



6.1 Introduction

This chapter of the plan deals with development strategies, objectives and standards for rural development and housing, that is, development located in Levels 6-10 of the County Settlement Hierarchy. One in three of the County's residents reside in such areas (approximately 35,500 people) and it is expected that the number of people living in these areas will continue to rise. While Wicklow has a good network of rural towns and villages, that provide infrastructure and support services to the wider rural area, such settlements only accommodate approximately 5,200 of this 35,500 rural population and have not in the last 10 years absorbed significant levels of rural growth. Therefore in accordance with the principles of the National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020, it is a goal of this plan to attract growth in rural settlements to both support local economies and to accommodate rural housing needs.

Strategic Objective To support appropriate and sustainable development in rural areas and to direct new development into existing rural settlements, while recognising the social and economic needs of those living outside of settlements.

6.2 Sustainable rural housing

Wicklow's proximity to Dublin, which allows for easy access to the main commercial and employment centres of the Metropolitan area, coupled with its beautiful landscape and amenities, has led to considerable pressure for housing in the open countryside. The Wicklow County Development Plan has since 1999 included measures to control rural housing, with a presumption against unnecessary rural dwelling and urban generated rural housing. This approach is supported the 'Sustainable Rural Housing – Guidelines for Planning Authorities'¹ which provide that:-

- People who are part of the rural community should be facilitated by the planning system in all rural areas, including those under strong urban-based pressures;
- Anyone wishing to build a house in rural areas suffering persistent and substantial population decline will be accommodated;
- The development of the rural environs of major urban areas, including the gateways and hubs identified in the NSS and County and other larger towns over 5,000 in population needs to be carefully managed in order to ensure their orderly development and successful functioning into the future.

In accordance with these guidelines, planning authorities should aim to support the following overarching policy objectives in their policies, practices and actions:

- The importance of encouraging development needed to sustain and renew established rural communities in both smaller rural towns and villages and wider countryside areas;
- The need to ensure that the planning system guides residential and other development to the right locations in rural areas in the interest of protecting natural and man-made assets in those areas;
- The need to analyse the different types of economic, social and physical circumstances of different types of rural areas and to tailor planning policies to respond to these differing local circumstances.

The Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines stress the importance of research and analysis being carried out into population and development trends in rural areas before Planning Authorities draft their rural development policies and objectives. In particular, an analysis of rural area 'types' as set out in Section 5.3.2 of the National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020 should be carried out.

1 These guidelines constitute Ministerial guidelines under Section 28 of the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2006. Section 28 provides that Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála shall have regard to Ministerial guidelines in the performance of their functions.



The rural area types identified by the NSS are:-

(1) Rural areas under strong urban influence. These areas will exhibit characteristics such as proximity to the immediate environs or close commuting catchment of large cities and towns, rapidly rising population, evidence of considerable pressure for development of housing due to proximity to such urban areas, or to major transport corridors with ready access to the urban area, and pressures on infrastructure such as the local road network.

(2) Stronger rural areas. In these areas population levels are generally stable within a well-developed town and village structure and in the wider rural areas around them. This stability is supported by a traditionally strong agricultural economic base and the level of individual housing development activity in these areas tends to be relatively low and confined to certain areas.

(3) Structurally weaker rural areas. These areas will exhibit characteristics such as persistent and significant population decline as well as a weaker economic structure based on indices of income, employment and economic growth.

(4) Areas with clustered settlement patterns. As set out in the NSS, areas exhibiting these characteristics are generally associated with the western seaboard of counties such as Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Clare and some parts of Kerry and many parts of the Gaeltacht where there are comparatively fewer village or smaller town type settlements compared with other rural areas; instead there tends in those areas to be a prevalence of housing clusters, groups of clusters and occasionally linear development.

For the review of the County Development Plan, the Planning Authority carried out an assessment in accordance with the approach outlined in the Guidelines, which involved an evaluation of population trends in the County between 1996-2006 in order to ascertain the pattern of population increase and decline in the County and an evaluation of rural housing trends since the adoption of the previous development plan.

This assessment revealed:

- No evidence of persistent or significant population decline in any part of the County, with only 4 DEDs experiencing any population decline – Imael north (the Glen of Imaal), Cronelea (north of Shillelagh) and Rathmichael & Bray No. 3 districts in the Bray urban area, with most significant population increase occurring along the eastern seaboard, around the western towns of Blessington and Baltinglass and along the Aughrim-Ballinaclesh-Rathdrum-Laragh-Roundwood corridor;
- Pressure for rural housing across the entire County, with the highest concentrations of applications on the fringes of major towns.

It is therefore concluded that there are effectively no 'structurally weak' areas in the County. Furthermore, when the 'zone of influence' of urban areas is considered (which includes the influence of Dublin as well as major towns in the County, namely the Bray–Greystones cluster, Rathdrum, Wicklow-Rathnew, Arklow, Blessington and Baltinglass), it is evident that the entire County can be considered an area under strong urban influence. This would be consistent with the preliminary analysis carried out as part of the National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020. This conclusion forms the basis for the rural housing objectives set out in this chapter.

6.3 General rural development objectives

The preceding section has identified that the entire County can be considered to be under varying degrees of urban influence. In rural areas under strong urban influences, the NSS stresses that development driven by cities and larger towns should generally take place within their built up areas or in areas identified for new development through the planning process.

RH1 Urban generated development, including housing, shall not be permitted in the rural areas of the County, other than in rural settlements that have been deemed suitable to absorb an element of urban generated development.



- RH2** To strengthen the established structure of villages and smaller settlements both to support local economies and to accommodate additional population in a way that supports the viability of local infrastructure, businesses and services, such as schools and water services.
- RH3** To ensure that key assets in rural areas such as water quality and the natural and cultural heritage are protected to support quality of life and economic vitality.
- RH4** To accommodate necessary rural development, including rural housing, where the need for same can be demonstrated and justified, subject to the highest standards of siting and design.

Table 6.1 Rural Settlement Hierarchy

MAP 6.01 (VOLUME 2) SHOWS THE BOUNDARIES OF EACH SETTLEMENT

Level	Settlement type	Settlement name		
6	Rural Towns	Avoca Donard Dunlavin	Kilmacanogue Newcastle	Roundwood Shillelagh
7	Large Villages	Barndarrig Ballinaclash Coolboy Glenealy Hollywood	Johnstown/ Thomastown Kilpedder / Willowgrove Kiltegan Knockananna	Laragh - Glendalough Manor Kilbride Redcross Stratford
8	Small Villages	Annacurragh Annamoe Askanagap Ballyconnell Ballycoog Ballyknockan	Ballynacarrig (Brittas Bay) Connary Coolafancy Coolkenno Donaghmore Grangecon	Greenan Kirikee Knockanarrigan Lackan Moneystown Rathdangan Valleymount
9	Rural Clusters	Ballinglen Ballyduff Ballyfolan Ballynultagh Baltyboys Boleynass Barraniskey Carrigacurra Crab Lane Coolattin Croneyhorn	Crossbridge Davidstown Glenmalure Goldenhill Gorteen Kilamoat Kilcarra Killiskey Kilmurray (NMKY) Kilmurray (Kilmacanogue) Kilquiggan	Kingston Macreddin Moyne Mullinaccluff Oldcourt Park Bridge Rathmoon Redwells Stranakelly Talbotstown Tamacork Tomriland
10	Rural Areas i.e. any location outside the development boundary of any settlement listed above			

6.3.1 Rural settlements (Levels 6-9 in the County settlement hierarchy)

Given the likely future development patterns in major towns, improvements in accessibility and the attractiveness in quality of life and affordability terms, rural towns and villages face increasing development pressures from those wishing to move from large urban and city areas. This can in turn have knock-on repercussions for the affordability of housing and housing land in rural settlements for rural dwellers. There is therefore a major development challenge in harnessing the development potential of these centres on the one hand, while protecting these resources for essentially local or rurally derived housing needs on the other.

- RH5** The following criteria will apply to new housing developments in rural settlements:-
- where no mains sewerage is available, permission for housing (both single and multi-house developments) will only be considered on the basis of individual on-site effluent disposal systems – shared private wastewater treatment plants will not be allowed;



- the scale of the development proposed shall be in proportion to the pattern and grain of the settlement. In particular, no single application shall increase the existing housing stock in the settlement by more than 15% and the maximum size of development that will be considered will be 25% of the number of houses permissible over the life of the plan for that settlement;
- the design of the development shall accord with that settlement's prevailing character and style (in particular with regard to building lines, set backs, building heights and local materials), an analysis of which shall be included with any application for permission²;
- where permission is sought for multi-house developments in rural settlements, planning permission will only be considered where the applicant / developer can show that the size and design of dwellings are suited to the needs of those eligible to occupy the dwellings.

RH6 Where permission is sought by an individual applicant for a dwelling in any of the settlements in Levels 6-9, the applicant will be required to show compliance with objectives for that settlement set out in this chapter. Where permission is granted for a single house in any settlement in Levels 6-9, the applicant will be required to lodge with the Land Registry a burden on the property, in the form of a Section 47 agreement, restricting the use of the dwelling for a period of 7 years in accordance with these objectives.

RH7 Where an application is made for a multi-house development, the developer will be required by condition to lodge with the Land Registry a burden on each property, restricting its use and sale for a period of 7 years in accordance with objectives for that settlement. The developer shall be responsible for ensuring that first purchasers fulfil the requirements of the burden and shall provide evidence of same from a legal professional upon request.

RH8 Subsequent sales within 7 years of first construction / purchase will be bound by the same burden and the vendor and purchaser will be responsible for providing evidence of compliance with same to the Planning Authority upon sale of any dwelling.

Definitions of terms used in this chapter

Regional Growth

Housing demand generated from inside or outside County Wicklow ('open market')

County Growth

Housing demand generated by those persons that have been permanently living and/or working in County Wicklow for at least 3 years prior to the application for planning permission / purchase of the house

Local Growth

Housing demand generated by those persons who are permanent native residents of any location from Level 6 – 10 in the County settlement hierarchy

Proven Need

This is defined as those in need of new housing, in particular:-

- first time home owners;
- someone that previously owned a home in County and is no longer in possession of that home by reason of transfer/sale of the home following legal separation / divorce, the transfer of a home attached to a farm to a family member or the past sale of a home following emigration.

Permanent Native Resident

A person is considered a permanent native resident of a given location if they were born and reared in the family home at that location, or resided at that location for at least 10 consecutive years prior to the application for planning permission / purchase of the house.

² This requirement does not prejudice innovative and contemporary design; on the contrary, in principle, designs of a contemporary style will be allowed provided they do not detract from the character of the area.



Rural Towns (Level 6)

These are strong rural towns, with a good range of infrastructural services and are suited to accommodating a significant element of urban generated housing demand, with necessary controls in place to ensure that local demand can also be met. These towns are differentiated in this plan from Small Growth Towns having regard to their more rural character and the rural nature of their catchments. Such rural centres are considered to contain the potential to consolidate rural development needs and support the maintenance of essential rural social and community infrastructure such as schools, shops, public houses, post offices and local sporting organisations.

Table 6.2 Historical and projected population for rural towns 1996-2022

Settlement Level	Settlement	1996	2002	2006	2011	2016	2022
Rural Towns	Avoca	490	564	622	700	800	900
	Donard	162	201	182	200	300	400
	Dunlavin	693	914	897	1,000	2,000	2,500
	Kilmacanogue	818	834	839	915	1,000	1,100
	Newcastle	763	851	938	1,000	1,500	1,750
	Roundwood	446	518	571	700	1,100	1,300
	Shillelagh	324	278	311	450	600	750

RH9 The settlements in Level 6 shall be prioritised for moderate growth and investment and shall absorb demand for new housing from inside and outside the County subject to the following controls:-

Multi-house development	50% Regional Growth 50% County Growth , excluding those living / working in Levels 1-3 of the hierarchy
Single house development	County Growth, excluding those living / working in Levels 1-3 of the hierarchy

RH10 To have up to date local plans (either Local Area Plans or Town Plans) in place for all settlements in Level 6 of the settlement hierarchy and in particular, to prepare local plans for Avoca, Donard and Kilmacanogue during the lifetime of this plan.

Large Villages (Level 7)

These are the settlements that have a moderate level of existing infrastructural services, both physical and social and that are of such a size as to accommodate a limited amount of urban generated housing demand. Such large villages generally have a population of less than 500, with many considerably smaller.

**Table 6.3 Indicative growth targets for large villages (number of houses) up to 2016**

Settlement Level	Settlement	2006	2016	Increase
Large villages	Barndarrig	80	120	+40
	Ballinaclash	100	140	+40
	Coolboy	56	76	+20
	Glenealy	89	119	+30
	Hollywood	25	45	+20
	Johnstown/Thomastown	50	70	+20
	Kilpedder/Willowgrove	166	196	+30
	Kiltegan	54	74	+20
	Knockananna	42	62	+20
	Laragh - Glendalough	130	180	+50
	Manor Kilbride	74	84	+10
	Redcross	68	88	+20
	Stratford	56	96	+40
	Total growth			

Note: The increase shown is the increase between 2006 and 2016. Therefore any growth in house numbers occurring between 2006 and 2010 must be considered in the evaluation of further proposals for housing during the life of this plan 2010-2016.

RH11 The settlements in Level 7 shall be considered suitable for limited growth and investment and shall absorb demand for new housing from inside and outside the County subject to the following controls:-

Multi-house development	<p>25% Regional Growth</p> <p>50% County Growth, excluding those living / working in Levels 1-4 of the hierarchy</p> <p>25% Local Growth</p>
Single house development	Local Growth

Small Villages (Level 8)

Small villages are generally existing smaller scale settlements with very limited infrastructure that can accommodate lesser levels of growth. These settlements tend to have populations of less than 100 and for the most part have few facilities, other than perhaps a public house, a primary school and a church.

**Table 6.4 Indicative growth targets for small villages (number of houses) up to 2016**

Settlement Level	Settlement	2006	2016	Increase
Small villages	Annacurragh	11	21	+10
	Annamoe	38	48	+10
	Askanagap	14	19	+5
	Ballyconnell	17	27	+10
	Ballycoog	13	33	+20
	Ballyknockan	37	47	+10
	Ballynacarrig (Brittas Bay)	32	52	+20
	Connary	18	28	+10
	Coolafancy	15	25	+10
	Coolkenno	17	27	+10
	Donaghmore	10	15	+5
	Grangecon	50	65	+15
	Greenan	4	9	+5
	Kirikee	12	17	+5
	Knockanarrigan	13	23	+10
	Lackan	19	24	+5
Moneystown	3	13	+10	
Rathdangan	33	48	+15	
Valleymount	24	34	+10	
Total growth				195

Note: The increase shown is the increase between 2006 and 2016. Therefore any growth in house numbers occurring between 2006 and 2010 must be considered in the evaluation of further proposals for housing during the life of this plan 2010-2016.

RH12 The settlements in Level 8 shall be considered suitable for restricted growth and investment and shall absorb only local or rural generated housing demand subject to the following controls:-

Multi-house development	<p>Proven Need for new housing, and</p> <p>25% County Growth, excluding those living / working in Levels 1-4 of the hierarchy</p> <p>75% Local Growth</p>
Single house development	Proven Need for new housing and compliance with Local Growth criteria

Rural Clusters (Level 9)

These are 'unstructured' settlements considered suitable for very limited new rural development, with the main purpose of the designation being to direct rural generated housing into clusters rather than the open countryside. The population projections for the County allocate limited growth to these clusters, in the order of 80 houses between 2006 and 2016. Given the controls that apply for these clusters, some flexibility in this target may be applied where the number of bona fide applicants exceeds the target.



RH13 The settlements in Level 9 shall be considered suitable for limited growth and shall absorb only local or rural generated housing demand subject to the following controls:-

Multi-house development	Not permissible
Single house development	<p>Proven Need for new housing, and</p> <p>Meet Local Growth criteria, with the following limitation:</p> <p>Residents of Level 6 & 7 will only be eligible for permission in Level 9 if the applicant is a son/daughter of a parent that was born and raised and resided for a period of not less than 10 years in that rural cluster or its surrounding rural area</p>

6.3.2 Houses in the open countryside (Level 10)

RH14 The Planning Authority will support proposals for necessary individual dwellings on suitable sites in the open countryside (i.e. areas outside of any designated settlement) where the applicant can clearly demonstrate a genuine social or economic need for a rural dwelling (as defined in this section) and a housing need, having regard to their existing housing situation.

Where permission is granted, the applicant will be required to lodge with the Land Registry a burden on the property, in the form of a Section 47 agreement, restricting the use of the dwelling for a period of 7 years to the applicant or to other such persons that the Planning Authority may agree to in writing.

ECONOMIC NEED

Involvement in agriculture

The Planning Authority will positively consider applications from those who are significantly involved in agriculture. In such cases, it will be necessary for the applicant to satisfy the Planning Authority with supporting documents that the nature of the agricultural activity, by reference to the area of land and or / the intensity of the usage, is sufficient to support full time or significant part time occupation. Where the applicant has no previous experience in agriculture and/or is establishing a new or alternative agricultural enterprise, the Planning Authority shall require the applicant to establish the activity in question a minimum of three years prior to the application for permission for a dwelling, and provide evidence that the enterprise and the applicant have been successful during that period.

Involvement in non-agricultural rural enterprise

The Planning Authority will support applications from those whose full time employment is intrinsically linked to the rural area, that can demonstrate a need to live in the immediate vicinity of their employment in order to carry out their employment. The Planning Authority will strictly require any applicant to show that there is a particular aspect or characteristic of their employment that requires them to live in that rural area, as opposed to a local settlement. As above, where the applicant has no previous experience in the rural activity in question and/or is establishing a new or alternative rural enterprise, the Planning Authority shall require the applicant to establish the activity in question for a minimum of three years prior to the application for permission for a dwelling, and provide evidence that the enterprise and the applicant have been successful during that period.

SOCIAL NEED

Permanent native residents and returning emigrants

The Planning Authority recognises the need of persons local to or intrinsically linked to rural areas that are not engaged in significant agricultural or rural based occupations to live in rural areas. In this regard, persons local to or intrinsically linked to a rural area are considered to include:-



- permanent native residents of that rural area i.e. a person who was either born and reared in the family home in the same rural area as the proposed development site, or resided in that same rural area for at least 10 consecutive years prior to the application for planning permission;
- permanent native residents who have not resided in that rural area for many years due to emigration, but were born and reared in the same rural area as the proposed development site, and now wishes to return to their local area;

Consideration for rural housing will also be given to those persons who were permanent native residents of a rural area but due to the expansion of an adjacent town / village, the family homeplace is now located within the development boundary of the town / village. A person whose lands have been zoned or designated as development lands in the extension of the development boundary shall not benefit from such consideration in this regard. This shall relate to lands subsumed within individual development boundaries of Local Area Plans and Town Plans adopted in the previous 6 years.

Inheritance of a rural holding

Persons who are not native to an area but have inherited / been gifted a rural holding from a close relative (father, mother, grandfather, grandmother or uncle/aunt with no children of their own) may be considered for rural housing where

- the land has been in family ownership since before October 1994
- the proposed dwelling and the holding are to be held as a single property and not subdivided;
- the applicant can show a social or economic need to live in the rural area in question.

REPLACING OR RENOVATING AN EXISTING RURAL STRUCTURE

Applications for a new rural dwelling will be positively considered where the new dwelling is replacing an existing rural dwelling that has become obsolete or is not suited to modern accommodation needs. It will be necessary for the applicant to demonstrate that the structure being replaced is in fact a 'dwelling' and its residential use has not been abandoned.

Where the existing dwelling is not proposed for demolition, the applicant shall include proposals for the existing house, including permission for any change of use. Any alternative use proposed e.g. tourism, storage etc must be consistent with the policies for that use set out elsewhere in this Plan. It will be a requirement of any grant of permission that the existing and new houses be held in single ownership.

Permission may in certain circumstances be considered for the conversion of non-residential rural structures to residential use and/or the renovation and extension of abandoned rural dwellings, where the building is of architectural, local, visual or historical interest to justify retention and conservation. Compliance with the following criteria shall be necessary:

- the original walls and roof must be substantially intact; buildings of a ruinous nature will not be considered;
- buildings must be physically capable of undergoing conversion and their original appearance must be substantially retained. A structural survey to this effect by a suitably qualified professional must be submitted as part of a planning application;
- works must be executed in a sensitive manner and retain architecturally important features whenever possible and make use of existing buildings and traditional and complementary building materials, techniques and specifications.

6.4 Rural development design standards

This section will set out the general design standards that will apply to rural housing developments. For town centre type / mixed use development in rural towns and larger villages, regard shall also be taken of the standards set out in Chapter 5 'Urban Development'.



6.4.1 Rural Towns / Large Villages

In the past, 'urban' development standards have been applied to new developments in rural towns and villages, often with the result of new developments appearing out of scale, excessively dense and out of character with their location. In this regard, it is considered necessary to have separate design standards for developments in the smaller rural settlements of the County.

Scale of development

The scale of any development proposed shall be in proportion to the location. In accordance with Objective RH5, no single application shall increase the existing housing stock in the settlement by more than 15% and the maximum size of development that will be considered will be 25% of the number of houses permissible over the life of the plan for that settlement. For the larger of the rural towns (Level 6), this will generally mean a limit of 20-30 houses in any single development (for the smaller towns, this reduces to 5-10). For the large villages (Level 7), this will usually mean a maximum size of around 5 units.

Density

The key design rule for new multi house development in rural towns and large villages will be consistency with the existing pattern and grain of development. Therefore the density allowable will depend on both the location of the site within the settlement and the character and prevailing density of the settlement itself. Where there is an established town core with a distinctive character and pattern, new development shall 'infill' this existing pattern with regard to plot size and width, building height, building line and set backs etc. On greenfield type sites at the edge of the core (or where the core is undefined), a suitable transitional density will be required between the built up part of the town and its more rural hinterland. Normally housing density in such cases will be in the order of 10-20 units per hectare – in the larger rural settlements the applicable local area or town plan will specify the density allowable at such locations. Clearly if the site is dependent on individual on-site effluent disposal systems, a much lower density will be required to meet environmental and public health standards.

Layout

Again, the layout proposed should reflect the character and pattern of the area and suburban type layouts shall be avoided e.g. back-to-back semi-detached layout with 11m garden to rear and on-site car parking to front. Consideration shall be given to 'rural cluster' type formats, with houses grouped closely together, other in courtyard formats, surrounded by gardens / open spaces.

Where sites have sufficient road frontage, new developments will be expected to address the road and create a new streetscape where possible, paying due regard to traffic safety and possible future road widening needs.

Car parking / open space etc.

Given the lack of public transport available in most of these small settlements, it must be acknowledged that the private car will be the primary mode of transport. Therefore 2 car parking spaces will be required per dwelling, with suitable provision made for either a small visitor parking area or somewhere safe for visitors to park without causing obstruction.

Private gardens and public open spaces will be required to be provided at the same rates applicable for more urban developments³ but it is expected that this minimum standard will normally be exceeded given the scale and density controls that will be applied. For infill type development in defined town / village cores, a relaxation in public open space required will be considered if this is required to fit in with the existing layout and prevailing density of that area or in the interests of high quality layout and design. In such cases, it must be clearly shown that the level and design of private open space provided is sufficient.

House design

While high quality contemporary design is encouraged, particular regard shall be taken in rural towns to the

³ Private open space - 0.64sqm private garden per 1sqm house floor area
Public open space – 15% of the site area



traditional building form and design in that settlement, with particular regard to height, roof style, materials and detailing. A good variety in design even in small developments will be required, including a range of sizes to meet the different needs of all in society.

Services

Roads & footpaths: In order to avoid excessive urbanisation, it will not always be necessary for new housing developments in small settlements to be provided with wide roads with cycle and footpaths on both sides. Given the rural location and the size controls that will be applied to new housing developments, consideration shall be given to shared road spaces, with priority given to pedestrians and cyclists. Due consideration must also be given to the needs of refuse and emergency vehicles and a turning area will usually be required on site.

Water services: As permission for multi-house developments will generally only be considered on the basis of connection to the town water supply and wastewater treatment plant, it will be necessary to ensure that the development can be connected to these systems and these systems have adequate capacity for the development. Alternatively, where compliance with relevant EPA and EU standards can be achieved, individual on-site effluent disposal systems and well water supplies may be permissible.

Social & affordable housing

Social and affordable housing will be required to be provided in accordance with the County Housing Strategy. Where the agreement drawn up entails the construction of social and / or affordable houses on the site, the design, scale, density etc of these houses shall fully accord with the above design criteria.

6.4.2 Small Villages / Rural Clusters

These small settlements for the most part do not have a structured or identifiable village centre and all new development will therefore in essence be greenfield type developments.

This will essentially mean that in most cases there will be little existing development from which to draw inspiration or reference for new developments. This will in effect therefore place a higher responsibility on the designer to come up with a design that fits with its surroundings and complements any existing development in the settlement. Particular consideration should be given to

- Set back from the public road. Excessive set back can dislocate the new development from the existing settlement, even where the structure of the settlement is weak or undefined. The new structure should be part of the settlement and the set back proposed shall reflect this relationship. For example, in the small villages of Annamoe and Valleymount, there is a village core and existing buildings are tight to the road. New dwellings here should replicate this trend. However, in Moneystown, where there is no established village fabric, new dwellings should be sufficiently close to the road frontage to create a connection with the 'street' but would not necessarily be required to create new street frontage.
- The character of the settlement. Where a settlement has features that are common throughout or some aspect that makes it distinctive, these should be identified and integrated in the new house design. For example, the use of stone is prevalent in Ballyknockan and the use of stone finishes or features in new houses would allow better integration into the settlement.

For multi-house development in small villages, the guidelines set out above for larger villages with regard to density, layout, clustering and design should be followed, while taking into account the larger sites that are likely to be required to accommodate on-site effluent disposal systems.

6.4.3 Houses in the open countryside

The key parameter in designing a house in the countryside is to limit its impact on the landscape. The landscape includes both the natural and existing built environment. The overriding objective when considering a planning application is to protect and conserve the beautiful landscape we have inherited from other generations. The key to this is site selection and site layout, and the house should be absorbed as much as possible by the landscape, and this should be helped by landscaping, and if necessary by landscape mounding. The house type and design



also has an important impact. Thus houses that do not fit into the landscape due to their scale, unusual design features, colour, or materials that are non-traditional to that particular area will tend to stand out in close up and far distant views. Likewise boundary features and site entrances can add to the visual intrusion, and even landscaping with non-native species will cause a development to stick out in the general landscape. The following paragraphs are to give guidance, but should always be read in the context that the overall design and siting should leave as small a trace on the landscape.

Site selection

Above all else, it is important to acknowledge that some sites, for a variety of reasons, may not be suitable for house building and even a well considered and designed house may not be permissible. Therefore site selection is the most critical step in rural house design. While it is accepted that some bona fide applicants will have no choice in site, a large proportion of those seeking to build in rural areas will be building on family farms or buying a site from a landholder who may have a number of sites available for possible purchase.

Where such choice is available, the sites must be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- The openness and visibility of the site in the surrounding landscape, the sensitivity or vulnerability of the landscape to new development and the existence of protected views or prospects in the area. In these regards, prominent and exposed sites should be avoided as well as those that would impinge on a protected landscape or view. Applications in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be required to be accompanied by a Visual Impact Assessment;
- The suitability of the road access available to the site. The road serving the site must be capable of accommodating the additional traffic that will result from the proposed development – this includes not only domestic movements, but necessary service, delivery and construction vehicles that will need to access the site, as well as cyclists living in existing houses and the proposed house. It will not always be possible or desirable to carry out large scale road re-alignment or widening in a rural area to address the problem of a deficient road;
- The site drainage characteristics. Where the development would be dependent on an on-site effluent disposal system, it must be suitable to accommodate such a system, without adverse impacts to the ground or surface water regime, to other properties or to existing water supplies;
- Impacts on any other properties or dwellings – cognisance must be taken of potential impacts on existing proximate dwellings, particularly overlooking / overshadowing, noise and traffic.
- The possibility of clustering the new development with other houses or manmade structures. While isolated rural sites should be avoided, care needs to be taken to avoid over-development in any location or ‘ribbon development’⁴;
- The existence of heritage features on or near the site, such as protected habitats or archaeological features. A buffer zone between such features and any new development will be required, the extent of which will depend of the feature to be protected;
- The proximity to local services. All efforts should be made to locate a home in good proximity to local facilities, to reduce the need for excessive travel and to maximise social ties to the community.

Where no site choice is available, it cannot be assumed that permission will be granted solely on the grounds that the applicant has a bona fide necessity to live at that location.

House position & siting

New houses shall be suitably positioned on site to make maximum use of screening available either from the land form itself or from existing tree cover. Positioning in a sheltered location not only aids visual integration in the landscape, but also provides benefits to the house in terms of protection from the elements and improved privacy. The location of any required effluent disposal system must also be taken into account, as drainage will normally be by gravity flow.

⁴ Ribbon development is defined as almost continuous road frontage type development, where 5 or more houses exist on any one side of a given 250 metres of road frontage.



- Houses located in the middle of sites / fields, distant from boundaries will not be considered acceptable – houses should be ‘tucked into’ existing field boundaries;
- Houses shall not be above a ridgeline or so positioned to break the skyline or to appear highly visible or dominant in the landscape;
- The house should be positioned to maximise daylight and solar gain – 30% energy savings can be achieved if the house is oriented within 15° of south, providing its main living areas are arranged to avail of passive solar gains (refer to Chapter 14);
- The principle axis of the house should follow the site contours.

On sloping sites, houses will normally be required to be built into the slope of the site, so that the finished floor level of the house is not more than 0.15m above the existing ground level to the front of the house. However, deep excavations should also be avoided as these in themselves can cause a scar on the landscape. Where steeply sloping sites cannot be avoided, design solutions must be considered to minimise the impact, including for example the use of stepped or split level housing.

Where the proposed development site currently forms part of the site of an existing dwelling (i.e. it is proposed to subdivide an existing plot), the following considerations must be taken on board:

- the site must be large enough to conformably accommodate the existing and additional house(s) and their associated facilities such as gardens, car parking, effluent disposal facilities etc.
- the new house(s) should be so positioned on site to have a ‘relationship’ with the existing structures. In this regard, the end result should not be two (or more) distinct houses sitting at the opposite ends of the same site or a new house directly behind an existing one. Consideration must be given to clustering or the creation of courtyard type development, reminiscent of a vernacular farmstead layout.

House design

High quality design will be required for all sites and the design of any house will be required to be developed taking cognisance of the site location and characteristics; however, this does not mean that a poor house design will be considered because similar inappropriate designs have been permitted in the same area in the past. Designs lifted from another site and from a formulaic ‘pattern book’ will not be accepted, nor will historical imitations. Unusual or modern designs will be considered where the site can accommodate and suitably absorb the design. All applications will be required to be accompanied by a statement from the designer setting out how the design resulted from the assessment of the site.

Dwelling scale

As a result of modern demands for larger houses and Building Regulations which require higher ceiling height, rural dwellings have become larger in scale. However, insufficient care has been taken in mitigating the impact of this larger scale and many new dwellings appear very out of scale with surrounding traditional buildings and with the landscape itself. In this regard, dwellings should be sized according to the current and future needs of the occupant.

A large dwelling will require a large site and needs to be set within a ‘large scale’ landscape. An area characterised by small field patterns and low level vegetation is unlikely to be suitable for a large dwelling which will dominate the area. However, where existing vegetation is mature and abundant and views are long, there may be more scope for a larger dwelling.

Where family demands necessitate a large house but the site or landscape cannot support it, consideration must be given to reducing the scale and mass of the house, to that appropriate to the area. This will entail the use of a well thought out and considered dwelling format and shape.

Consideration must also be paid to other dwellings that may be in close proximity to the proposed development site. A new dwelling that does not respect the existing scale and vernacular in an area or results in impacts on surrounding dwellings with regard to overlooking or overshadowing will not be permitted.



Dwelling format / shape

The key requirement for rural houses is that they be absorbed by the landscape. Dwellings should thus blend in and not dominate the local landscape, or stick out by reason of scale, form, or detail. Dwellings should be simple in format and shape and an excessive number of block shapes and heights, roof pitches and shapes, add-ons, wings, protruding windows (such as bay windows), porches, conservatories etc should be avoided. The main body of the house should be the dominant element and be clearly distinguishable, and if necessary, one or a number of smaller, suitably designed projections attached to the main house may be provided to break up the overall mass of the structure.

'Deep plan' houses (i.e. houses that are two rooms 'deep' with a central dividing corridor) should be avoided, as this format overly constrains the options for the format, design, roof style and glazing layout of the house and also results in poor use of natural lighting.

While symmetry is not required, houses should be well 'balanced'. This will mean that any projections to the main body of the house will require to be sensitively designed and located and not cause the house to look 'lop-sided'.

Generally, the following characteristics should be integrated into a new dwelling

- low eaves
- narrow plan
- 35-55 degree roof pitch
- vertical emphasis to gables
- sturdy and solid
- flat fronted

Dwelling height

There is no presumption against the development of dormer or 2-storey dwellings at any location in the County – the key consideration will be the quality of the design, its compatibility with the surrounding traditional architecture and the ability of the site to successfully absorb the dwelling.

Roof style

House formats should be avoided that require excessive roofing – i.e. the ratio of 'roof to wall' needs careful consideration. Where an appropriate building format is used, this problem should not arise; however, deep plan bungalows or bungalows with large dormer spaces tend to have excessively large roofs and therefore appear 'unbalanced'. This should be addressed by breaking up the roof mass, for example, by creating a 'valley roof' that will effectively halve the size of the roof.

Modern houses tend to include roof edges that significantly 'oversail' the external walls, a feature which gives the roof more 'dominance' over the main structure of the house, thereby weakening its appearance and rendering the appearance out of keeping with traditional Irish rural house features. Eaves overhang should be minimised or mitigated by good design.

To make new rural houses as unobtrusive as possible and in keeping with traditional rural houses, roofs will normally be required to be tiled or slated in dark colours such as blue / black or dark brown.

Dormers

Where a dormer style house is selected as the best option, this should be in the format of a 1 ½ storey dwelling, with dormer windows extending upwards out of the main walls of the house, rather than the provision of a number of 'break-through' type dormer windows, as these tend to require a larger mass of roof. The use of rooflights to mid-roof dormers will be preferred and these should be so constructed to sit flush with the roof slates.

Windows & doors

Careful consideration must be given to the 'solid-to-void' relationship on a dwelling façade i.e. the relationship of solid wall to openings. The arrangement of openings should be kept simple and should be normally of the same size and style across the entire façade. Openings should be placed around the 'central' axis of the façade and should normally be symmetrical unless a high quality design allows otherwise.



Windows should generally be vertical in emphasis and in proportion to the rest of the house. Oversized feature windows to certain living spaces are permissible, but only where the length to width ratio is appropriate and the integrity of the overall design and balance of the house is not compromised.

Over-elaborate door styles should be avoided e.g. overly glazed panels or fan lights, as should large and fussy porches or canopies, particularly those including mock classical detailing and pillars.

Materials

Rural houses in County Wicklow are typically render finished and painted white / off white and this will be the normal finish required for new rural houses. Dashing with a coloured chip / pebble will not be permitted.

Brick, timber and metal finishes are not common and have only appeared in the last 30 years. The use of stone in domestic scale buildings would have been uncommon, although there are some localised exceptions, for example, areas surrounding quarries e.g. Ballyknockan. New houses will be required to utilise finishes common to and suited to the area. However, in locations where alternatives to painted render are typical or where a site is highly screened, alternative materials may be considered.

The use at an appropriately scale of timber, metal or stone features on a mainly rendered house to provide visual interest is welcomed, subject to correct positioning of the feature element and the use of the highest quality and appropriate materials. Brick will not normally be considered in any rural location but as set out above, where the site is well screened or very unobtrusive, flexibility in materials permitted will be afforded.

The use of plastic should be avoided in all cases, whether for use in rainwater gutters and pipes, windows or doors. Required external pipework and cabling associated with modern technology should be subtly located and should be coloured or painted to allow it to blend in with the façade.

Ornate fascias, patterned metal work, reconstituted stone / cladding or pre-cast features shall not be permitted.

Ancillaries

Walls / boundaries

The design of walls and boundaries, particularly those along public road frontages, shall be suitable to the rural location. In the first instance, existing hedges and trees lining boundaries should be maintained. However, where they require to be removed for sightline or other reasons, they shall be replaced by a similar hedge of native species interspersed with suitable native trees. Long stretches of solid walls or railings will not be permitted, notwithstanding their perceived design quality. Sod-and-stone banks and dense hedges behind roadside drainage ditches are the prevalent traditional roadside boundary in County Wicklow – it will be a normal requirement of permission that such boundaries be provided or reinstated.

Existing side or rear boundaries, particularly mature field boundaries, should be maintained. Where new boundaries are required, they should not comprise solid walls or long straight, dense lines of evergreen trees. Instead clusters of trees at strategic locations around the site, which will appear more natural in time, will be preferred.

Entrance design

House entrances shall be modest and suitable to the rural context and grandiose entrances with high wing walls, pillars and elaborate gates will not be permitted. Entrance gates should be recessed a minimum of 5m from the public road carriageway and the recessed space shall be splayed with wing walls, timber fences or stone banks not exceeding 0.8m in height (including any pillars), splayed to provide an overall width of 6 - 8m along the roadside boundary.

The splayed entrance space shall be appropriately surfaced – unbonded loose materials will not be permitted, as it may be drawn onto the public road.

The entrance shall be installed in such a manner so that the existing profile of the grass verge is maintained and that surface water can continue to flow freely off the public road. Existing drainage inlets from the public road onto the site shall be preserved and any roadside drains interfered with shall be fully re-instated and shall where necessary be culverted with pipes of adequate size and strength.



Driveways and hard surfaced areas

Driveways shall be of suitable gradient (1:40 for first 6m from the public road and not exceeding 1:10 thereafter) and length should be kept to the minimum necessary to avoid scarring the landscape. In highly scenic locations, applicants may be required to leave driveways only roughly surfaced to give a natural appearance. All driveways shall provide sufficient area for car parking and turning on site. However, large hard paved car parking / turning areas, particularly to the front of the site, should be avoided.

Completely circling the house with hard surfaced areas / paths should be avoided – where possible, the garden should be brought right up to the house.

Out buildings / garages / sheds

The number of detached out-buildings on a rural site shall be kept to the minimum necessary and permission may be refused for additional garages or stores where the need for same cannot be clearly demonstrated. Out-buildings should be located close to the main house and should be positioned to replicate a rural vernacular / farmyard format. Two-storey garages or garages in excess of 40sqm will not normally be permitted.

Services

- All surface water run-off from roofs, entrances, driveways, parking areas etc. shall be collected and disposed of within the site to soakpits, drains, water butts or adjacent watercourses. In particular, no such surface water run-off shall be allowed to flow onto the public roadway or adjoining properties, nor to discharge to the effluent disposal system or public foul sewer;
- The effluent disposal system shall be designed and constructed to the relevant EPA specification. It will be a normal requirement of permission that photographic evidence of the installation of the effluent disposal system (including percolation trenches and pipes) be submitted on completion of the system and that a certificate from a Chartered Engineer, Environmental Health Officer, or Hydrogeologist, (with professional indemnity insurance) stating that the effluent disposal system has been installed in accordance with the relevant standard be submitted to the Planning Authority before the development is occupied. When sizing the effluent disposal system, it is prudent to allow for any extensions that might be envisaged, as to add capacity at a later stage can be very disruptive, and expensive;
- The house developer shall normally be required to enter into an annual maintenance and servicing contract with regard to the effluent disposal system. This contract shall also include for a guarantee of continual effective treatment of the effluent and for periodic de-sludging;
- Where there is an issue with water quality in an area, an applicant may be requested to have the proposed water supply source tested for compliance with the Drinking Water Regulations 2000 (SI 439 of 2000) at the planning application stage. Normally however it will be sufficient to submit such results upon completion of the dwelling. Where deficiencies are identified in either case, the developer shall submit proposals to rectify the problem;
- External lighting shall be sensitively positioned so as to avoid light pollution or glare to road users – all external lights shall be cowled and directed away from sensitive receptors. Lighting should be kept to the minimum required for security, safety and working purposes.

Landscaping

All applicants for rural dwellings will be required to submit landscaping proposals. A mixture of native hedge species (such as whitethorn, blackthorn, whitebeam, holly and gorse) and deciduous and evergreen tree species should be used. Deciduous trees should be planted not less than 2m high and evergreen species planted when not more than 900mm high. Tree species planted shall include mountain ash, silver birch, willow, oak, sycamore, larch, spruce and pine. In visually problematic sites, the use of landscaping mounds may be required.

Landscaping including tree planting brought close to the house can reduce its impact and assist in integrating the house into the site. Planting should cut across the path of the wind and should be sited to make use of and improve



natural shelter features such as ridges and rocky outcrops.

Energy efficient design

Regard shall be taken in the design of new rural houses of the requirement of Chapter 14 of this plan, which requires all new houses to achieve a Building Energy Rating (BER) of not less than 'B1'. Guidance on how this may be achieved is set out in Section 14.5 of this plan.

However, two rural houses of identical design and technology may achieve completely different BERs due to the location of the site and positioning of the house. For example, a house in a wind swept coastal location is likely to achieve a lower BER than a house located inland and sheltered by mature tree screening. Therefore, site selection will play a critical role in meeting this objective.

Extensions to existing rural houses

The design of an extension should be sympathetic to the existing house. This does not mean that it has to exactly match the existing style, height and finishes, but that it should complement the existing house and not look out of place. A good extension is usually subservient to the main building i.e. extensions should be designed so that they look like extensions rather than a new house 'attached' to an old house. Extensions can reflect traditional aspects of the existing building, but contemporary extensions can also serve to compliment the existing building.

There are no hard and fast rules about the size of an extension, but it will be necessary to ensure that:

- The extension respects the size of the existing house;
- The extension does not reduce the area of the garden to such a degree that it affects the usefulness of the garden;
- The site is big enough to accommodate the extension as well as all the other facilities that a house requires e.g. effluent disposal system, car-parking area etc.

If the existing house is served by an on-site wastewater disposal system it will be necessary to show that this system is adequate to accept any additional wastewater generated by the proposed extension (in addition to any previous extensions that may have been constructed after the installation of the original effluent disposal system). Generally, if the extension has 2 or more bedrooms and / or entails an increase in the size of the house by 30% or more, the Planning Authority is likely to require the applicant to submit full details of the existing system. If it is clear that the existing system will not meet the needs of the enlarged house, it will be necessary to submit detailed proposals to upgrade the system, in accordance with current EPA standards.

With regard to:

- independent living units ('granny-flats');
- temporary residential units;
- taking in charge;
- naming of developments;
- flood routing;
- open space;
- 'green issues';
- social & affordable housing;
- privacy;

the objectives and standards set out in Chapter 5 will also apply in rural settlements and areas.