

**WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL**

UNSERVICED SETTLEMENTS – COOLE AREA

# **POLICY STATEMENT ON UNSERVICED SETTLEMENTS**

## Introduction

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

## Context

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

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

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

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

The function and objective of the unserviced settlement is twofold, firstly to sustain the existing rural facilities i.e. school, shop etc. in a sustainable manner and secondly to cater for the demand from the one-off houses that do not meet the local need criteria or do not wish to be located within the larger towns and villages under the settlement hierarchy.

### The Purpose of Unserviced Settlements

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

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

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

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

### Planning Assessment of Unserviced Settlements

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

### Development Limits

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

The development limits have been identified on the basis of the suitability and capacity for new residential development within which development for single houses or in exceptional circumstances small schemes will be allowed. The limits placed on each route into the settlements establish the defined area within which development will be considered acceptable. They will provide

opportunities to provide infill development and could allow some limited backland development but only where there are no detrimental effects upon the amenities of existing residents or the visual amenities of the settlement.

The impact of the number of new houses in a location without proper services i.e. water and waste is a serious planning consideration and it needs to be further emphasised that the risks to public health and the danger of pollution will be major considerations in any new planned development. So even though areas or sites may be within the defined development limits this does not automatically qualify them for planning permission because the detailed considerations of water supply and drainage capacity of the ground along with the amenity and design considerations will need to be fully considered and addressed.

These development limits have been selected and designated on the basis that, in the opinion and best advice of the executive, they provide an adequate and appropriate supply of development sites within the plan timescale to allow the settlements to grow in accordance with the services that are available.

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

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

**Policy 1: Any proposed development within the unserved settlements will be judged on their appropriateness and whether they would be more suitably located in the higher order settlements within the County's overall "settlement strategy".**

It must be remembered that the function of the unserved settlements is to sustain the existing rural facilities, i.e. shop, post office, church school etc. and to cater for the demand for single site housing in a rural setting close to the principal towns of Athlone and Mullingar rather than provide a location for urban generated volume housing.

**Policy 2: Outside the designated development limits development will normally be restricted to that required for the purposes of agriculture or that required to meet the social and economic needs of the settlement community. Development appropriate for the enjoyment of the scenic and natural environmental qualities and character of the countryside and other developments having a rural character may also be acceptable.**

To guide and control new development, Development Limits have been defined. In general terms development is acceptable within these limits but outside them, in order to maintain the character of the countryside, development will be strictly controlled. In effect only those types of

development, which draw on the character of the countryside itself, its beauty, culture, history and wildlife will normally be permitted. The limits will not preclude the development of local need housing outside of these limits as defined within the County Development Plan.

**Policy 3: Development, which will adversely affect the setting of the settlement, will not be permitted. Where development is likely to form the edge of a settlement, an integral and substantial landscaping scheme incorporating peripheral planting will normally be required.**

The interface between the settlement and the countryside is sensitive and requires careful treatment. Any new development should protect and enhance the setting of the settlement and landscaping proposals can ensure the integration of new development into the settlement, screen views, and provide shelter and enclosure.

**Policy 4: Within the designated development limits development will be permitted where it involves infilling, conversion, single site housing development, the use of derelict or underused land or premises and where the development meets all of the following criteria:**

- 1. It will not result in the loss of land of recreation or amenity value;**
- 2. It will not have an adverse effect on areas or buildings of historic or architectural importance, or sites of nature conservation value or archaeological importance;**
- 3. It will provide an acceptable residential environment;**
- 4. It will not be on a site where there is an unacceptable risk to the health and safety of residents through contamination, pollution or risk of pollution;**
- 5. It will not damage the character and amenity of existing residential areas;**
- 6. It will not create unacceptable problems; and**
- 7. It will not result in the loss of or damage to spaces identified as being of importance.**

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

- 1. Where the integrity and fabric of the village is enhanced by such a scheme.**
- 2. Where the scheme provides for the needs of the local community and can reduce the demand for housing outside the development limits in the open countryside.**

As well as the settlement having the capacity to absorb additional housing development the appearance of development and its impact upon both the rural setting and the distinct character of the settlement will be of paramount importance. Where the settlement's particular character, visual appearance or integrity can best be enhanced by a multiple house scheme consideration will be given to such an approach but ultimately based on the settlements

capacity to absorb additional development, which may give rise to reviewing the development limits for the entire settlement.

## **Planning Assessment of Archerstown.**

Archerstown is a small nodal settlement which is located approximately 4.4 miles north west of Delvin close to the county boundary with Co. Meath. Archerstown has a limited range of community services and facilities which include a shop and pub, hurling pitch and changing rooms. A new community centre to replace an existing prefabricated structure in the village is proposed. Archerstown was served by a primary school located in the settlement up to approximately 15 years ago. The area is served by a regional water main and there are no public sewerage facilities.

Archerstown has been the subject of significant development pressure for residential estate type development in recent times which has been refused permission on the basis of inappropriate scale in the absence of services. In this regard it is important that new development should respect the existing rural character and should be appropriate to the scale of the settlement.

Modern suburban estate type residential development would be inappropriate in the village and any further development should be either sensitive infill or small clusters which compliment the existing pattern and which reinforces the established character. In this connection there may be opportunities to replicate by way of an appropriate design response the existing built form comprising attached vernacular style buildings at the centre of the settlement. The potential for the expansion of vital community and social infrastructure will be protected and opportunities for provision of further community based services including local shopping will be encouraged. The identified development limits should ensure the existing development is contained and population growth within the settlement is facilitated consistent with viability of existing and future services.

The Planning Authority will give favourable consideration to sensitive restoration and/or adaptation of existing disused buildings located within the settlement in the interest of sustainability and conservation of the built heritage.

Development limits have been selected and designated on the basis that, in the opinion and best advice of the executive, they provide an adequate and appropriate supply of development sites within the plan timescale to allow the settlements to grow in accordance with the services that are available and to respect established character. There is a public water supply serving the area and effluent disposal is by means of individual septic tank drainage systems.

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

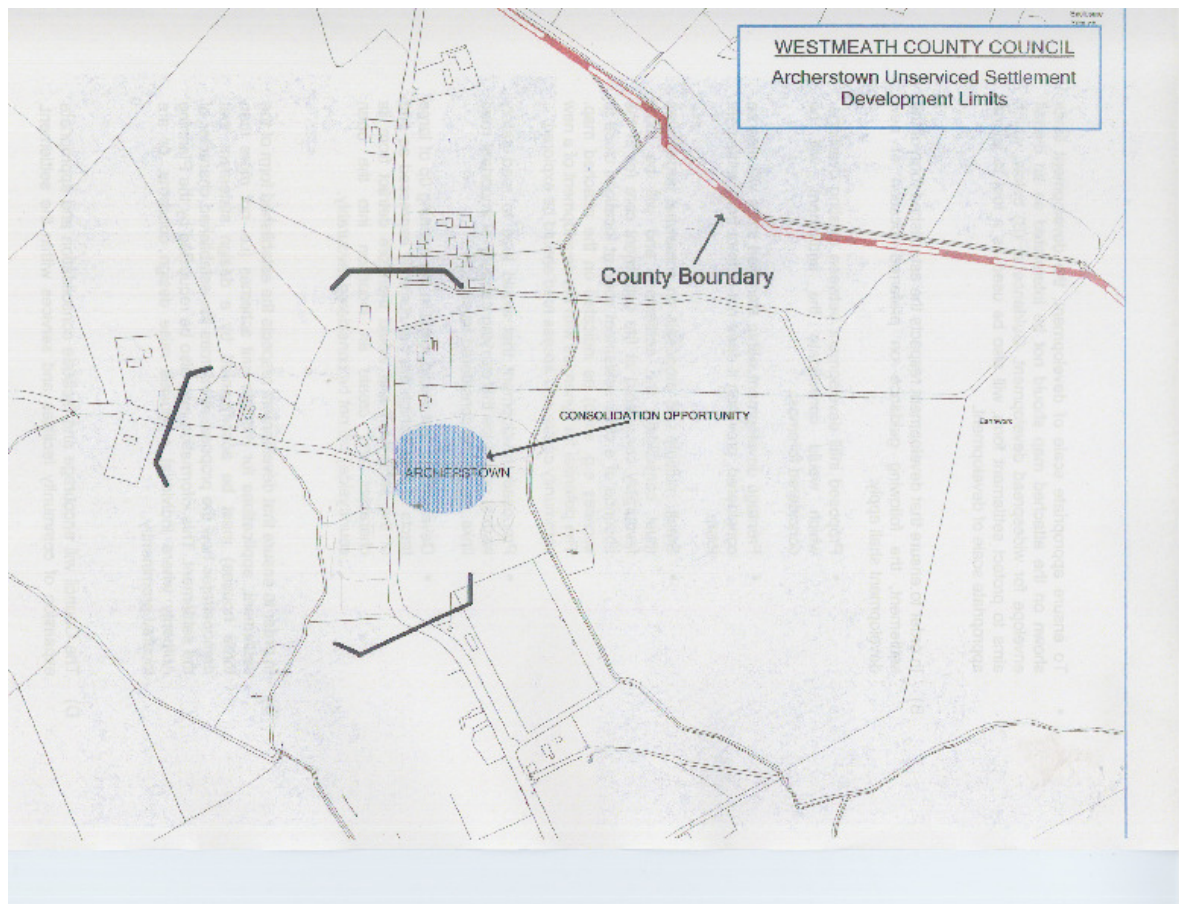
In addition to Policies 1- 5:

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

- To ensure appropriate scale of development, the development limits shown on the attached map should not be interpreted as an overall envelope for widespread development. Guidance at (B) below, which aims to protect settlement form, will also be used as a tool to inform appropriate scale of development.
- B) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, the following guidance on preferred location of new development shall apply:
- Proposed infill development between existing dwellings, which would consolidate the settlement, will be considered foremost.
  - Frontage development within identified limits will also be considered, providing it does not detract from settlement form.
  - Small, multiple unit proposals on somewhat larger sites must consolidate the settlement and will be most favourably considered at the settlement core (or in the absence of a clear settlement core, at locations close to services e.g. shop) as indicated on the attached map. The potential for synergies with the development of a new community centre and access road should be explored.
  - Proposed development that would lead to road safety issues, or reduce the carrying capacity of important road links, will not be considered favourably.
  - Development that would result in the opening up of large tracts of land (which are not currently expressed as part of the settlement and would therefore detract from its character and create an incursion into the open countryside) will not be considered favourably.
- C) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, applications for multiple unit schemes (i.e. not more than three houses) must be accompanied by a design statement that demonstrates how the proposal re-inforces the established character of the settlement. This information may also be requested by the Planning Authority where individual proposals raise design concerns, or are located prominently.
- D) The Council will encourage and facilitate consolidation and appropriate expansion of community facilities and services within the settlement.

The provision of public footpaths will generally be required as part of any permitted development with the settlement.

- E) All applications involving individual septic tank drainage systems shall be required to demonstrate compliance with appropriate County Development Plan standards in relation to effluent treatment and disposal.



## **Planning Assessment of Castletown Finea.**

Castletown Finea is a small nodal settlement located at the northern end of the county and close to the borders of counties Meath and Cavan. It is situated off the R394 approximately 7.5 miles north of Castlepollard. The settlement is attractively situated against a backdrop of rising hills to the east and south and Lough Sheelin to the north.

Castletown Finea has a good range of community services and facilities including a primary school, a church and cemetery, a football pitch and community centre and a post office and a shop. There are no public water supply or sewerage facilities serving the area.

There are opportunities for infill development to reinforce and strengthen the viability of existing services. This will be best availed of at locations in the centre of the village in order to consolidate and compliment existing built forms. A parcel of land comprising 2.4 acres in the ownership of Westmeath County Council is considered suitable for residential development including OPD's and other community related uses.

Modern suburban estate type residential development would be inappropriate in the village and any further development should be either sensitive infill or small clusters which compliment the existing pattern and which reinforces the established character. In this connection there may be opportunities to replicate by way of an appropriate design response the existing built form comprising attached vernacular style buildings at the centre of the settlement. The potential for the expansion of vital community and social infrastructure will be protected and opportunities for provision of further community based services including local shopping will be encouraged. The identified development limits should ensure the existing development is contained and population growth within the settlement is facilitated consistent with viability of existing and future services.

The Planning Authority will give favourable consideration to sensitive restoration and/or adaptation of existing disused buildings located within the settlement in the interests of sustainability and conservation of the built heritage.

These development limits have been selected and designated on the basis that, in the opinion and best advice of the executive, they provide an adequate and appropriate supply of development sites within the plan timescale to allow the settlements to grow in accordance with the services that are available.

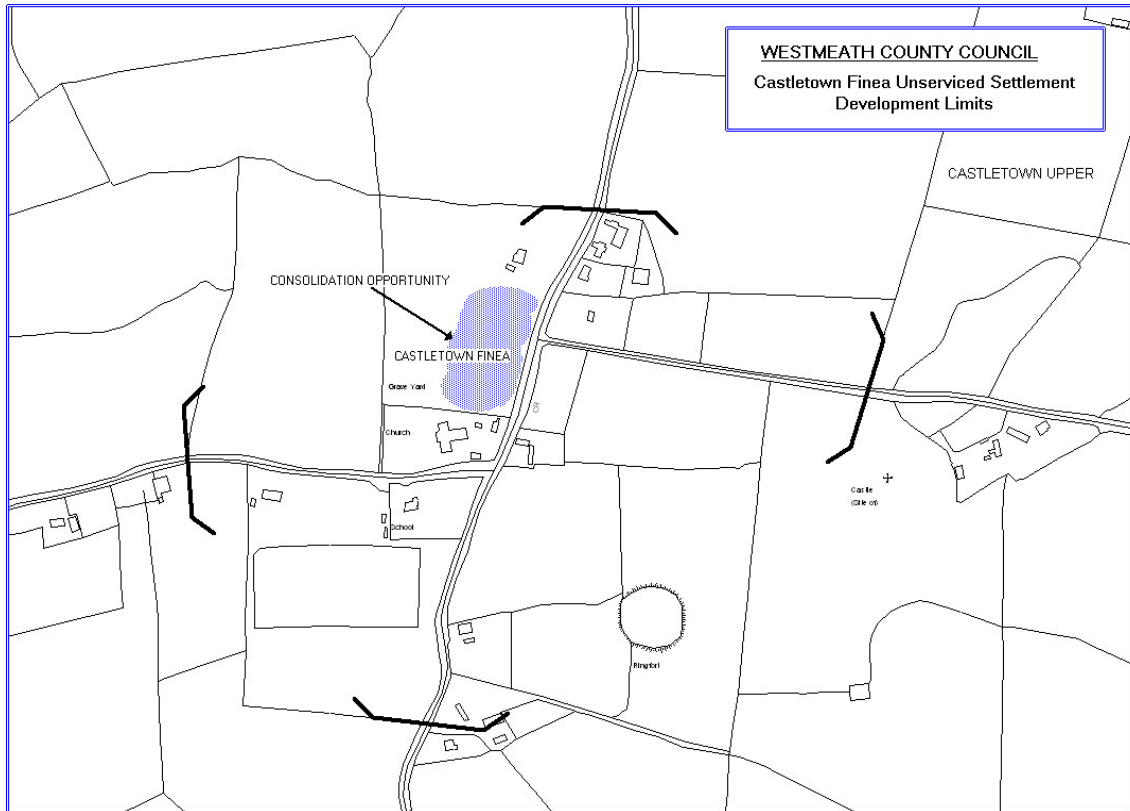
Policies 1-5 included within the overall policy statement on unserved settlements shall apply to Castletown Finea.

In addition to Policies 1- 5:

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

The provision of public footpaths will generally be required as part of any permitted development with the settlement.

- J) All applications involving individual septic tank drainage systems shall be required to demonstrate compliance with appropriate County Development Plan standards in relation to effluent treatment and disposal.



## **Planning Assessment of Lismacaffrey.**

Lismacaffrey is located on the R395 approximately 18 mile/km north west of Mullingar and lies adjacent to the Longford County Boundary. This settlement has strong historical associations with the monastic period and St. Fintan is believed to have established a settlement here and in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the site was subsequently occupied by the Franciscan Third Order Sisters.

The Unserviced Settlement of Lismacaffrey is located on a crossroads and has a primary school, a pub and shop. Water supply is available by way of the regional mains. There is no foul or surface water drainage system in existence. The crossroads format of the village has resulted in sporadic linear development along the approach roads particularly to the north.

The pattern of ribbon development which has been allowed to extend from the settlement's centre suggests that a tighter village envelope should be drawn to consolidate the settlement to preclude further incursions into the surrounding open countryside. The intention being to form a distinct core area where the available services can be accessed easily in terms of walking distance.

Lismacaffrey cannot sustain large-scale residential development and any further development should only be on a single house basis or in clusters but it does have the opportunity to develop on a limit scale within the identified "development limits" as mapped (and attached). Ideally, the format of development should reflect the traditional village designs especially on road frontages. The potential for the expansion of vital community and social infrastructure e.g. the school will be protected and opportunities for provision of further community based services including local shopping will be encouraged. The identified development limits should ensure the existing development is contained and population growth within the settlement is facilitated consistent with viability of existing and future services.

There are a significant number of opportunities to allow for infill between existing buildings within the settlement and shall be subject to the considerations and policy objectives stated within the County Development Plan and the "Unserviced Settlement Policy Guidance", which accompanies this planning assessment. The Planning Authority will give favourable consideration to sensitive restoration and/or adaptation of existing disused buildings located within the settlement in the interest of sustainability and conservation of the built heritage.

These development limits have been selected and designated on the basis that, in the opinion and best advice of the executive, they provide an adequate and appropriate supply of development sites within the plan timescale to allow the settlements to grow in accordance with the services that are available.

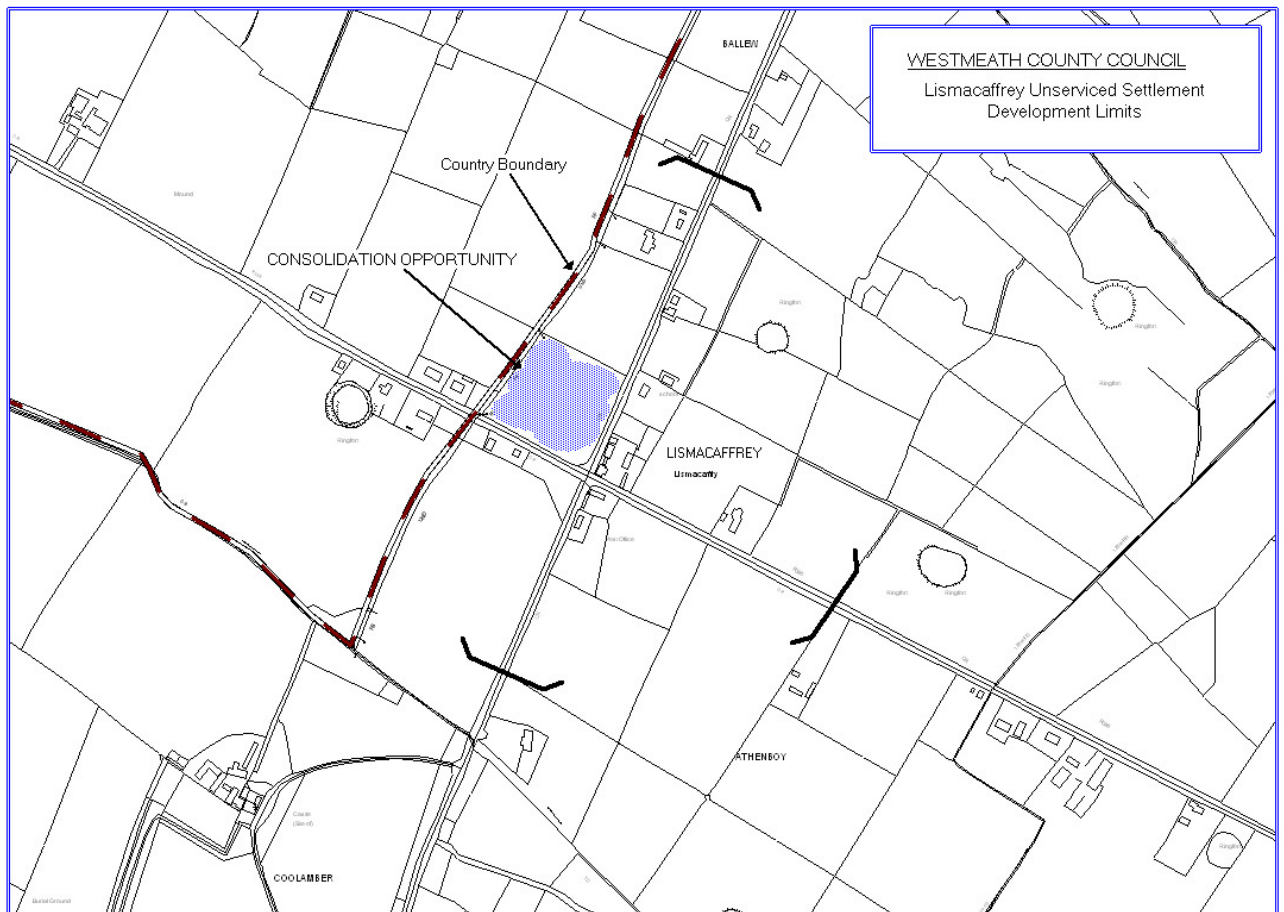
Policies 1-5 included within the overall policy statement on unserved settlements shall apply to Lismacaffrey.

In addition to Policies 1- 5:

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

the settlement. This information may also be requested by the Planning Authority where individual proposals raise design concerns, or are located prominently.

- N) The Council will encourage and facilitate consolidation and appropriate expansion of community facilities and services within the settlement. The provision of public footpaths will generally be required as part of any permitted development with the settlement.
- O) All applications involving individual septic tank drainage systems shall be required to demonstrate compliance with appropriate County Development Plan standards in relation to effluent treatment and disposal.
- P) The Council will, in the event of an application for development at or adjacent to the crossroads and where circumstances provide, require the staggering of the junction along the north south that is Streete to Abbeylara road.



## **Planning Assessment of Streete.**

Streete is a small picturesque estate village that nestles in a hollow in the rich green wooded Inny Valley lowlands. It is situated at the north eastern edge of Westmeath County – 11 miles from Longford and 16 miles from Mullingar. Street Village sits centrally in the parish of Streete, which extends into County Longford. The village has a shop, pub, church and in close vicinity – a health centre, primary school and another church. Streete has approximately 20 dwelling houses with an estimated population of less than 70.

The parish of Streete is always associated with St.. Fintan and his well was a place of pilgrimage up until the 1700s. The Norman invasions of 1172 brought great changes to the Parish of Streete, The Tuites, De la Mearses, de Constantins, De Lacys and the Nugents became the dominant families, superseding the old Gealic families of O'Farrell and Murtagh. John De la Mare had his castle and prison in Streete. Streete does not feature as a monastic centre during early Norman times but it did become known as "beate Maria de Straid" – St. Mary's of the Streete, and the churches have been dedicated to St. Mary ever since. The present St. Mary's was built in 1812 and reconstructed in 1932.

In 1856 the Wilson family of Daramona, erected Streete Institute with a porch and committee rooms where adult classes were held in all branches of education including farming and engineering. W.E. Wilson was renowned for his observatory which he erected at Daramona. The first small observatory was built in 1871, in the garden of the house with a small room attached to it for photography. It had a 12" equatorial reflecting telescope provided by Sir Howard Grubb. In 1881, a new large observatory was built, attached to the house and in 1889 a new physical laboratory was erected adjoining this structure.

The village of Streete has a distinctive and diverse character, deriving from its social and economic history which influences built form and layout. The village is made up of predominantly older properties related to its historical past and the Daramona Estate together with limited modern development comprising one off housing. Within the older parts of the village, the streetscape is characterised by the variety of buildings and their individual relationship to the road. The traditional layout of Streete is exemplified by the terraced row of the Estate workers cottages with their small plots of land and larger older houses with no setback from the road.

It is important that any new development in the village is based upon an understanding of the essential character of the settlement and its sensitivity to inappropriate development. Any future development needs to be in sympathy with its particular location within the village with regard to scale, density and dominance of building form. In this regard the Planning Authority will be guided by the **Streete Village Design Statement** prepared by Westmeath County Council in consultation with the local community in May 2004.

Modern suburban estate type residential development would be inappropriate in the village and any further development should be either sensitive infill or small clusters of not more than 3 units which compliment the existing pattern and which reinforces the established character. The potential for the expansion of vital community and social infrastructure will be protected and opportunities for provision of further community based services including local shopping will be encouraged. The identified development limits should ensure the existing development is contained and population growth within the settlement is facilitated consistent with viability of existing and future services and the protection of established character.

The Planning Authority will give favourable consideration to sensitive restoration and/or adaptation of existing disused buildings located within the settlement in the interest of sustainability and conservation of the built heritage.

Development limits have been selected and designated on the basis that, in the opinion and best advice of the executive, they provide an adequate and appropriate supply of development sites within the plan timescale to allow the settlements to grow in accordance with the services that are available and consistent with the protection of village character. There is a public water supply serving the area and effluent disposal is by means of individual septic tank drainage systems.

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

In addition to Policies 1- 5:

- Q) Having regard to the acknowledged need to ensure development is appropriate to the scale of the existing settlement and can be absorbed:
- Multiple unit proposals shall not exceed 3 dwellings in number.
  - To ensure appropriate scale of development, the development limits shown on the attached map should not be interpreted as an overall envelope for widespread development. Guidance at (B) below, which aims to protect settlement form, will also be used as a tool to inform appropriate scale of development.
- R) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, the following guidance on preferred location of new development shall apply:
- Proposed infill development between existing dwellings, which would consolidate the settlement, will be considered foremost.

- Frontage development within identified limits will also be considered, providing it does not detract from settlement form.
- Small, multiple unit proposals of not more than 3 dwellings on somewhat larger sites must consolidate the settlement and will be most favourably considered at the settlement core.
- Proposed development that would lead to road safety issues, or reduce the carrying capacity of important road links, will not be considered favourably.
- Development that would result in the opening up of large tracts of land (which are not currently expressed as part of the settlement and would therefore detract from its character and create an incursion into the open countryside) will not be considered favourably.

- S) In order to ensure that development respects the established form of the settlement, applications for multiple unit schemes (i.e. not more than three houses) must be accompanied by a design statement that demonstrates how the proposal continues the established character of the settlement. This information may also be requested by the Planning Authority where individual proposals raise design concerns, or are located prominently.
- T) The Council will encourage and facilitate consolidation and appropriate expansion of community facilities and services within the settlement. The provision of public footpaths will generally be required as part of any permitted development with the settlement.
- U) The number of dwelling units within the settlement shall not be allowed to increase by more than 50% of the current housing stock up to the year 2010.
- V) All applications involving individual septic tank drainage systems shall be required to demonstrate compliance with appropriate County Development Plan standards in relation to effluent treatment and disposal.

**WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**Streete Unserviced Settlement**  
**Development Limits**

