms of supporting rural employment and rural diversity, climate change management and carbon sequestration, biodiversity and as a source of renewable/alternative energy sources. Forests and woodlands also have a significant recreational and amenity value. Meath has one of the lowest ratios of planted area in the State. In 2017, c. 13,326 ha of the County was in forest cover which accounts for only 5.7% of the County¹² and a marginal increase from 5.3% in 2012. The Department of Agriculture, Food and

the Marine (DoAFM) published a forest policy in 2014, 'Forests, Products and People - Ireland's Forest Policy - A Renewed Vision' which sets out Government policy in relation to this sector of the rural economy.

The introduction of large scale forestry areas, particularly conifers can have negative impacts on an area if they are not in harmony with the surrounding environment. Forestry activities must be appropriate in terms of nature and scale to the surrounding area, so they are not visually obtrusive or cause damage to important habitats or the ecology of the area. To facilitate guidance on areas which contain opportunities for the creation of new woodland and areas which might be sensitive to new forestry proposals, the Landscape Characterisation Assessment of the County should be consulted. (Appendix 5 refers).

The Plan aims is to support the sustainable growth of forestry as an economic activity whilst affording maximum protection to the rural environment and landscape. This Plan acknowledges the tourism and amenity potential of Coillte Forested lands particularly at Halfcarton, Oldcastle. It will therefore be an objective of this Plan to support the development of a tourism type development at this location subject to obtaining all relevant consents.

At all times, the recommendations of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht guidelines on forestry and fisheries, archaeology and landscape, will be adhered to. In addition, the Council will encourage the provision of public access to new forests through walking and bridle paths, recreational areas and other similar facilities.

Policies

It is a policy of the Council:

¹² National Forest Inventory, Forest Service (2017)

RUR POL 27

To encourage the development of forestry to a scale and in a manner which maximises its contribution to the economic and social well being of the County on a sustainable basis and which is compatible with the protection of the environment including the avoidance of likely significant effects on European Sites (SACs and SPAs).

RUR POL 28

To encourage sustainable forestry development, which is planted, managed and harvested in accordance with the Forest Service Guidelines for Landscape, Forest Harvesting and Environmental, Archaeology, Biodiversity and Water Quality.

RUR POL 29

To promote forestry development of appropriate scale and character whilst ensuring that the development does not have a negative visual impact on the countryside or cause pollution or degradation to wildlife habitats, natural waters or areas of ecological importance.

RUR POL 30

To encourage the provision of public access in conjunction with relevant stakeholders to new forests through walking and bridle paths, recreational areas and other similar facilities.

RUR POL 31

To promote the avoidance of deforestation or commercial afforestation within Natura 2000 sites unless directly relating to the management of the site for its qualifying interests.

RUR POL 32

To seek to promote the tourism and amenity potential while retaining adequate tree cover in the general area surrounding Halfcarton forest , Oldcastle.

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 38

To co-operate with the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to encourage and promote the preparation and implementation of an Indicative Forest Strategy for the County.

RUR OBJ 39

To support the development of a sustainable and sympathetic forestry type tourism development within Halfcarton forest, Oldcastle.

9.8 Tree and Hedgerow Preservation

Throughout the County, series of trees or groupings of trees have been identified as being of particular importance or value to the area. As a means of protecting these areas of planting, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) have been made for a number of sites (Map 9.2 Tree Preservation Orders).

Notwithstanding the existence of TPOs, it is recognised that in some instances tree felling will be unavoidable over the life of the Plan. Where felling of trees is unavoidable, new planting will be required and the planting of native species will be encouraged. The Council will consult with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine advisors regarding its recommendations on Tree Felling Licence applications.

Please refer to Chapter 8 Cultural and Natural Heritage strategy for further details.

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 33

To consider the preservation of any tree, trees or groups of trees or woodland of special amenity or environmental value by use of Tree Preservation Orders.

RUR POL 34

To require the submission of landscape plans, where appropriate, to accompany planning applications for rural

development prepared by competent professionals and to promote the use of native trees for boundary treatment and shelter belts.

RUR POL 35

To retain and protect significant stands of existing trees/ hedgerows/woodlands, and seek increased planting of native trees, where appropriate, in new developments.

RUR POL 36

To consider the development of woodland/forestry and amenity tourism type development which is sustainable and sympathetic to the area with retention of tree cover and taking into account the sensitivities of the local environment.

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 40

To consider the use of TPOs for the preservation of any tree, trees or group of trees or woodland of special amenity or environmental value. Additions should be explored having regard to any relevant surveys and the policies and objectives elsewhere in the Plan.

9.9 Extractive Industry and Building Materials Production

The Council acknowledges the need for extractive industries in terms of supply of aggregate materials for the construction sector, delivering transport infrastructure projects, and for the export market. However, the potential for conflict in the operation of these industries with wider environmental issues needs careful consideration. By their nature, aggregates can only be worked where they occur. The cost of haulage affects economic competitiveness in this sector. This inevitably leads to conflicts and environmental concerns. Extractive industries by their nature can give rise to detrimental environmental and residential amenity effects including traffic generation, vibration, dust, noise, water pollution, visual intrusion and loss of ground water supplies. The impact on the road network of the County is significant.

In assessment of planning applications related to the extractive industry, including related buildings and restoration/rehabilitation of existing pits, the Council will have regard to the policies/objectives for the specific landscape character of the area. (Appendix 5 Landscape Character Assessment refers.)

The County contains a variety of raw materials critical to the construction industry in the form of sand, gravel, stone reserves including high purity limestones and shale used in cement and magnesia manufacture and base metal deposits. The potential of these resources to underpin construction output and provide employment and economic growth in the local and regional economy is recognised as is the need to exploit such resources in an environmentally sound and

sustainable manner.

The wide distribution of resources is recognised and known deposits and sites were mapped by The Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) in 2004 and updated in 2014. The GSI Aggregate Potential Mapping illustrates potential crushed rock and sand and gravel deposits and assesses the interactions between the development of these resources and certain land uses such as bore holes and events such as landslides. Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Quarries and Ancillary Activities were published by the former Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) in 2004.

The Council has undertaken an examination of quarries within its administrative area in accordance with section 261A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended to determine whether development was carried out which would have required Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Appropriate Assessment (AA) having regard to the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive and the Habitats Directive. At present there are 29 active quarries in Co. Meath, 19 of which were registered under Section 261A and 10 of which are operating with planning permission.

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 37

To facilitate adequate supplies of aggregate resources to meet the future growth needs of the County and the wider region while addressing key environmental, traffic and social impacts and details of rehabilitation.

RUR POL 38

To ensure that projects associated with the extractive industry carry out screening for Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) of the E.C. Habitats Directive, and comply with all relevant Environmental Legislation as required.

RUR POL 39

To facilitate the exploitation of the County's natural resources and to exercise appropriate control over the types of development, including rural housing, taking place in areas containing proven deposits, whilst also ensuring that such developments are carried out in a manner which would not unduly impinge on the visual amenity or environmental quality in the area.

RUR POL 40

To support the extractive industry where it would not compromise the environmental quality of the County and where detailed rehabilitation proposals are provided.

RUR POL 41

To seek to ensure that the extraction of minerals and aggregates minimises the detracting from the visual quality of the landscape and does not adversely affect the environment or adjoining existing land uses.

RUR POL 42

To ensure that the extractive industry and associated development minimises adverse impacts on the road network in the area and that the full cost of road improvements, including during operations and at time of closure, which are necessary to facilitate those industries are borne by the industry itself.

RUR POL 43

To ensure that all existing workings are rehabilitated to suitable land uses and that all future extraction activities allow for the rehabilitation of pits and proper land use management. The biodiversity value of the site should be considered in the first instance when preparing restoration plans. Where land filling is proposed, inert material is the preferred method. Each planning application shall be considered on a case by case basis and where relevant will be dealt with under the relevant regional Waste Management Plan.

RUR POL 44

To ensure that development for aggregates / mineral extraction, processing and associated processes does not significantly impact in the following areas:

- 1)** Existing and proposed Special Areas of Conservation
- 2)** Special Protection Areas

- 3) Natural Heritage Areas and Proposed Natural Heritage Areas;
- 4) Other areas of importance for the conservation of flora and fauna;
- 5) Areas of significant archaeological potential;
- 6) In the vicinity of a recorded monument, and;
- 7) Sensitive Landscapes
- 8) World Heritage Sites
- 9) Tentative World Heritage Sites

Objectives

It is the objective of the Council to:

RUR OBJ 41

To ensure that all quarrying activities and projects associated with the extractive industry comply with all relevant Planning and Environmental Legislation.

RUR OBJ 42

To ensure that the extractive industry and associated development minimises adverse impacts on the road network in the area and that the full cost of road improvements, including during operations and at time of closure, which are necessary to facilitate those industries are borne by the industry itself.

9.10 The Meath Gaeltachts/Gaeltachtaí na Midhe

Rathcairn and Bhaile Gibb are two Gaeltachts in the County which constitute an important part of the Country's linguistic, social and cultural tradition. The Land Commission acquired lands in the 1930's which facilitated the establishment of the Meath Gaeltachts. Circa 122 families (767 persons) from congested districts in Galway, Mayo, Donegal, Kerry and Cork were settled in five townlands in County Meath between 1935 and 1940. It is essential that policies which protect the Irish language and which encourage and support sustainable employment in these areas are implemented.

The areas have a combined population of 1,857 persons in Census 2016, representing an increase of 10.6% from the 2006 Census. The Council in performance of its duties pursuant to the Official Languages Act 2003 has drafted its own plan towards providing:

- A clear policy towards bi-lingual signage;
- Attending the needs of the public and providing services in Irish;
- Attend the needs of the Gaeltacht completely in Irish, and;
- Assign persons with Irish to provide services through Irish, as required

The Language Scheme/Plan is monitored to ensure that its provisions are clearly met in an efficient and effective manner and in accordance with the Official Languages Act 2003.

9.10.1 Regional Policy

The RSES acknowledges that: *"These Gaeltacht*

districts are endowed with a unique linguistic and cultural heritage and demonstrate significant capacity and capability in terms of its highly developed forms of social capital and community resilience. These dynamic social and communal features represent at once an important socioeconomic and sociolinguistic differentiator and also act as a key regional development asset which can contribute to efforts in achieving balanced regional development objectives."

RPO 9.27 states: *"Support the implementation of language plans for the Region's Gaeltachts and the identification of Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks in the Region, and to promote the development of the Gaeltacht in Meath in a manner that protects and enhances the distinctive linguistic and cultural heritage, whilst meeting the needs and aspirations of both residents and visitors alike."*

9.10.2 Development in the Gaeltachts

There is a requirement on Planning Authorities to include objectives in the Development Plan for:

"The protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht including the promotion of Irish as the community language, where there is a Gaeltacht area in the area of the development plan¹³."

It has been a long standing objective of successive Governments to maintain Irish as the first language of the community and of the home in the Gaeltachts and the Council fully supports this objective. The Council is committed to the protection and enhancement of the Gaeltachts in the County in order to prevent the depreciation of its unique linguistic and cultural setting from influxes of non-Irish

speakers. A Language Plan will be prepared for the Limistéir Pleanála Teanga (Language Planning District) for Ráth Chairn and Baile Ghib in accordance with the Gaeltacht Act 2012.

It is important for the achievement of the overall objective of protection and enhancement of the linguistic and cultural heritage of these areas that the linguistic impact of future residential development, in the case of the following:

- multi residential,
- rural dwellings in the open countryside and
- rural dwellings in the rural node of Oristown is assessed as part of the planning process.

This accords with National and Regional planning guidance.

The normal requirements for planning applications for rural dwellings within the defined rural areas of the Gaeltachts are applicable (please refer to Section 9.5). In order to ensure the development of sustainable communities, lands have been identified in Rathcairn and Bhaile Gibb to accommodate employment uses. There are existing Údarás funded projects in both Baile Ghib and Rathcairn and it is an objective of this Plan in conjunction with Údarás na Gaeltachta and Gaeltacht na Mí Economic forum to continue to support economic development in the Gaeltacht areas of the County.

Please refer to Chapter 4 Economy and Employment Strategy and Volume 2 Written statements for Rathcairn and Baile Ghib.

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

¹³ Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended.

RUR POL 45

To ensure the continued survival and development of Gaeltachts in Meath as areas distinct in the linguistic and cultural life of the County, whilst seeking to realise their economic and development potential in a balanced and sustainable manner over the lifetime of the Plan.

RUR POL 46

Support the implementation of language plans for the Gaeltachts and the identification of Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks in the Region, and to promote the development of the Gaeltacht in Meath in a manner that protects and enhances the distinctive linguistic and cultural heritage, whilst meeting the needs and aspirations of both residents and visitors alike.

RUR POL 47

To ensure that all new development in the Gaeltachts has a positive impact upon the use of Irish in the area and the cultural heritage of the area, whilst seeking to realise the area's economic and development potential in a balanced and sustainable manner over the lifetime of the Plan.

RUR POL 48

To require all applications for rural houses within the Gaeltachts to comply with the

'Meath Rural Design Guide', or any such replacement document.

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 43

To require that a "Linguistic Impact Study" be carried out by a competent person(s) accompany planning applications in all cases for the following residential developments:

- multi residential,
- rural dwellings in the rural node of Oristown and
- rural dwellings in the open countryside before any application for housing is considered within the Gaeltacht Area.

Such a study, by reference to the linguistic background of intended occupants, shall clearly establish that a given proposal will have a positive impact upon the promotion and use of Irish as the language of the community and further sustain the character of the Gaeltacht. The study shall be accompanied by sufficient supporting information which demonstrates how the proposal protects and enhances the distinctive linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht.

Part of the linguistic assessment shall comprise of an interview of the intended occupier of a dwelling.

The interview shall be facilitated by the Local Authority

RUR OBJ 44

To promote the provision of signage in Irish in the Gaeltachts regarding: 1) Entry and exit points explanatory details of the cultural significance of the areas to visitors; 2) the provision of all commercial signage in Irish, and; 3) in association with the relevant professional and vocational groups, that auctioneers and other temporary signs are in Irish.

9.10.1 Development Assessment Criteria

To assist in assessing the impact of new multi residential development upon the use of Irish in the Gaeltachts, all planning applications for residential development, both single and multiple house developments, will be referred to the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Údarás na Gaeltachta Management for comment.

9.11 Multi-Experience Attractions

Rural tourism can play a strong role in stimulating rural economies. This Plan acknowledges this regional amenity and tourism role of the County while recognising the importance of ensuring tourist development does not have a negative impact on the overall character of the area. Policies and guidance in relation to tourist accommodation, hotels, holiday homes, caravan and camping sites, tourist signage, festivals and walking and cycle routes is set down in Chapter 4 Economy and Employment Strategy.

9.12 Vernacular Rural Buildings (Refurbishment and Re-Use)

A key component of the rural landscape of the County is the legacy of traditional dwellings and buildings, many of which have been neglected in preference for new dwellings, or because traditional buildings have become unsuitable as farming practices have changed. In the majority of cases in recent times, most vernacular 'Parnellite' cottages are being replaced with larger contemporary and in particular suburban style dwellings that in many instances are out of keeping with the rural character of the area. In addition, thatched cottages, which were once commonplace throughout the County, have been and continue to be in decline, and every effort will be made by the Council to encourage and facilitate the survival of the remaining examples.

The Council consider that vernacular rural dwellings and vernacular structures are an important element of our built heritage. Accordingly, it is the Council's policy to seek to retain and preserve vernacular dwellings and structures whilst promoting their sympathetic renovation and continued use rather than replacement. There will be a presumption against the demolition of vernacular dwellings and structures where restoration or adaptation is a feasible option. Furthermore, permission for demolition will only be considered where it is demonstrated that a vernacular dwelling is not reasonably capable of being made structurally sound or otherwise improved.

Detailed policy in relation to refurbishment and reuse of existing vacant structures within the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne

are contained within Chapter 8 Cultural and Natural Heritage.

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 49

To promote the viable re-use of vernacular dwellings without losing their character and to support applications for the sensitive restoration of disused vernacular or traditional dwellings.

RUR POL 50

To encourage and facilitate the appropriate refurbishment of existing vernacular housing stock in rural areas and in certain limited cases the replacement of existing vernacular dwellings subject to development assessment criteria outlined below.

RUR POL 51

To oppose the demolition and replacement of traditional or vernacular rural houses in order to protect the varied types of housing stock in rural areas of the County and to preserve the rural built heritage.

RUR POL 52

To only permit the replacement of a vernacular dwelling/structure where it is clearly demonstrated by way of a suitably qualified structural engineer's report that the dwelling/structure is not reasonably

capable of being made structurally sound or otherwise improved, where the roof, all external structural walls and internal walls are substantially intact and where the building was last used as an authorised habitable dwelling.

RUR POL 53

To consider the limited conversion of outhouses and other structures attached to large country houses or other heritage structures where acceptable conservation practice is observed in line with the other policies and objectives of this Plan and where acceptable site suitability has been established in terms of access, car parking, open space, wastewater disposal and maintaining the setting and amenities of the main structure.

RUR POL 54

To respect the sensitive restoration and conversion to residential use of disused vernacular or traditional dwellings or traditional farm buildings, including those which are Protected Structures, such proposals shall not be subject to the Rural Housing Policy (i.e. local need) that applies to new dwellings.

RUR POL 55

To actively promote the retention and restoration of thatched dwellings as a key component of the built heritage of the County.

It is an objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 45

To update the survey of surviving thatched structures in the County and to promote available grant schemes to assist owners with their retention and repair.

RUR OBJ 46

To carry out a survey of Land Commission dwellings over the life of the Development Plan, to acknowledge their contribution to the building stock of the County, as appropriate.

9.13 Replacement Dwellings

In recent years, the Council has grown concerned with regard to the tendency to replace established rural dwellings and structures, rather than upgrading or modernising older buildings. Planning permission will be considered for a new replacement dwelling only in instances where a dwelling is not considered by the Council to be vernacular or where it does not provide a positive/important contribution to the local character or heritage of the surrounding area. Furthermore, planning permission will be considered for a replacement dwelling in cases where an existing habitable dwelling has been destroyed recently by fire or by accidental occurrence.

Accordingly, it is the Council's policy to seek to retain vernacular dwellings and structures and promote their sympathetic renovation and

continued use rather than replacement. For this reason there will be a presumption against the demolition of vernacular dwellings and structures where restoration or adaptation is a feasible option.

9.13.1 Development Assessment Criteria

The Council shall assess applications for refurbishment and/or replacement of existing housing stock in rural areas, having regard to the criteria outlined hereunder:

- That in the case of refurbishment and extension proposals, that the scale and architectural treatment of proposed works are both subservient and sympathetic to the character of the original structure and do not detract from the setting of the surrounding area including adjoining or nearby development;
- That in the case of replacement dwellings, the design is appropriate to the site in terms of size and scale and does not detract from the setting of the surrounding area including adjoining or nearby development;
- That the overall size of the replacement dwelling does not result in a significant negative visual impact to the character, landscape and heritage of the rural area and shall have regard to local distinctiveness.
- That in the case of replacement dwellings, to require that the original structure was last used as an authorised habitable dwelling and that the roof, and all internal and external walls and windows are substantially intact;

- That replacement dwellings are provided at locations where there is safe access to the public road and acceptable wastewater disposal arrangements can be put in place and where specific development objectives or other policies of the Council are not compromised; and,
- That the design of replacement dwellings in rural areas shall have regard to the design, finish and character of the existing building and comply with the 'Meath Rural Design Guide', or any such replacement document.

In the assessment of whether a house which it is proposed to replaced is habitable or not, the Council will rely on the definition contained in Section 2 (Interpretation) of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended.

A "Habitable House" means a house which

- (a) is used as a dwelling;
- (b) is not in use but when last used was used, disregarding any unauthorised use, as a dwelling and is not derelict, or;
- (c) was provided for use as a dwelling but has not been occupied.

In the interests of clarity, the provisions of RUR POL 14 (i.e. Rural Generated Housing Need) and RUR POL 16 (Occupancy clause) will not apply in the case of refurbishment and/or replacement of existing housing stock.

9.14 Extensions in the Rural Area and Rural Node Zones

The need for people to extend and renovate their dwellings is recognised and acknowledged.

Extensions will be considered favourably where they do not have a negative impact on adjoining properties or on the character of the surrounding rural area. The design of extensions in rural areas shall have regard to the design, finish and character of the existing building and comply with the 'Meath Rural House Design Guide' 2009, or any such replacement document.

It is an objective of the Council:

RUR OBJ 47

That all applications for residential extensions in rural areas shall comply with the following criteria:

- Be consistent with Section 5.5 of the 'Meath Rural House Design Guide' 2009 or any such replacement document.
- High quality design which respects, harmonises and integrates with the existing dwelling in terms of height, scale, materials used, finishes, window proportions, etc;
- Ensure that the quantity and quality of private open space that would remain to serve the house is sufficient;
- Flat roof extensions, in a contemporary design context, will be considered on their individual merits;
- Impact on amenities of adjacent residents, in terms of light and privacy. Care should be taken to ensure that the extension does not overshadow windows, yards or gardens or have windows in the flank walls which would reduce a neighbour's privacy;
- Extensions which break the existing

front building line will not normally be acceptable. A porch extension which does not significantly break the front building line will normally be permitted;

- Proposed side extensions shall retain side access to the rear of the property, where required for utility access, refuse collection etc.
- Ability to provide adequate car parking within the curtilage of the dwelling house;
- In all cases where diversion or construction over existing sewerage and/or water mains is required, the consent of Irish Water will be required as part of the application;
- Extensions are subordinate to the and/or water mains is required, the consent of Irish Water will be required as part of the application;
- Extensions are subordinate to the existing dwelling with a presumption against the size of any extension exceeding 100% of the floor area of the existing dwelling.

9.15 Family Flat Extensions in the Rural Area and Rural Node Zones

Family flats (often known as granny flats) are a way of providing additional accommodation with a level of independence for an undefined temporary period of time. Family flats allow for semi-independent accommodation for an

immediate family member (dependent on the main occupants of the dwelling). Applications for family flats will be considered favourably subject to criteria set out in the relevant policy set out below.

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 56

The creation of a custom-built 'family flat' to be occupied by a member of the occupant family with a housing need is generally acceptable subject to site suitability and compliance with RUR OBJ 47.

It is an objective of the Council

RUR OBJ 48

All applications for family flat development shall comply with the following criteria:

- The flat shall form an integral part of the structure of the main house with provision for direct internal access to the remainder of the house. i.e. not detached;
- The flat shall be modest in size and shall not have more than one bedroom (2 bedrooms in exceptional circumstances).
- The unit shall not exceed a gross floor area of 50 square metres. The flat shall not have a separate access provided to the front elevation of the dwelling;
- There shall be no permanent subdivision of the garden/private amenity space;

- The flat shall remain in the same ownership as that of the existing dwelling on site. In this regard, the flat shall not be let, sold or otherwise transferred, other than as part of the overall property;
- The design proposed shall enable the flat to easily fully revert to being part of the original house when no longer occupied by the family member(s);
- If the site is not connected to public mains, the existing wastewater treatment system on site must be capable for any additional loading from the flat, and if not proposals should be submitted to accommodate the additional loading.

apply. This provision applies to all categories of development, including individual houses in rural areas, regardless of the housing circumstances of the applicant’.

Under Part 4, Article 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 - 2019, notification of planning applications which involve a new access or material widening of an access to an existing or planned national road, or where the development might give rise to a significant increase in the volume of traffic using a national road, must be sent to the National Roads Authority. The Authority may make submissions or observations on such planning applications in accordance with Article 29 of the Regulations. National policy in relation to access to national routes has been outlined previously in Chapter 5 Movement Strategy.

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

9.16 Restricting Access to Certain Categories of Roads

9.16.1 National Primary and National Secondary Routes

National policy in relation to development involving access to national roads and development along such roads is set out in the Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines published by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in January 2012. The Guidelines state, ‘The policy of the planning authority will be to avoid the creation of any additional access point from new development or the generation of increased traffic from existing accesses to national roads to which speed limits greater than 60kmh

RUR POL 57

To develop and maximise the opportunities of the county’s national primary and secondary roads as key strategic infrastructure vital to the county’s continued economic development and to protect this strategically important infrastructure from unplanned ribbon development or random one-off housing development.

RUR POL 58

To ensure that future development affecting national primary or secondary roads, shall be assessed in accordance with the guidance given in the document

'Spatial Planning and National Roads - Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (or any replacement document).

9.16.2 Regional and County Roads (Refer to Map no. 9.2)

It is vitally important that new housing in rural areas, that is located along non national routes, is located in such a manner as to avoid endangering public safety by way of a traffic hazard. There are a number of regionally and locally important functions of certain regional and county road routes that act as particularly important transport links traversing the County.

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 59

To ensure that all development accessing off the county's road network is at a location and carried out in a manner which would not endanger public safety by way of a traffic hazard.

RUR POL 60

To identify and protect those non-national roads of regional or local importance from unnecessary and excessive individual access/egress points, which would prejudice the carrying capacity and ultimately the function of the road.

RUR POL 61

To restrict new accesses for one-off dwellings where the 80km per hour speed limit currently applies in order to safeguard the specific functions and to avoid the premature obsolescence of identified regional and important county link roads (see Map No. 9.2) through the creation of excessive levels of individual entrances and to secure the investment in non-national roads.

9.16.3 Development Assessment Criteria

Exceptions to the above policies relating to regional and protected county roads will be considered on their merits in the following circumstances:

- For those who have a location specific rural housing need on family owned lands (in compliance with Section 9.5.3 Rural Housing Policy above) and cannot provide access onto any other non identified regional or county road and therefore need to access one of the regional or county roads identified on Map No. 9.2. In this circumstance, the applicant will be encouraged to maximise the potential of an existing entrance. The onus shall be on the applicant to demonstrate that they have no other access or suitable sites within their landholding, and;
- Where an existing dwelling with a vehicular entrance that is not considered to constitute a traffic hazard is to be demolished and replaced with a new dwelling.

New development proposals onto certain regionally and locally important county road type routes that act as particularly important transport links that traverse Co. Meath shall be assessed having regard to:

- Avoiding unnecessary new accesses, for example where access could be provided off a nearby county road.
- Ensuring that necessary new entrances are located in such a manner as to provide effective visibility for both users of the entrance and users of the public roads so that opportunities for conflicting movements are avoided.
- Avoiding the premature obsolescence of regional roads in particular, through creating excessive levels of individual entrances.

9.17 Roadside Boundaries

Roadside boundaries, whether hedgerows, sod and stone bank, stone wall or other boundaries, provide important features that are elements of both the landscape and ecology of rural areas. The retention of such boundary treatments assists in absorbing new rural housing into its surroundings and should generally be encouraged.

Occasionally, the removal of substantial lengths of roadside boundaries is proposed as part of an element of improving visibility at the junction of a new entrance onto a road. Where an alternative site is available and otherwise suitable, applicants and Planning Authorities should consider a location that avoids the necessity for widespread boundary removal.

Policy

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 62

To avoid the removal of existing roadside boundaries where they are more than 3 m from the road edge (edge of carriageway), except to the extent that this is needed for a new entrance, and where required for traffic safety reasons. (Please refer to policies contained in Section 8.9.7 Woodlands, Hedgerows and Trees in this regard).

9.18 Roads Served by Unmanned Railway Crossings

Under the National Development Plan, a rail investment and safety programme has yielded substantial route renewal and service upgrades that will deliver, over time, more frequent and faster rail passenger services over the rail network. In some areas, laneways accessed via unmanned level crossings that were originally designed to provide access to agricultural lands are the subject of significant residential development. In certain circumstances, the provision of substantial additional development that is completely dependent for access using unmanned and unprotected level crossings may increase the risk of a safety incident unacceptably or to the degree that alternative crossing arrangements are necessary. The provision of such arrangements needs to be carefully considered given the likely costs involved and the availability of resources.

Policy

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 63

To refer proposals for new housing development requiring access via unmanned and unprotected level crossings to Iarnród Éireann and to carefully consider the subsequent views of Iarnród Éireann such that due and proper consideration has been made for the safety of road users and rail safety.

9.19 Technical Requirements

9.19.1 One Off Houses: Sight Distances and Stopping Sight Distances

Policy

It is the policy of the Council:

RUR POL 64

To ensure that the required standards for sight distances and stopping sight distances are in compliance with current road geometry standards as outlined in the NRA document Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) specifically Section TD 41-42/09 when assessing individual planning applications for individual houses in the countryside.