Longford County Development Plan 2015 – 2021

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Annex 1: Housing Strategy

Executive Summary

Future Analytics Consulting (FAC) was appointed by the Longford Local Authorities to prepare a Housing Strategy to inform the County Development Plan for the period 2015-2021.

The overarching purpose of this Housing Strategy is to ensure that the proper planning and sustainable development of Longford provides for the housing needs of existing and future populations in an appropriate manner.

This strategy is framed in the context of the Government's current stated position with respect to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and takes account of the recently revised population forecasts for County Longford contained within the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region 2010-2022. The strategy has been prepared against the backdrop of significant challenges in the current housing market and accordingly, it draws on relevant national and local market expertise to inform both the approach taken and subsequent findings.

The main findings and recommendations of this Housing Strategy include the following:

– Drawing upon the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region's[1] revised population forecasts, the population of Longford is expected to increase by 5,603 people over the period 2011-2022.

– The number of households in County Longford is expected to increase from 14,748 in 2011 to approximately 16,980 in 2022, an increase of 2,335 units, or the equivalent of a per annum average of 212 units.

– The average household size in 2011 was 2.64 and this is projected to fall to 2.40 by 2022. This will invariably have implications on the annual target for housing production over the life of the Housing Strategy which will fluctuate accordingly. The reduced household size will also result in pressure for more units to accommodate the envisaged population growth.

– This strategy identifies the need to provide 2,120 housing units up to and including the end of the plan period in 2021. It is considered that there is currently enough zoned lands in the county to address future requirements.

– The anticipated social housing need for County Longford between 2012-2021 is 293 units. On average, there is likely to be a shortfall in the delivery of social housing of between 13.07% and 15.67% over this period. This equates to an average shortfall of 13.85% and this strategy proposes that the Longford Local Authorities set a requirement of a minimum of 14% of units on all land zoned for residential uses for the purpose of social/specialised housing.

– There is a significant number of constraining factors restricting the delivery of social housing in the current climate and it is envisaged that future requirements will be addressed via a combination of options including the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and partnership working with Voluntary Bodies and Housing Cooperatives.

– An assessment of the changing demographic profile of Longford suggests there will be an identifiable need to provide a greater mix of housing types and sizes in the future, including that to cater for specialist needs such as the elderly and those with disabilities.

– The Housing Strategy is being drafted during a period of great uncertainty in the housing market and the Irish economy, and should therefore be kept under review, as necessary, in line with provisions in the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended) to take account of any significant changes in the housing market or in national planning policy.

1. Introduction

This Housing Strategy has been prepared by Future Analytics Consulting on the behalf of the Longford Local Authorities to meet statutory requirements set out under the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended) and in particular Part V of said Act. It also addresses relevant provisions contained within the Housing (Miscellaneous Provision) Act, 2009.

Under Part V of the Act, each planning authority must prepare a Housing Strategy which will cover the period of its Development Plan. Each strategy must have regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and must address the overall supply of housing within the administrative boundary of the Local Authority. Within this, the Planning Authority has a statutory obligation to address needs for social and affordable housing and to ensure that sufficient land is zoned for housing over the period of its plan.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The previous Longford County Housing Strategy 2007-2016 was prepared during a period of unprecedented growth in the national property market. The fundamental changes that have taken place in the economy, and in particular, the housing market in intervening years means that many assumptions underpinning the previous strategy have changed considerably. High levels of market uncertainty and the changing nature of housing demand, including mitigating factors such as income, demographics and credit conditions are key aspects which underline the current housing market and the applied methodology considers these aspects in detail, providing a robust and credible basis for the assessment of future housing need in Longford.

[1] For reference purposes please see Section 1.3 of this document

This Housing Strategy has been prepared in accordance with national legislation and relevant guidance, with the stated aim of addressing the following:

- To ensure that the overall future supply of housing in County Longford is sufficient to address planned population growth;
- To ensure that adequate housing is made available for people on different income levels in the County;
- To ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of different households in the County;
- To address the need for social housing in County Longford.

In line with statutory requirements contained within the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government guidance *Development Plans - Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, Longford County Council has an obligation to ensure that sufficient zoned land is available to meet residential needs for the next 9 years and this strategy therefore covers the period to 2024.

A key intention was to produce a succinct and readable strategy document. To avoid duplication with content in the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021, this document does not include a chapter setting out the background policy context.

1.2
REVIEW OF PART V

In June 2011, the Government published a 'Housing Policy Statement' which will function as a framework to address short to medium term issues in the housing market. While reaffirming the Government's commitment to addressing social housing needs, this statement outlined their intention to stand down all existing affordable housing programmes to reflect current affordability conditions. These will be wound up as part of the ongoing review[2] of Part V of the Act. The Government has outlined that a decision is not being taken to end Part V fully, rather that it may be recast to incorporate relevant changes as necessary. This strategy is framed in the context of the Government's current stated position with respect to Part V. Further consideration is given to available social housing delivery mechanisms in Section 4.

[2] On 29th February 2012, the DoECLG issued a circular which stated that pending the outcome of the review in negotiating agreements under section 96, Part V obligations should be discharged through mechanisms that place no additional funding pressures on authorities.

1.3
REVISED POPULATION PROJECTIONS - REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES FOR THE MIDLAND REGION

The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region 2010-2022 (RPG) set a 2016 population target of 39,392 people for County Longford. High levels of housing delivery and significant in-migration to the County has resulted in the 2016 target being exceeded in advance of the forecasted period. A revised population target for 2016 of 43,080 people has subsequently been agreed with the Midland Regional Authority, and this target provides the basis for housing modelling carried out in this strategy.

2.
Housing in Longford: A Market Assessment

SUMMARY

- The population of Longford increased by 25.31% between 2002-2011.
- Between 2006-2011, there was a 7% increase in the population of Longford Town, a 6% increase in Granard, while Edgeworthstown and Ballymahon recorded population growth rates of 23% and 29% respectively.
- The average household size in County Longford fell from 3.24 in 1996 to 2.64 in 2011.
- There were 3,051 housing completions in Longford over the period 2007-2013.
- The lowest average house prices in the country are currently found in Longford at €132,000.
- The current average asking price of a 1 bed apartment in Longford is approximately €43,000 and a 4 bed bungalow approximately €159,500.

2.1
INTRODUCTION

A strong understanding of recent activity in the wider housing market as well as that in County Longford is an important starting point in the preparation of a Housing Strategy for the county. Population and housing are intrinsically interlinked. An increase in population influences housing by creating housing demand. Conversely, the availability of housing influences house prices and the resulting number of people and households who can potentially migrate into an area, affecting total population.

These connections between housing and population vary over time and between places, and because of this, where possible, local circumstances as well as prevailing economic and market conditions should be considered when producing a Housing Strategy. This section provides an overview of national, regional and local housing activity in Longford over the last ten years, and draws on local auctioneer and market expertise to provide commentary on the current and future outlook for the market.

2.2
POPULATION AND HOUSING GROWTH 2002-2011

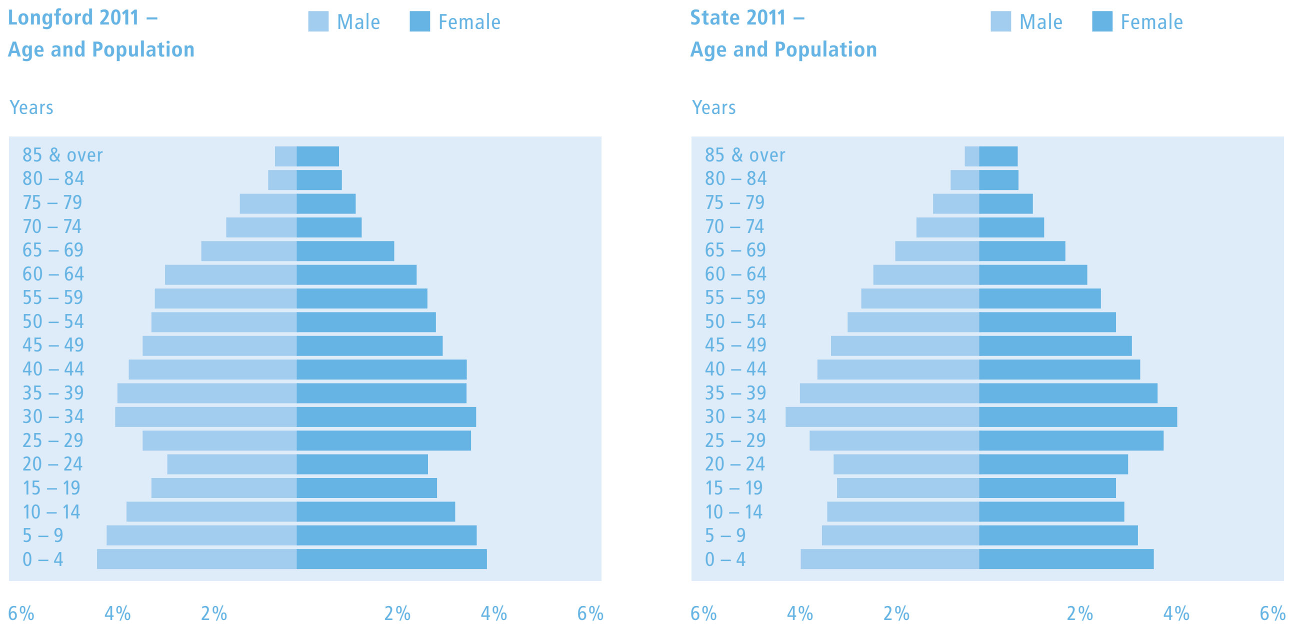
Between 2002-2011 the population of the state increased from 3,917,203 to 4,581,269 people, a growth rate of almost 17%. Population growth over 2002-2006 was typified by trends of strong net-inward migration, which has been tempered considerably in recent years, by significant net outward migration.

At 25.31%, population growth in the Midland Region outstripped recorded levels of national growth over the period of 2002-2011. A cursory comparison of Longford's population performance relative to other counties in the Midland Region reveals that in terms of levels of growth in the period 2006-2011, County Longford was only surpassed by County Laois (20.13%) over that period, but this trend should also be framed in the context of actual growth over that time – Longford's percentage share of the total population growth in the Midlands Region only increased marginally from 13.78% in 2002 to 13.81% in 2011. As illustrated in Table 2.1 below, population gains were made between 2006-2011, relative to Offaly and Westmeath, but they lagged behind that exhibited by Laois over this period.

Table 2.1
Longford and Midland Region Population Analysis 1996-2011

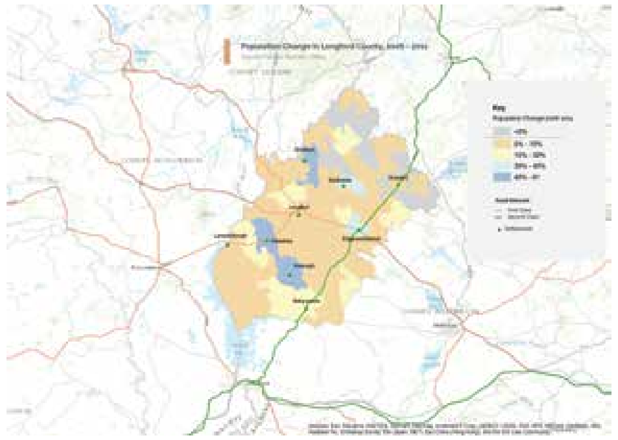
Area/ Region		Population 1996	Population 2002	Population 2006	Population 2011	% Change 1996-2002	% Change 2002-2006	% Change 2006-2011	Overall % Change 1996-2011
Midland Region	Laois	52,945	58,774	67,059	80,559	11.01	14.10	20.13	52.16
	Longford	30,166	31,068	34,391	39,000	2.99	10.69	13.40	29.28
	Offaly	59,117	63,663	70,868	76,687	7.69	11.32	8.21	29.72
	Westmeath	63,314	71,158	79,346	86,164	12.49	11.51	8.59	36.08
	Total	205,452	225,363	251,664	282,410	9.69	11.67	12.22	37.46

Figures 2.2
Longford and State Population Profiles 2011



The major settlements in Longford, namely those identified within the settlement hierarchy of the RPGs and the Longford County Development Plan Core Strategy, experienced varying levels of population growth between 2006-2011. These included a 7% increase in the population of Longford Town, and a 6% increase in Granard, but more pronounced increases took place in Edgeworthstown and Ballymahon, which recorded growth rates of 23% and 29% respectively.

Figure 2.3
Longford Population Change 2006-2011



Housing delivery is often considered to be a more immediate reflection of prevailing market conditions within an area – an indicator of how the market operates and fluctuates in 'real time', and this has been particularly evident in the peaks and troughs displayed by the Irish housing market over the last ten years. Overall, from the late 1990s until the economic collapse in 2007, Ireland experienced strong housing demand influenced by population growth, a reduction in household sizes, increased age groups with higher household formation rates, together with net immigration. Additional factors also included an increase in divorce rates, higher incomes and a significant investment in the buy-to-let property market. This is evidenced locally in Longford by the fall in average household size in the County from 3.24 in 1996 to 2.64 in 2011. A total of 2,849 houses were built between 2007 and 2011, with the majority of these units having been constructed in the period 2007-2009, fuelling the recorded population growth in the County over this period. Further analysis on housing supply is explored in Section 4.

2.3 CURRENT AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Significant challenges remain in the national housing market. Latest research from Daft.ie and Myhomes.ie indicates that house prices outside of Dublin are continuing to fall, although the rate of decline is moderating. Positively, there are signs of a general pick-up in activity, if not prices, in the market. Mortgage availability remains a constraining influence. The cost of borrowing, coupled with the requirement for larger 'up front' deposits, and relative job security, is inhibiting some first time buyers, but cash sales are predominating in some areas. It is estimated that there are approximately 43,000 properties for sale around the country, with almost 40% of homes finding a buyer within four months, up from 33% a year ago. Notably, the lowest average house prices in the country are found in Longford at €132,000[3], with the market in the County generally comparable with that of Leitrim, Roscommon, Laois, and Monaghan. Year on year house prices in Longford are down 5.5%[4], but this compares favourably to more pronounced decreases in Westmeath (-9.8%), Offaly (-11%) and Laois (-20.4%) over the same period. In line with national trends, the price of apartments has fallen considerably more than larger houses in the County. The current average asking price for a 1 bed apartment is Longford is approximately €43,000 and a 4 bed bungalow approximately €159,500.

Local auctioneers also testify to some variations in asking prices across the County, with Longford Town particularly displaying resilience in terms of its rental and house sales market due to demand for good quality houses and apartments. Local insight also suggests that there is an emerging trend of investors purchasing houses in traditionally lower value areas due to the presence of strong rental demand. There is general consensus that market momentum should gather pace over the next couple of years as part of the envisaged recovery scenario for the economy. In the longer term, localised demographic factors such as the rise in the cumulative birth rate[5] and lower occupancy rates may require a revised approach to housing provision in the County, including a wider assessment of housing mix typologies with respect to dwelling type, size and affordability levels.

[3] The Daft.ie House Price Report, April 2013

[4] As at April 2013.

[5] The Longford population in the 0-4 age group increased by 958 persons or 28% between 2002-2011

3. Housing Demand

SUMMARY

- The population of the County is projected to increase by 5,603 persons between 2011-2022.
- The number of households in County Longford is expected to increase from 14,410 in 2011 to approximately 16,745 in 2022, an increase of 2,335 houses or the equivalent of a per annum average of 212 units.
- Approximately one third of the households in Longford have an average annual disposal income of €14,749.00 (about €283.63 per week).
- Affordability modelling suggests that approximately 293 social housing units will have to be delivered over the period to 2021.
- On average, there is likely to be a 13.85% shortfall in the delivery of social housing over the period to 2021.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The determination of housing demand over the operational period of the Development Plan is a fundamental cornerstone of the overall Housing Strategy. It is essential that all relevant and available data is considered and applied where appropriate. The demand side model draws on key research information from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DoECLG), the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to reflect the latest position with respect to the housing market and the documented outputs are the product of considered scenario testing.

3.2 HOUSING DEMAND METHODOLOGY

The following key steps have been taken to determine the housing demand for County Longford up to and including the plan period of 2015 to 2021, and beyond.

STEP 1
A detailed assessment of the Longford County population projections for the period 2015 to 2021 based on the revised Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region population forecasts.

STEP 2
Calculation of average household size and additional households required to cater for the projected additional population from 2015–2021, including implied assumptions on average household size over that period.

STEP 3
Estimated distribution of household disposal incomes in the County for 2015–2021 based on the 10 decile income ranges set out in the CSO Household Budget Survey (2012)

STEP 4
Calculation of household disposable income distribution from 2015–2024 based on the ESRI Medium Term Review 2013 – 2020 (July 2013).

STEP 5:
Assessment of average house prices in the State and in Longford County and Town from 2000–2012 – based on the DoECLG Database Direct for Housing Statistics (August 2013).

STEP 6
Calculation of projected house price bands for Longford County for the years 2015– 2021 based on evidenced assumptions relating to average house price decreases and increases over the time period.

STEP 7
Determination of annual income distribution of total households in County Longford from 2015 – 2021 based on the 10 income decile ranges, with reference to source documents including the CSO's Household Budget Survery 2009–2010 and 2004–2005.

STEP 8
Determination of income distribution of annual additional households required for Longford from 2015–2021, based on 10 decile income ranges, County Longford Development Plan 2009–2015, DoECLG's 'A Model Housing Strategy and Step-by-Step Guide, 2000'.

STEP 9
Calculation of house price affordability for Longford County from 2015–2021, based on the calculated household disposable income distribution and the application of the annuity formula.

STEP 10
Calculation of anticipated social and affordable housing need and associated shortfall for Longford County from 2015-2021 based on the number of households required, housing affordability, household band position, house price bands, number of houses required within each band, and percentage and number of housing units projected to be provided within each band.

3.3 POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD PROJECTIONS

The starting point in any assessment of demand for housing over the Development Plan period 2015- 2021 is projected population growth for this period.

In accordance with the revised RPG population forecasts, the population of the County is projected to increase by 5,603 people between 2011-2022, which reflects a 14% increase over that period. The population of Longford Town is forecast to increase from 8,002 to approximately 12,926 people over the same timeframe.

Table 3.1:
Projected Population Growth in County Longford, 2011-2024

Year	Longford County Population	Annual Population Increase from 2011 to 2024	Longford Town Population	Remainder of County
2011	39,000	-	8,002	30,988
2012	39,497	497	-	-
2013	40,000	503	-	-
2014	40,509	509	-	-
2015	41,025	516	-	-
2016	41,547	522	10,240	31,306
2017	42,042	495	-	-
2018	42,544	501	-	-
2019	43,051	507	-	-
2020	43,564	513	-	-
2021	44,084	519	-	-
2022	44,603	519	12,926	31,677
2023	45,135	532	13,080	32,055
2024	45,670	535	13,235	32,435

The Census 2011 results indicate that Longford has a population to household ratio of 2.71. In line with national trends, household size in the County has declined in recent decades and it is envisaged that this trend will continue in the foreseeable future. The RPGs project an occupancy rate of 2.4 over the period to 2022, and in compliance with this, the Housing Strategy projects this ratio forward over the intervening period. Through this process, the strategy is consistent with the Regional Planning Guidelines.

By applying the relevant household size to projected population increases, it is possible to forecast required household numbers to 2022.

As summarised in Table 3.2 below, the number of households in County Longford is expected to increase from 14,410 in 2011 to approximately 16,745 in 2022, an increase of 2,335 houses, or the equivalent of a per annum average of 212 units.

Please note:
The relationship between projected population and household growth in absolute terms over the study period may not directly sum due to the uniform application of an average household size of 2.4 over this period, which discounts existing household formation rates and assumes that all households in the county will consist of 2.4 people over this period.

Table 3.2:
Projected Additional Houses Required Per Annum from 2012-2024

Year	Annual Population Increase from 2012 to 2024	Average Household Size	Additional Houses Required Per Annum	Number of Households
1996		3.24	-	9,320
2002		3.11	-	9,996
2006		2.86	-	12,042
2011		2.71	-	14,410
2012	497	2.4	207	14,617
2013	503		210	14,826
2014	509		212	15,039
2015	516		215	15,254
2016	522		218	15,471
2017	495		206	15,678
2018	501		209	15,887
2019	507		211	16,098
2020	513		214	16,312
2021	519		216	16,528
2022	519		216	16,745
2023	532		222	16,966
2024	535		223	17,189

3.4 DISPOSABLE INCOME PROJECTIONS

Disposable income is the amount of income, after tax is deducted, that is available for spending and saving. It functions as an important measure of housing affordability[6] in an area i.e. the ability of a household to purchase their own home. Current estimates of household disposal income are derived from the CSO Household Budget Survey (2012). This resource provides a snapshot of national household budgets, which have to be adjusted for county-level analysis. A deflator[7] of 0.88 has been extracted from the CSO report on County Incomes and Regional GDP 2010[8] and applied for such purposes.

Table 3.3 below illustrates the outputs of this exercise, with findings disaggregated into ten income segments or 'deciles' and applied to the proportion of households in Longford within each decile. It indicates that after taxes, about one third[9] of the households in Longford have an average annual disposable income of €14,749, or the equivalent of €283.63 per week.

6 Section 93 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, defines 'affordability' as "a person who is in need of accommodation and whose income would not be adequate to meet the payments of a mortgage for the purchase of a house to meet his or her accommodation needs because the payments calculated over the course of a year would exceed 35% of that person's annual income net of income tax and pay related social insurance…"

7 The measure of price inflation/deflation in an area, relative to the national measure at that time.

8 Published February 2013

9 1st, 2nd and 3rd Deciles

Table 3.3
Estimated Distributions of Household Disposable Incomes for County Longford, 2011

Income Range	Average Weekly Disposable Income (State) (€) (1999-2000)	Average Weekly Disposable Income (State) (€) (2004-2005)	Average Weekly Disposable Income (State) (€) (2009-2010)	Percentage Change from 2004-2005 to 2009-2010	Assumed Annual Percentage Income Increase from 2005 to 2010	Adjusted Average Weekly Disposable Income (State) (€) (2011)	Percentage of Households in Each Category (State)	Average Annual Disposable Income (State) (€) (2011)	Longford County Deflator	Average Annual Disposable Income (Longford) (€) (2011)	Number of Households in Longford (2011)
1st Decile	106.23	158.99	188.91	18.8%	3.76%	196.02	11.57%	10,193.05	0.887	9,040.14	1,667
2nd Decile	174.42	244.65	300.98	23.0%	4.60%	314.84	10.54%	16,371.68	0.887	14,519.93	1,519
3rd Decile	249.38	359.12	431.28	20.1%	4.02%	448.61	9.48%	23,327.82	0.887	20,689.28	1,366
4th Decile	331.71	488.30	549.20	12.5%	2.49%	562.90	9.60%	29,270.75	0.887	25,960.03	1,383
5th Decile	423.00	628.31	669.46	6.5%	1.31%	678.23	9.74%	35,267.91	0.887	31,278.86	1,404
6th Decile	515.73	779.53	802.56	3.0%	0.59%	807.30	9.56%	41,979.71	0.887	37,231.51	1,378
7th Decile	617.61	950.84	972.03	2.2%	0.45%	976.36	9.81%	50,770.85	0.887	45,028.31	1,414
8th Decile	743.44	1,167.54	1,183.82	1.4%	0.28%	1,187.12	9.58%	61,730.31	0.887	54,748.19	1,380
9th Decile	925.52	1,420.76	1,472.66	3.7%	0.73%	1,483.42	9.78%	77,137.80	0.887	68,412.98	1,409
10th Decile	1,428.71	2,232.01	2,289.38	2.6%	0.51%	2,301.15	10.34%	119,659.74	0.887	106,125.40	1,490
Total							100.00%				14,410

To inform the forward projection of future affordability in Longford, the baseline figures are then inflated annually using forecasted average disposable household income growth rates from the Economic and Social and Research Institute (ESRI). The latest projections from the Medium Term Review 2010-2020[10] set out a scenario-based approach to future growth. Based on the current economic outlook, a recovery-based scenario average of 3.6% per annum has been applied over the plan period, which for reference, compares with an average growth rate figure of 7.1% contained within the previous Housing Strategy. The key outputs of this are shown in Table 3.4 below, which highlights a notable difference in average disposable incomes across the County for the 10 decile income ranges for each of the projected years[11].

10 Published July 2013.

11 This includes an additional 3 years to take account of the previously stated requirement to report to 2024.

Table 3.4:
Average Annual Disposable Income for County Longford, 2011-2024 (€)

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
% Growth	-	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%
1st Decile	9,040	9,366	9,703	10,052	10,414	10,789	11,177	11,580	11,996	12,428	12,876	13,339	13,819	14,317
2nd Decile	14,520	15,043	15,584	16,145	16,726	17,329	17,952	18,599	19,268	19,962	20,681	21,425	22,196	22,995
3rd Decile	20,689	21,434	22,206	23,005	23,833	24,691	25,580	26,501	27,455	28,444	29,467	30,528	31,627	32,766
4th Decile	25,960	26,895	27,863	28,866	29,905	30,982	32,097	33,252	34,450	35,690	36,975	38,306	39,685	41,113
5th Decile	31,279	32,405	33,571	34,780	36,032	37,329	38,673	40,065	41,508	43,002	44,550	46,154	47,815	49,537
6th Decile	37,232	38,572	39,960	41,399	42,889	44,433	46,033	47,690	49,407	51,186	53,028	54,937	56,915	58,964
7th Decile	45,028	46,649	48,329	50,069	51,871	53,738	55,673	57,677	59,754	61,905	64,133	66,442	68,834	71,312
8th Decile	54,748	56,719	58,761	60,876	63,068	65,338	67,691	70,127	72,652	75,268	77,977	80,784	83,693	86,705
9th Decile	68,413	70,876	73,427	76,071	78,809	81,646	84,586	87,631	90,786	94,054	97,440	100,948	104,582	108,347
10th Decile	106,125	109,946	113,904	118,005	122,253	126,654	131,213	135,937	140,831	145,901	151,153	156,595	162,232	168,072

3.5 HOUSE PRICE ASSESSMENT AND PROJECTION

Section 2 of this strategy sets out in detail background information on house price trends in the current market.

As part of the price assessment and projection for County Longford, it is important to determine, generally, current house price sales and how they may fluctuate over the plan period. Table 3.5 below outlines the projected calculated house prices bands for County Longford from 2008-2024. This table has been calculated using the CSO Residential Property Price Index (July 2013) and reflects a nominal 1% increase in house prices in 2015 and 2016 rising to a 4% increase between 2021-2024.

Table 3.5
Affordability Analysis and Associated Affordable Housing Demand 2008-2024

	Average Price Increase/ Decrease	1st Band - not exceeding X1	2nd Band - X1-X2		3rd Band - X2-X3		4th Band - X3-X4		5th Band - X4-X5		6th Band - X5-X6		7th Band - X6-X7		8th Band - exceeding X7
2008	-	150,000	150,001	200,000	200,001	250,000	250,001	300,000	300,001	350,000	350,001	400,000	400,001	500,000	500,000
2009	-16.20%	125,700	125,701	167,600	167,601	209,500	209,501	251,400	251,401	293,300	293,301	335,200	335,201	419,000	419,000
2010	-11.40%	111,370	111,371	148,494	148,494	185,617	185,618	222,740	222,741	259,864	259,865	296,987	296,988	371,234	371,234
2011	-13.00%	96,892	96,893	129,189	129,190	161,487	161,487	193,784	193,785	226,082	226,082	258,379	258,380	322,974	322,974
2012	-11.40%	85,846	85,847	114,462	114,462	143,077	143,078	171,693	171,693	200,308	200,309	228,924	228,924	286,155	286,155
2013	0.00%	85,846	85,847	114,462	114,462	143,077	143,078	171,693	171,693	200,308	200,309	228,924	228,924	286,155	286,155
2014	0.00%	85,846	85,847	114,462	114,462	143,077	143,078	171,693	171,693	200,308	200,309	228,924	228,924	286,155	286,155
2015	1.00%	86,705	86,705	115,606	115,607	144,508	144,509	173,410	173,410	202,311	202,312	231,213	231,213	289,016	289,016
2016	1.00%	87,572	87,572	116,763	116,763	145,953	145,954	175,144	175,144	204,334	204,335	233,525	233,526	291,906	291,906
2017	2.00%	89,323	89,324	119,098	119,098	148,872	148,873	178,647	178,647	208,421	208,422	238,196	238,196	297,744	297,744
2018	2.50%	91,556	91,557	122,075	122,076	152,594	152,595	183,113	183,113	213,632	213,632	244,150	244,151	305,188	305,188
2019	3.00%	94,303	94,304	125,737	125,738	157,172	157,172	188,606	188,607	220,041	220,041	251,475	251,476	314,344	314,344
2020	3.50%	97,604	97,604	130,138	130,139	162,673	162,674	195,207	195,208	227,742	227,743	260,277	260,277	325,346	325,346
2021	4.00%	101,508	101,509	135,344	135,344	169,180	169,180	203,016	203,016	236,852	236,852	270,688	270,688	338,360	338,360
2022	4.00%	105,568	105,569	140,758	140,758	175,947	175,948	211,136	211,137	246,326	246,326	281,515	281,516	351,894	351,894
2023	4.00%	109,791	109,792	146,388	146,389	182,985	182,986	219,582	219,583	256,179	256,180	292,776	292,776	365,970	365,970
2024	4.00%	114,183	114,183	152,243	152,244	190,304	190,305	228,365	228,366	266,426	266,427	304,487	304,488	380,608	380,608
% of Longford Housing Units within each Band based on Whole Country		2.50%	13.50%		15.50%		17.50%		14.50%		10.50%		11.50%		14.50%

The projections for household income to 2021 are applied to the DoECLG Model Housing Strategy annuity formula to determine the maximum affordable house price for each of the ten disposable income decile ranges. The key variables used in the annuity formula include an affordability threshold of a maximum of 35% expenditure of household income on mortgage costs, a loan to value ratio of 0.80, an annual interest rate (APR) of 3.95%, and a loan term of 25 years.

Tables 3.6 and 3.7 below set out the average annual and monthly disposable incomes for Longford for the period 2012-2024 and Table 3.8 summarises the outputs from the annuity calculation, detailing the approximate affordable house prices in County Longford to 2024.

Table 3.6
Average Annual Household Disposable Income in County Longford, 2012-2024

Range	% of Households in Each Category (Longford)	Average Annual Household Disposable Income - Longford County - 2012-2024 (€)												
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1st Decile	11.57%	9,366	9,703	10,052	10,414	10,789	11,177	11,580	11,996	12,428	12,876	13,339	13,819	14,317
2nd Decile	10.54%	15,043	15,584	16,145	16,726	17,329	17,952	18,599	19,268	19,962	20,681	21,425	22,196	22,995
3rd Decile	9.48%	21,434	22,206	23,005	23,833	24,691	25,580	26,501	27,455	28,444	29,467	30,528	31,627	32,766
4th Decile	9.60%	26,895	27,863	28,866	29,905	30,982	32,097	33,252	34,450	35,690	36,975	38,306	39,685	41,113
5th Decile	9.74%	32,405	33,571	34,780	36,032	37,329	38,673	40,065	41,508	43,002	44,550	46,154	47,815	49,537
6th Decile	9.56%	38,572	39,960	41,399	42,889	44,433	46,033	47,690	49,407	51,186	53,028	54,937	56,915	58,964
7th Decile	9.81%	46,649	48,329	50,069	51,871	53,738	55,673	57,677	59,754	61,905	64,133	66,442	68,834	71,312
8th Decile	9.58%	56,719	58,761	60,876	63,068	65,338	67,691	70,127	72,652	75,268	77,977	80,784	83,693	86,705
9th Decile	9.78%	70,876	73,427	76,071	78,809	81,646	84,586	87,631	90,786	94,054	97,440	100,948	104,582	108,347
10th Decile	10.34%	109,946	113,904	118,005	122,253	126,654	131,213	135,937	140,831	145,901	151,153	156,595	162,232	168,072
	100%													

Table 3.7
Average Monthly Disposable Income in County Longford, 2012-2024

Range	% of Households in Each Category (Longford)	Average Monthly Disposable Income - Longford County - 2012-2024 (€)												
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1st Decile	11.57%	780	809	838	868	899	931	965	1,000	1,036	1,073	1,112	1,152	1,193
2nd Decile	10.54%	1,254	1,299	1,345	1,394	1,444	1,496	1,550	1,606	1,663	1,723	1,785	1,850	1,916
3rd Decile	9.48%	1,786	1,850	1,917	1,986	2,058	2,132	2,208	2,288	2,370	2,456	2,544	2,636	2,730
4th Decile	9.60%	2,241	2,322	2,405	2,492	2,582	2,675	2,771	2,871	2,974	3,081	3,192	3,307	3,426
5th Decile	9.74%	2,700	2,798	2,898	3,003	3,111	3,223	3,339	3,459	3,584	3,713	3,846	3,985	4,128
6th Decile	9.56%	3,214	3,330	3,450	3,574	3,703	3,836	3,974	4,117	4,265	4,419	4,578	4,743	4,914
7th Decile	9.81%	3,887	4,027	4,172	4,323	4,478	4,639	4,806	4,979	5,159	5,344	5,537	5,736	5,943
8th Decile	9.58%	4,727	4,897	5,073	5,256	5,445	5,641	5,844	6,054	6,272	6,498	6,732	6,974	7,225
9th Decile	9.78%	5,906	6,119	6,339	6,567	6,804	7,049	7,303	7,565	7,838	8,120	8,412	8,715	9,029
10th Decile	10.34%	9,162	9,492	9,834	10,188	10,554	10,934	11,328	11,736	12,158	12,596	13,050	13,519	14,006
	100%													

Table 3.8:
Approximate Affordable Housing Prices in County Longford, 2012-2024

Range	% of Households in Each Category (Longford)	Approximate Affordable House Price - Longford County - 2012-2024 (€)												
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1st Decile	11.57%	65,029	67,370	69,795	72,308	74,911	77,608	80,402	83,296	86,295	89,401	92,620	95,954	99,408
2nd Decile	10.54%	104,447	108,207	112,102	116,138	120,319	124,651	129,138	133,787	138,603	143,593	148,762	154,118	159,666
3rd Decile	9.48%	148,825	154,183	159,733	165,484	171,441	177,613	184,007	190,632	197,494	204,604	211,970	219,601	227,506
4th Decile	9.60%	186,740	193,462	200,427	207,642	215,117	222,861	230,884	239,196	247,807	256,728	265,971	275,546	285,465
5th Decile	9.74%	225,000	233,100	241,491	250,185	259,192	268,523	278,189	288,204	298,580	309,328	320,464	332,001	343,953
6th Decile	9.56%	267,819	277,461	287,449	297,797	308,518	319,625	331,131	343,052	355,402	368,196	381,451	395,184	409,410
7th Decile	9.81%	323,904	335,565	347,645	360,160	373,126	386,559	400,475	414,892	429,828	445,302	461,333	477,941	495,147
8th Decile	9.58%	393,823	408,000	422,688	437,905	453,670	470,002	486,922	504,451	522,611	541,425	560,917	581,110	602,030
9th Decile	9.78%	492,118	509,835	528,189	547,203	566,903	587,311	608,455	630,359	653,052	676,562	700,918	726,151	752,292
10th Decile	10.34%	763,397	790,879	819,351	848,848	879,406	911,065	943,863	977,842	1,013,044	1,049,514	1,087,296	1,126,439	1,166,991
	100%													

Table 3.9 below provides a breakdown of the total additional housing units required over the period of 2012-2024 based on the ten decile range. This analysis is based on the revised RPG targets for County Longford up to year 2022.

Table 3.9
Required Additional Households in County Longford, 2012-2024

Income Range	% of Households in Each Category (Longford)	Total Additional Households - Longford County - 2012-2024 (€)												
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1st Decile	11.57%	24	24	25	25	25	24	24	24	25	25	25	26	26
2nd Decile	10.54%	22	22	22	23	23	22	22	22	23	23	23	23	23
3rd Decile	9.48%	20	20	20	20	21	20	20	20	20	21	21	21	21
4th Decile	9.60%	20	20	20	21	21	20	20	20	21	21	21	21	21
5th Decile	9.74%	20	20	21	21	21	20	20	21	21	21	21	22	22
6th Decile	9.56%	20	20	20	21	21	20	20	20	20	21	21	21	21
7th Decile	9.81%	20	21	21	21	21	20	20	21	21	21	21	22	22
8th Decile	9.58%	20	20	20	21	21	20	20	20	20	21	21	21	21
9th Decile	9.78%	20	20	21	21	21	20	20	21	21	21	21	22	22
10th Decile	10.34%	21	22	22	22	23	21	22	22	22	22	22	23	23
	100%	207	210	212	215	218	206	209	211	214	216	216	222	223

3.6 HOUSEHOLD AFFORDABILITY

An essential requirement of this Housing Strategy is to identify as accurately as possible the number of households who can be classified as having an affordability problem over the period 2015-2021, so as to adequately inform the necessary provision of these units. Table 3.10 below sets out in detail the determination of the anticipated social housing need and associated shortfall for Longford County Council. This determination is based on the number of households required, housing affordability by each decile, household band position, house prices bands (upper value), number of houses required within each band, and the percentage and number of housing units projected to be provided within each band.

Taking 2015 as an illustrative year, there are 215 households required, 25 of which are required within the 1st Band that has an upper price value of €86,705 and based on DoECLG House Price Statistics System, it is expected that only 5 housing units will be provided within this band. Therefore, there will be a housing shortage in this band of 30 units and this equates to 14.01% of the overall total household requirement.

Table 3.10

Calcualtion of Anticipated Social & Affordable Housing Need, County Longford 2012 – 2024

Year	Range	No. of Households Required	Running Total	Affordability by each Decile	Household Band Position	House Prices Bands - Upper Value	No. of Houses Required within each Band	% of Housing Units Projected to be Provided within each Band	No. Housing Units Projected to be Provided within each Band	Housing Shortfall - i.e. No. of Households Meeting Affordability Criteria	Housing Shortfall as a % of Total Households Required
2012	1st Decile	24	24	65,029	1st Band	85,846	38	2.50%	5	32	15.67%
	2nd Decile	22	46	104,447	2nd Band	114,462	13	13.50%	28	-15	-
	3rd Decile	20	65	148,825	3rd & 4th Bands	171,693	28	33.00%	68	-40	-
	4th Decile	20	85	186,740	5th Band	200,308	15	14.50%	30	-15	-
	5th Decile	20	105	225,000	6th Band	228,924	13	10.50%	22	-9	-
	6th Decile	20	125	267,819	7th Band	286,155	22	11.50%	24	-2	-
	7th Decile	20	145	323,904	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	30	-	-
	8th Decile	20	165	393,823							
	9th Decile	20	186	492,118							
	10th Decile	21	207	763,397							
		207						100.00%	207		
2013	1st Decile	24	24	67,370	1st Band	85,846	37	2.50%	5	32	15.04%
	2nd Decile	22	46	108,207	2nd Band	114,462	12	13.50%	28	-16	-
	3rd Decile	20	66	154,183	3rd & 4th Bands	171,693	27	33.00%	69	-42	-
	4th Decile	20	86	193,462	5th Band	200,308	15	14.50%	30	-15	-
	5th Decile	20	107	233,100	6th and 7th Bands	286,155	34	22.00%	46	-12	-
	6th Decile	20	127	277,461							
	7th Decile	21	147	335,565	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	30	-	-
	8th Decile	20	167	408,000							
	9th Decile	20	188	509,835							
	10th Decile	22	210	790,879							
		210						100.00%	210		
2014	1st Decile	25	25	69,795	1st Band	85,846	36	2.50%	5	31	14.43%
	2nd Decile	22	47	112,102	2nd Band	114,462	12	13.50%	29	-17	-
	3rd Decile	20	67	159,733	3rd & 4th Bands	171,693	27	33.00%	70	-43	-
	4th Decile	20	87	200,427	5th & 6th Bands	228,924	28	25.00%	53	-25	-
	5th Decile	21	108	241,491	7th Band	286,155	25	11.50%	24	1	-
	6th Decile	20	128	287,449	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	31	-	-
	7th Decile	21	149	347,645							
	8th Decile	20	170	422,688							
	9th Decile	21	190	528,189							
	10th Decile	22	212	819,351							
		212						100.00%	212		
2015	1st Decile	25	25	72,308	1st Band	86,705	35	2.50%	5	30	14.01%
	2nd Decile	23	48	116,138	2nd & 3rd Bands	144,508	24	29.00%	62	-39	-
	3rd Decile	20	68	165,484	4th Band	173,410	15	17.50%	38	-23	-
	4th Decile	21	89	207,642	5th & 6th Bands	231,213	27	25.00%	54	-27	-
	5th Decile	21	109	250,185	7th Band	289,016	25	11.50%	25	0	-
	6th Decile	21	130	297,797	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	31	-	-
	7th Decile	21	151	360,160							
	8th Decile	21	172	437,905							
	9th Decile	21	193	547,203							
	10th Decile	22	215	848,848							
		215						100.00%	215		
2016	1st Decile	25	25	74,911	1st Band	87,572	35	2.50%	5	30	13.59%
	2nd Decile	23	48	120,319	2nd & 3rd Bands	145,953	24	29.00%	63	-40	-
	3rd Decile	21	69	171,441	4th Band	175,144	14	17.50%	38	-24	-
	4th Decile	21	90	215,117	5th & 6th Bands	233,525	27	25.00%	54	-28	-
	5th Decile	21	111	259,192	7th Band	291,906	25	11.50%	25	0	-
	6th Decile	21	132	308,518	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	32	-	-
	7th Decile	21	153	373,126							
	8th Decile	21	174	453,670							
	9th Decile	21	195	566,903							
	10th Decile	23	218	879,406							
		218						100.00%	218		
2017	1st Decile	24	24	77,608	1st Band	89,323	33	2.50%	5	28	13.34%
	2nd Decile	22	46	124,651	2nd & 3rd Bands	148,872	22	29.00%	60	-38	-
	3rd Decile	20	65	177,613	4th & 5th Bands	208,421	25	32.00%	66	-41	-
	4th Decile	20	85	222,861	6th Band	238,196	14	10.50%	22	-8	-
	5th Decile	20	105	268,523	7th Band	297,744	23	11.50%	24	-1	-
	6th Decile	20	125	319,625	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	30	-	-
	7th Decile	20	145	386,559							
	8th Decile	20	165	470,002							
	9th Decile	20	185	587,311							
	10th Decile	21	206	911,065							
		206						100.00%	206		

Year	Range	No. of Households Required	Running Total	Affordability by each Decile	Household Band Position	House Prices Bands - Upper Value	No. of Houses Required within each Band	% of Housing Units Projected to be Provided within each Band	No. Housing Units Projected to be Provided within each Band	Housing Shortfall - i.e. No. of Households Meeting Affordability Criteria	Housing Shortfall as a % of Total Households Required
2018	1st Decile	24	24	80,402	1st Band	91,556	33	2.50%	5	28	13.18%
	2nd Decile	22	46	129,138	2nd & 3rd Bands	152,594	22	29.00%	61	-39	-
	3rd Decile	20	66	184,007	4th & 5th Bands	213,632	25	32.00%	67	-42	-
	4th Decile	20	86	230,884	6th Band	244,150	14	10.50%	22	-8	-
	5th Decile	20	106	278,189	7th Band	305,188	23	11.50%	24	-1	-
	6th Decile	20	126	331,131	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	30	-	-
	7th Decile	20	147	400,475							
	8th Decile	20	167	486,922							
	9th Decile	20	187	608,455							
	10th Decile	22	209	943,863							
		209						100.00%	209		
2019	1st Decile	24	24	83,296	1st Band	94,303	33	2.50%	5	28	13.08%
	2nd Decile	22	47	133,787	2nd & 3rd Bands	157,172	22	29.00%	61	-39	-
	3rd Decile	20	67	190,632	4th & 5th Bands	220,041	25	32.00%	68	-43	-
	4th Decile	20	87	239,196	6th Band	251,475	14	10.50%	22	-8	-
	5th Decile	21	108	288,204	7th Band	314,344	23	11.50%	24	-1	-
	6th Decile	20	128	343,052	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	31	-	-
	7th Decile	21	149	414,892							
	8th Decile	20	169	504,451							
	9th Decile	21	190	630,359							
	10th Decile	22	211	977,842							
		211						100.00%	211		
2020	1st Decile	25	25	86,295	1st Band	97,604	33	2.50%	5	28	13.07%
	2nd Decile	23	47	138,603	2nd & 3rd Bands	162,673	22	29.00%	62	-40	-
	3rd Decile	20	68	197,494	4th & 5th Bands	227,742	25	32.00%	68	-43	-
	4th Decile	21	88	247,807	6th Band	260,277	14	10.50%	22	-8	-
	5th Decile	21	109	298,580	7th Band	325,346	23	11.50%	25	-	-
	6th Decile	20	129	355,402	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	31	-	-
	7th Decile	21	150	429,828							
	8th Decile	20	171	522,611							
	9th Decile	21	192	653,052							
	10th Decile	22	214	1,013,044							
		214						100.00%	214		

Year	Range	No. of Households Required	Running Total	Affordability by each Decile	Household Band Position	House Prices Bands - Upper Value	No. of Houses Required within each Band	% of Housing Units Projected to be Provided within each Band	No. Housing Units Projected to be Provided within each Band	Housing Shortfall - i.e. No. of Households Meeting Affordability Criteria	Housing Shortfall as a % of Total Households Required
2021	1st Decile	25	25	89,401	1st Band	101,508	34	2.50%	5	28	13.13%
	2nd Decile	23	48	143,593	2nd & 3rd Bands	169,180	23	29.00%	63	-40	-
	3rd Decile	21	68	204,604	4th & 5th Bands	236,852	26	32.00%	69	-44	-
	4th Decile	21	89	256,728	6th Band	270,688	14	10.50%	23	-9	-
	5th Decile	21	110	309,328	7th Band	338,360	24	11.50%	25	-1	-
	6th Decile	21	131	368,196	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	31	-	-
	7th Decile	21	152	445,302							
	8th Decile	21	173	541,425							
	9th Decile	21	194	676,562							
	10th Decile	22	216	1,049,514							
		216						100.00%	216		
2022	1st Decile	25	25	92,620	1st Band	105,568	34	2.50%	5	29	13.19%
	2nd Decile	23	48	148,762	2nd & 3rd Bands	175,947	23	29.00%	63	-40	-
	3rd Decile	21	68	211,970	4th & 5th Bands	246,326	26	32.00%	69	-43	-
	4th Decile	21	89	265,971	6th Band	281,515	14	10.50%	23	-8	-
	5th Decile	21	110	320,464	7th Band	351,894	24	11.50%	25	-1	-
	6th Decile	21	131	381,451	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	31	-	-
	7th Decile	21	152	461,333							
	8th Decile	21	173	560,917							
	9th Decile	21	194	700,918							
	10th Decile	22	216	1,087,296							
		216						100.00%	216		
2023	1st Decile	26	26	95,954	1st Band	109,791	35	2.50%	6	29	13.25%
	2nd Decile	23	49	154,118	2nd & 3rd Bands	182,985	23	29.00%	64	-41	-
	3rd Decile	21	70	219,601	4th & 5th Bands	256,179	27	32.00%	71	-44	-
	4th Decile	21	91	275,546	6th Band	292,776	15	10.50%	23	-9	-
	5th Decile	22	113	332,001	7th Band	365,970	25	11.50%	25	-1	-
	6th Decile	21	134	395,184	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	32	-	-
	7th Decile	22	156	477,941							
	8th Decile	21	177	581,110							
	9th Decile	22	199	726,151							
	10th Decile	23	222	1,126,439							
		222						100.00%	222		

Year	Range	No. of Households Required	Running Total	Affordability by each Decile	Household Band Position	House Prices Bands - Upper Value	No. of Houses Required within each Band	% of Housing Units Projected to be Provided within each Band	No. Housing Units Projected to be Provided within each Band	Housing Shortfall - i.e. No. of Households Meeting Affordability Criteria	Housing Shortfall as a % of Total Households Required
2024	1st Decile	26	26	99,408	1st Band	114,183	35	2.50%	6	30	13.31%
	2nd Decile	23	49	159,666	2nd & 3rd Bands	190,304	24	29.00%	65	-41	-
	3rd Decile	21	70	227,506	4th & 5th Bands	266,426	27	32.00%	71	-45	-
	4th Decile	21	92	285,465	6th Band	304,487	15	10.50%	23	-9	-
	5th Decile	22	114	343,953	7th Band	380,608	25	11.50%	26	-1	-
	6th Decile	21	135	409,410	8th Band	None	-	14.50%	32	-	-
	7th Decile	22	157	495,147							
	8th Decile	21	178	602,030							
	9th Decile	22	200	752,292							
	10th Decile	23	223	1,166,991							
		223						100.00%	223		

A summary of total social need for County Longford is set out in Table 3.11 below, which evidences that there is an anticipated per annum social housing shortfall, or requirement, of between 13.07% and 15.67% over the period to 2024. There is a requirement to deliver 293 social housing units up and including the end of the plan period in 2021, which equates to an anticipated average shortfall of 13.85% up to 2021.

Table 3.11
Summary of Anticipated Social and Affordable Housing Need in County Longford, 2012-2024

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
New Household Formations	207	210	212	215	218	206	209	211	214	216	216	222	223
Social and Affordable Housing Requirement	32	32	31	30	30	28	28	28	28	28	29	29	30
Housing Shortfall as a % of Total Households Required	15.67%	15.04%	14.43%	14.01%	13.59%	13.34%	13.18%	13.08%	13.07%	13.13%	13.19%	13.25%	13.31%

4. Housing Supply

SUMMARY

- The calculated housing target for the Longford County up to 2021 is 2,120 units.
- The total housing land requirement for this period is 84 hectares.
- The calculated requirement for Longford Town for this period is 61 hectares.
- Based on the revised RPG total housing target of 2,335 units by 2022 and a calculation of existing supply relative to demand, there is sufficient zoned land in the county to address identified future requirements.
- It is anticipated that the Longford Local Authority will meet their identified social housing provision over the Development Plan period, via a combination of options including the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and by working in partnership with Voluntary Bodies and Housing Cooperatives.

This section of the strategy examines past and projected future housing supply, providing analysis on house completions, the types of units developed and the amount of zoned land available for residential development.

4.1 HOUSING PERMITTED AND COMPLETED

Between 2007 and 2011 a total of 2,849 units were completed in County Longford. Table 4.1 compares predicted demand arising from the county's previous Housing Strategy with actual completion figures, obtained from the DoECLG. It illustrates a significant fall in housing completion rates in recent years, which fell from a peak of 1,579 units in 2007 to 89 units in 2011. The outstripping of predicted demand by actual supply between 2002 and 2008 mirrors the nationwide trend of accelerated housing output during this period.

[12] Based on previous Housing Strategies: Longford County Development Plan 2009-2015 and Longford County Development Plan 2003-2009

Table 4.1
Forecast Housing Demand and Actual Supply, 2002-2011

Year	Predicted Housing Demand [12]	Actual Units Completed	% Over/ Under Delivery
2002	604	735	+122%
2003	604	659	+109%
2004	604	909	+150.5%
2005	604	973	+161%
2006	604	1328	+220%
2007	453	1579	+349%
2008	453	584	+129%
2009	453	445	-2%
2010	453	152	-66.5%
2011	453	89	-80.4%

Table 4.2 provides a breakdown of completed units by type over the period 2005-2011. 56.5% of total completions over the 7 year period were on planned larger schemes, 34% were individual houses, while approximately 9% were apartments. The table also highlights the drop-off in apartment development relative to total completions in recent years.

Table 4.2
Housing Completions by type, 2005-2011

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Individual House [13]	364	417	382	270	162	92	63
Scheme House [14]	556	807	918	287	271	58	21
Apartment	53	104	279	27	12	2	5
Total	973	1328	1579	584	445	152	89

The above activity is further emphasised through the examination of housing units granted planning permission over the period. Since 2007, the number of schemes granted planning permissions has dropped by 90%, while within this, the overall number of units permitted has dropped by 96%. Table 4.3 below also highlights the shift in trends away from speculative development, and in particular flatted schemes, since 2007/2008.

Table 4.3
Annual Planning Permissions Granted in County Longford, 2007-2011

Year	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
Status	Granted (PPs)	No. Units	Granted (PPs)	No. Units	Granted (PPs)	No. Units	Granted (PPs)	No. Units	Granted (PPs)	No. Units
Houses (Incl. Multi-Develop & One-off)	339	936	225	445	92	196	57	57	34	34
Flats/Apts.	9	31	4	7	3	3	1	1	2	2
Total Apartment	348	967	229	452	95	199	58	58	36	36
Annual % Inc/Decrease in Grants	-	-	-34.19%		-58.52%		-38.95%		-37.93%	
Cumulative Amount %	-	-	-34.19%		-92.71%		-131.66%		-169.59%	

13 Bungalows and detached housing
14 Semi-detached and terraced housing
15 2,335 units divided by 11 years.

4.2 HOUSING TARGETS

The revised population forecasts of the RPGs establish a housing target for Longford of 2,335 units by 2022 (from 2011), the equivalent of 212[15] units per annum. Using the 2011 figures as the baseline, a total of 2,120 units must be delivered over the intervening years to the end of the plan period in 2021.

Longford County Council has an obligation to ensure that sufficient zoned residential land is available throughout the lifetime of the Development Plan and beyond to meet anticipated needs and allow for an element of choice in the market. DoECLG guidance *Development Plans - Guidelines for Planning Authorities* formalises this requirement, by stipulating that enough land should be made available to meet residential needs for the next 9 years.

In line with that set out in Section 3, it is envisaged that the majority of new residential development will take place in Longford Town and the relevant housing land requirements should be guided by this principle. It is estimated that approximately 1,844 units will be delivered in Longford Town over the period to 2021, with the remainder (276 units) dispersed around the County. For the purposes of calculating the future land requirement to deliver on planned targets, a density of 30 dwellings per hectare has been applied to development in the urban town area, with a density of 12 dwellings per hectare applied elsewhere. Table 4.4 below summarises this requirement, as well as that covered by the regional planning guidelines period to 2022, disaggregating it down by planned delivery in Longford Town and the remainder of the County.

Table 4.4
Summary of Longford Housing Land Requirements by 2021

	Longford County Total	Longford Town	County Balance
Applicable Densities Per Hectare (ha)	-	30	12
Housing units required (by 2021)	2,120	1,844	276
Housing Land Requirement (by 2021(ha)[16])	84	61	23
Housing units required (Period to 2022)	2,335	2,031	304
Housing Land Requirement Period to 2022 (ha)	93	68	25

4.3 LAND SUPPLY

County Longford has approximately 154.7 hectares of zoned land purely for residential development which has not yet been built out[17]. This consists of approximately 82 hectares in Longford Town and approximately 72.7 hectares across the other principal settlements in the County. Based on the applied average densities for Longford Town and the remainder of the County, the available land is estimated to be capable of providing 3,332 units[18]. Translating this into population capacity, these residential lands could potentially cater for approximately 7,997 persons, based on an estimated average household size of 2.4[19]. Having regard to the above figures and the Council's obligation to accommodate 40% of the county balance in rural service settlements and the open countryside[20], this strategy concludes that there is sufficient zoned land in the county to address identified future housing requirements.

16 Excludes 50% headroom requirement for 2015-2021.
17 This excludes lands in the County's Strategic Reserve, as identified in the County Development Plan Core Strategy.
18 A breakdown of 2,460 units in Longford Town (at a density of 30 dwellings per hectare) and 872 units in the remainder of the county (at a density of 12 dwellings per hectare).
19 As per the RPG target by 2016.
20 As per the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region 2010-2022.

4.4
UNFINISHED HOUSING ESTATES SURVEY 2011

Table 4.5
Location of Unfinished Estates in Longford

An updated DoECLG survey into unfinished housing developments was undertaken in 2011 to provide important evidence on progress in addressing the issues raised by unfinished housing. The study indicated that while larger local authorities such as Cork and Dublin have the largest numerical levels of vacant housing, Longford (42 units) is among the highest in the Country for vacant houses per 1000 households[21].

Table 4.5 above illustrates the distribution pattern of unfinished estates in Longford, with 8 located within the legal boundary of Longford Town, 2 situated inside the town's environs and the remaining 73 dispersed across wider Longford County.

The units of most relevance to this strategy are those which are fully developed but vacant as these units can reasonably be expected to contribute to overall housing supply in the County. Of those estates surveyed and confirmed as complete, a total of 67 units were identified as vacant. Each unfinished residential development has distinct characteristics, context and mitigating issues, and responses, therefore, must be tailored to these circumstances. Longford County Council is positively engaging with all relevant parties to address related matters and while it is difficult to estimate the future outcomes of ongoing work at this stage, it is envisaged that solutions may contribute positively to future housing supply in the County in the medium to long term.

[21] Leitrim had the highest vacancy rate at 44 units 1000 households.

4.5
SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROVISION

In accordance with Section 9 of the Housing Act 1988, housing authorities are required to undertake an assessment of housing need in their administrative area. The assessment itself includes a broad range of categories encompassing the homeless; travellers; those in overcrowded or involuntary accommodation; people with disabilities etc. The latest assessment[22] determined that there was a net housing need for 803 social housing units within the town and county. The largest category of need by far is those unable to meet the cost of accommodation, which accounted for 61% of total identified need.

Table 4.6 draws together a summary of social and affordable housing provided in Longford County from 2007 to 2009, based on the DoECLG's Database Direct for Housing Statistics, 2013. A per annum average of 388 units were delivered between 2007-2009, with Longford Town Council accounting for approximately 15% of annual delivery over this period.

[22] Carried out by Longford County Council as of the 31st May 2013.

Table 4.6
Social and Affordable Housing Provision 2007-2009

Planning Authority	Year	(1) Completions and Acquisitions	(2) Voluntary and Cooperative Housing	(3) Rental Accom-modation Scheme	(4) Houses Available for Rent from Existing Stock	(5) Total Social Rented Accommo-dation	(6) Affordable Housing	Total Social and Affordable Housing Provision (i.e. 5+6)
Longford County Council	2007	138	4	64	74	280	19	299
	2008	94	7	116	106	323	30	353
	2009	115	14	89	119	337	3	340
Longford Town Council	2007	14	0	1	24	39	5	44
	2008	0	0	2	28	30	0	30
	2009	73	0	3	24	100	3	100
Total – LCC/LTC	2007	152	4	65	98	319	24	343
	2008	94	7	118	134	353	30	383
	2009	188	14	92	143	437	3	440

4.6
MEETING SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEMAND

As set out in Section 3 of this strategy, there is an identified need for approximately 197 social housing units over the plan period 2015-2021.

As table 4.6 above highlights, social and affordable housing has traditionally been addressed through a number of different means in Longford. At present, Longford County Council maintains a total of 1,427 social housing units. Within this, the total housing stock for Longford Town is 481 units. There are currently 493 people on the County Council waiting list and 269 on the Town Council waiting list.

In light of intended change to housing support mechanisms, deriving from the Government's Housing Policy Statement in 2011, it is considered necessary to assess options which may influence delivery over the Development Plan period. There are a number of avenues available to Local Authorities to address the identified demand for, and delivery of, social housing. These are briefly described as follows:

4.6.1
PROVISION OF SOCIAL HOUSING UNDER PART V

The provision of social housing under the traditional Part V mechanism will be seriously constrained in the short to medium term, not least given the marked decline in the volume of private house construction in recent years. Longford County Council acknowledges the ongoing review of Part V of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 which was announced in June 2011, but recognises the continued rationale for capturing planning gain for residential development through resourcing of social housing supports.

4.6.2
RENTAL ACCOMMODATION SCHEME, LEASING INITIATIVES AND HOUSING ASSIST PAYMENT

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is an initiative to cater for the accommodation needs of certain persons in receipt of rent supplement, normally for more than 18 months and who are assessed as having a long-term housing need. It involves Longford Local Authority paying the rent to the accommodation providers on behalf of the tenant. The Local Authority makes use of the private sector and engage in a contractual arrangement to secure medium term rented accommodation. The accommodation must meet certain standards and the landlord must be tax compliant and must register the tenancy with the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB).

The RAS initiative seeks to eliminate 'poverty traps' by providing the footing on which to access employment or up-skilling opportunities which may support broader accommodation options in the future. Unlike rent supplementation, tenants can remain in the scheme upon taking on full time employment, with a higher contribution towards the rent being sought as income increases.

There are currently 209 RAS tenants in Longford. Leasing initiatives involve Local Authorities entering into lease arrangements with private property owners for periods of between 6 months to 4 years.

4.6.3 PROVISION OF SOCIAL HOUSING WITH VOLUNTARY BODIES AND HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES

Approved non-profit housing bodies or voluntary housing associations also provide social housing and are formed for the purpose of relieving housing need and the provision and management of housing. They are established by a voluntary management board to benefit the community in which they are based, and are approved and funded by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Housing cooperatives can provide both social rented housing and housing to purchase. Housing cooperatives are self-help and jointly owned member/user housing associations or societies.

Projects undertaken may be in response to the needs of the elderly, people with disabilities, homeless persons or families and single people on low incomes. Some housing associations may be formed to specialise in meeting a particular housing need, others develop with broader aims.

The specific housing services offered will depend on the aims or concerns of the members, the needs of tenants as well as the financial and other resources available for both capital costs and ongoing management running costs. There will inevitably be some constraints on delivery of social housing units through this process given ongoing capital financial restrictions.

Longford County Council will continue to work in partnership with voluntary bodies and cooperatives, to optimise resources in acquiring and managing social housing. A summary of output in this area between 2006-2009 is set out in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7
Voluntary and Cooperative Housing Output for Longford County 2006-2009

Year	Voluntary and Co-operative Housing Output					
	Capital Assistance Scheme			Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme		
	No. Of Houses			No. Of Houses		
	Completed or Acquired	In Progress	Commenced	Completed or Acquired	In Progress	Commenced
2009	14	16	4	0	73	0
2008	7	26	6	0	73	0
2007	4	27	31	0	73	73
2006	5	0	5	0	0	0

4.6.4 CASUAL VACANCIES

A small number of Longford's housing stock will become available as new lettings annually through casual vacancies. It is expected that the number of casual vacancies will drop over the period of the Development Plan due to the Housing Authority not being in a position to construct new dwellings due to the current economic climate.

4.6.5 TEMPORARY HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION

In Longford, hostel accommodation has also been used as valuable temporary short term solution to address social accommodation needs. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul run St. Martha's and Bethany House on the Dublin Road in Longford, providing specialist accommodation for women and families (19 beds), and men (10 beds) who's needs are currently unmet.

4.6.6 PURCHASE OF NEW OR SECOND HAND DWELLINGS

The purchase of new or second hand dwellings will be limited by capital financial restrictions. In line with the wider housing market, sales executed under the Tenant Purchase Scheme have slowed in recent years, and this mechanism is thus envisaged to yield a total of c. 48 units (averaging the annual sales completed 2009-2012 and applying this to 2013-2019) over the Development Plan period (2013-2019). Tenant Purchase sales completed between 2009-2012 are outlined in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8
Tenant Purchase Sales 2009-2012

Year	Applications Received	Applications Progressed	Local Authority House Sales Completed
2009	18	14	7
2010	26	18	4
2011	77	44	5
2012	65	63	17
2013 (at 30/06/2013)	0	16	11

It is anticipated that Longford County Council will meet their identified social housing provision via a combination of all of the options set out above, having regard to any national guidance which may emerge over the life time of the strategy. In the potential absence of new build opportunities in the short term, all sources of supply from vacant and unfinished estates, unsold affordable units and the turnaround of casual vacancies will have to be explored in detail.

4.7 TRAVELLERS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In accordance with the Longford County Council Assessment of Housing Need carried out in May 2013, the housing needs of the following categories require special attention:

Travellers Accommodation
Under the Housing Acts 1966-1997, Local Authorities are responsible for the provision of accommodation, including serviced caravan sites, for Travellers. Longford has one of the largest concentrations of Travellers in the country. 744 Travellers were recorded in the County in the 2011 Census, the equivalent of 19.1 people out of every 1000 people, comparable to a national average of 6.4 Travellers per 1000. Each year, Longford County Council carries out a survey of all travellers resident within its functional area, which assists it in the provision of accommodation for traveller families. The current Longford County Council Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009-2013 sets out the Councils' strategy for provision of traveller accommodation and support services over a five year period in accordance with the Housing Traveller Accommodation Act, 1998. Table 4.9 sets out traveller families by accommodation type in the County, as documented in the current Traveller Accommodation Programme. A new programme will be prepared to cover the period 2014-2018, which will better inform specific accommodation needs for the Traveller community over the Development Plan period 2015-2021.

Table 4.9
Breakdown of Traveller Accommodation in Longford (2008)

Type of Accommodation Arrangement	No. of families
Roadside	1
Private Site	1
Sharing with Relatives	5
Private Rented	28
Rental Accommodation Scheme	12
Other (transfers/medical)	3
TOTAL	50

The most recent Longford Needs Assessment also identified 23 persons in need of social housing support that have some form of intellectual, physical, sensory or mental health disability. The 2011 Census figures highlighted a number of notable increases in age cohorts of 60 years and over[23] in the County. Looking forward, it is envisaged that greater levels of independent, semi-independent and supervised housing will be required. Longford County Council will endeavour to carry out specialist extensions and alterations to Local Authority houses to accommodate the needs of disabled persons and the elderly. Related Initiatives include the housing adaption grant and mobility aid grant.

[23] The population of 60-64 year olds increased by 28%, the population of 65-69 year olds by 34%, the population of 75-79 year olds increased by 16%, while the population of those aged 85 and over increased by 12.5%.

5 Housing Strategy Objectives

This section has evolved from the analysis of the housing issues that have emerged during the preparation of the strategy. Firstly, it outlines a number of broad principles that inform the overall approach to the strategy. Secondly, it formalises these aspects through a number of recommended housing objectives. The preparation of this section has necessitated a review of existing housing policy contained in the current development plan and the recommendations set out below are designed to build upon and complement that reviewed.

5.1 KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE HOUSING STRATEGY

- To work to deliver the population targets and population distributions set out in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Regions, having regard to the County's established settlement hierarchy as set out in the Longford County Development Plan;
- To promote socially balanced and inclusive communities in all housing areas across Longford;
- To provide for varying identified needs in the County with respect to housing typology, size and mix;
- To monitor the housing strategy, allowing for adequate consultation with those who are central to the implementation of the policies in the strategy.

5.2 DEVELOPMENT PLAN HOUSING OBJECTIVES

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) sets out clear requirements for the monitoring and review of local authority housing strategies. Section 95 subsection (1)(b) requires that a planning authority's development plan should include objectives to ensure that the housing strategy is implemented. These objectives should relate to:

- The existing and likely future need for social housing;
- The need to ensure the availability of housing for persons who have different levels of income;
- The need to provide different types and sizes of housing, to match, in so far as possible, the different types of households to be provided for;
- The special needs of the elderly and those with disabilities must be provided for; and
- The need to counteract social segregation in the provision of housing.

In light of the above, this Housing Strategy sets out the following housing objectives, which are to be incorporated into the respective plans of Longford County Council:

5.2.1 GENERAL HOUSING OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Council to plan positively for future housing requirements in the County in accordance with the population targets and distributions set out in the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region. In doing so, the Council will facilitate the expansion of existing settlements in a planned and coordinated fashion, ensuring that adequate provision of necessary infrastructure comes forward alongside development;

- Notwithstanding the above, housing shall be provided in rural areas where it promotes the economic role of these areas, negates isolation and promotes social inclusion;
- In response to the changing demographic profile of the County, it is the policy of the Council to seek the provision of a mix of housing types to ensure sustainable and balanced communities in town and village areas. This will include the provision of housing for the elderly, persons with disability, lone parents and travelling families. To facilitate this, the Council will require larger schemes to include a mix of house types and sizes, having regard to the prevailing nature of household formation and change, demographic change and related considerations in the County.
- It is Council policy to expect a high quality of design in all housing development having due regard to Government policy relating to sustainable development, which aims to reduce the demand for travel within existing settlements, and the need to respect and reflect the established character of rural areas.
- During the preparation of development plans and local area plans, the Local Authority will take into consideration the Department of Environment's register on Unfinished Housing Estates, in the interests of proper planning and sustainable development. Local Authorities will continue to work with developers and residents of private residential developments to address public safety and environmental improvements within these estates, as necessary.

5.2.2 GENERAL OBJECTIVES RELATING TO SOCIAL AND SPECIALIST HOUSING

- It is the policy of the Council to facilitate the provision of housing units to sufficiently cater for social and specialist housing needs over the plan period, as established in the County Housing Strategy.
- Provision of social and specialist housing shall be progressed through partnership working with voluntary and co-operative housing organisations, the Health Service Executive, as well as through agreements with private developers.
- In the interest of counteracting undue social segregation, the Council County will ensure that an appropriate balance between incomes, social, specialist and private (including private rented) housing is provided within communities. Decisions on leasing take up, RAS and on Part V percentage ratios on specific sites will be based on the existing housing profile and needs of the area.
- It is the policy of the planning authority to reserve 14% of all lands being developed in the urban area for residential use over the plan period for the purpose of addressing the requirement for social housing under Part V.
- As outlined above, percentage reservation for Part V shall be decided on the basis of individual site assessment. Criteria to be taken into account will include the type and location of the housing units required by the planning authority at a given time, as defined by the priority housing list by the Housing Section and the existing mix of housing classes in the area.
- It is the policy of the Council to promote and support the development of housing for older people and those with disabilities, including the concept of independent living and the development of 'lifecycle housing' i.e. housing that is adaptable for people's needs as they change over their lifetime.
- The County Council will seek to provide appropriate accommodation for Travellers through the continued implementation of the Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme.

5.3 STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

To ensure the successful implementation of this Housing Strategy, it is necessary to keep it under review. Therefore, not more than two years after the making of the Development Plan, the Chief Executive will give a report to members on the progress achieved in implementing the Housing Strategy and the Development Plan objectives. Where the report indicates that new or revised housing needs have been identified, the Chief Executive may recommend that the Housing Strategy be amended and the Development Plan varied accordingly.

6
Conclusion

The Housing Strategy has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) as a basis to address the following key issues:

- The identification of housing need within County Longford;
- The identification of social and specialist housing needs within the County;
- The identification of supply side requirements to satisfy identified needs, including the consideration of appropriate land zoning in Longford;
- The consideration of specific policy response to the above.

The preparation of this strategy has included the assessment of all relevant and up-to-date publications and data resources, which have been analysed in detail to provide a robust basis for future policy development and implementation. In addition to meeting the statutory requirement for its production, this strategy ensures that the proper planning and sustainable development of Longford provides for the housing needs of existing and future populations in an appropriate manner.

ANNEX →

Annex 2: Retail Strategy

Executive Summary

The Longford County Retail Strategy 2015-2021 has been compiled as part of the review and update of the County Development Plan.

It represents a reassessment of the County's previous retail strategy, which was prepared during a period of considerable growth in the national retail market.

This strategy has been produced in a very different economic context and while it clearly illustrates the impacts which the recession has had on the retail market in the County, importantly, it also evidences the economic resilience of Longford's retailers and its economy. This report offers plenty of encouragement for the future development of the retail sector in Longford and provides a strong basis for policy development in this area.

The main purpose of the Longford County Retail Strategy 2015-2021 is to ensure that the development of retail floorspace within the County is grounded in an evidence based framework during its six year lifecycle. In this way, the development of additional retail floorspace can be assessed against a set of clearly defined and evidence based criteria. This will allow for the development of a healthy retailing environment within County Longford which reinforces the vitality of its urban centres and facilitates competition in both the County itself and within the wider Midland Region.

The main findings and recommendations of this retail strategy include:

- Longford Town retains the majority of retail floorspace within the County, and remains at the top of the Longford County Retail Hierarchy;
- The findings of healthcheck analysis exercises on each of the main settlements within County Longford indicates that while there has been a decline in economic activity, all have retained their overall functionality and continue to provide the required services to their residents and hinterlands;
- Vacancy, as it manifested itself during the duration of the study (2013), is becoming an emerging problem in peripheral areas of the four main settlements of the County;
- The overall vacancy rate within County Longford is currently 17.73%;
- Of the three retail categories, the level of vacancy is highest in the comparison retail floorspace category, with 19.32% of all such floorspace within the County currently vacant;
- Since 2007, only 697 square metres of additional retail floorspace has been built[1];
- Planning permission for 14,673 square metres of retail floorspace has now expired having not been implemented;
- Planning permission for a further 514 square metres of retail floorspace is due to expire before the 1st of January 2015, if not renewed or implemented prior to expiration;
- There is a requirement for at least an additional 2,000, square metres of convenience, 1,500 square metres comparison and 4,500 square metres of bulky goods retail floorspace between 2015 and 2021.

[1] This excludes the Longford Town Centre development which commenced pre 2007.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 FUNCTION OF THE UPDATED LONGFORD RETAIL STRATEGY

This retail strategy has been prepared by Future Analytics Consulting Ltd. on the behalf of Longford Local Authority in accordance with provisions set out in the 'Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities' published by Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DoECLG) in 2012.

The overriding aim of the strategy is to create the appropriate conditions necessary to foster a healthy and vibrant retail environment in County Longford over the Development Plan period of 2015-2021. It does so through retail policy recommendations which are framed in the context of national and regional plans, strategies and guidelines. The strategy provides important information on the quantum, scale and types of retail development required over the period to 2021, with further outlook to 2024.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The County's previous Retail Strategy 2009-2015 was prepared during a period of considerable growth in the national retail market. This strategy has been produced in a very different economic context, both nationally and locally in Longford, with consumer sentiment and activity in the retail sector subdued, comparable with levels of growth previously experienced. High levels of market uncertainty, the changing nature of the retail industry, high vacancy rates and credit considerations are key elements which typify the current retail market and the applied methodology considers these aspects in detail.

The key objectives of this retail strategy are as follows:

- Define the retail hierarchy in the County and related retail core boundaries;
- Undertake a health check appraisal of the key retail centres in Longford, to ascertain the need for interventions in these areas;
- Identify the broad requirement for additional retail floorspace development in the County over the plan period, to support the established settlement hierarchy, and;
- Provide guidance on policy recommendations and criteria for the future assessment of retail development proposals over the Development Plan Period 2015-2021.

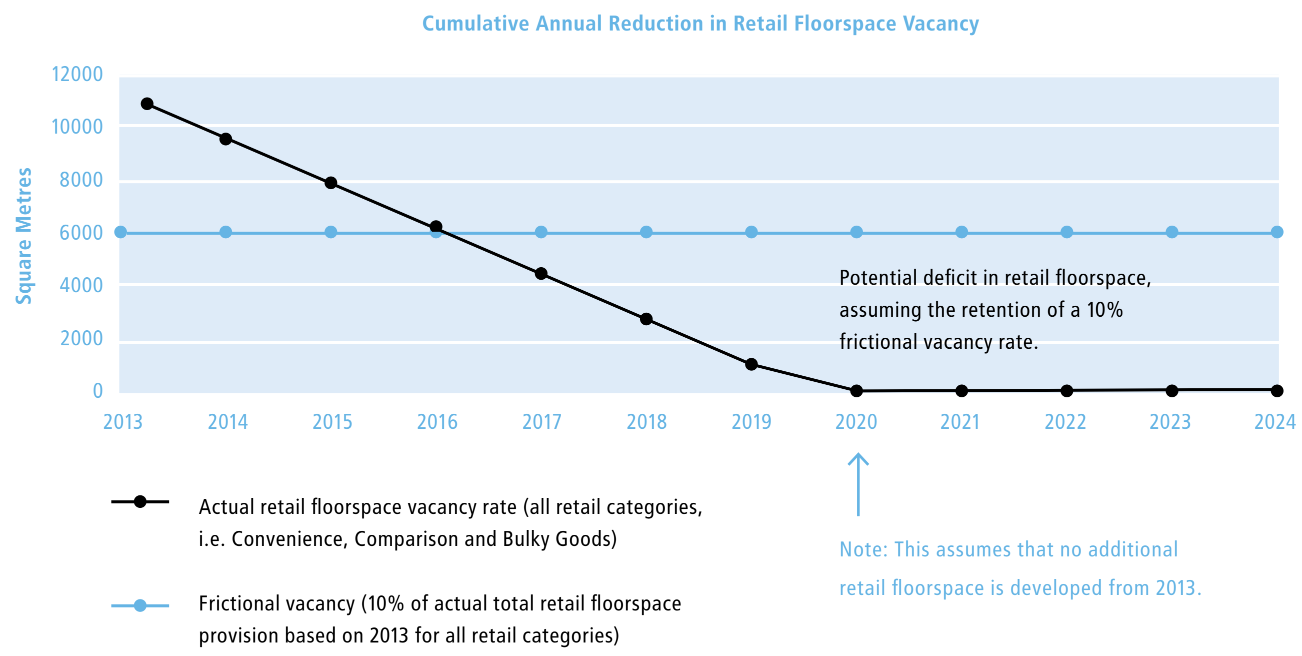
A key intention was to produce a succinct and readable strategy document. To avoid duplication with content in the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021, this document does not include a chapter setting out the background policy context.

1.2.1 CONSIDERATION OF VACANCY

The preparation of the Longford County Retail Strategy considered retail floorspace vacancy in detail. A survey of existing floorspace in the County was undertaken, which identified a cumulative total of 10,745 square metres of vacancy, across convenience, comparison and bulky retail categories. This equates to 17.73% of total retail floorspace in the County. Based on market insights, a frictional vacancy rate of 10% was held across the respective categories to foster competition in the market and the residual total was fed in the calculated demand model. Identified demand over the plan period was subsequently rationalised on the basis of this vacancy to determine adjusted floorspace requirements. The modelled outputs illustrate that there is no identified need for additional comparison or bulky goods floorspace until 2017, taking account of existing levels of vacancy.

In undertaking the review of the Longford County Retail Strategy 2009-2015, Longford County Council has sought to take a proactive approach to addressing the issue of retail floorspace vacancy, while remaining cognisant of their responsibility to facilitate growth in retail and general economic activity within the county. The Retail Strategy has taken a cumulative approach to depleting vacant floorspace, while accommodating additional floorspace where it is required. The graph below illustrates how the existing vacancy will be absorbed over the lifecycle of the strategy. This graph which is a composite of the three retail categories, illustrates the frictional vacancy level (i.e. 10%) and the cumulative reduction (i.e. for all three retail categories) in vacant retail floorspace, as well as highlighting a potential deficit in retail floorspace which may occur post 2016 period to meet projected demand if there is no additional provision of retail floorspace based on that provided in 2013. This frictional vacancy level is based on market insights and is intended to foster competition, and to enable Longford County Council to accommodate growth and maintain retail functionality and economic activity. It is projected within the Retail Strategy, and as illustrated in the graph, that there will be no requirement for additional retail floorspace in any of the three retail categories prior to 2016, taking account for the maintenance of a 10% frictional vacancy rate.

Fig 1.1:
Graph illustrating the cumulative annual reduction in retail floorspace over the lifetime of the Longford County Retail Strategy 2015-2021.



1.3
DEFINITION OF RETAIL TYPOLOGIES

Annex 1 of the 2012 Retail Planning Guidelines provides clear guidance on the classification of the two types of retail goods categories, convenience and comparison, and defines each category as follows:

Convenience
This category includes all supermarkets, smaller convenience stores and retail food outlets (excluding fast food takeaways, restaurants and cafes) serving food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, tobacco and non-durable household goods.

Comparison
The list of goods which fall under this category is as follows: clothing and footwear, furniture, furnishings and household equipment (excluding non-durable household goods), medical and pharmaceutical products, therapeutic appliances and equipment, educational and recreation equipment and accessories, books, newspapers and magazines, goods for personal care, goods not elsewhere classified and *bulky goods.*

Bulky Goods - While the bulky goods category is listed under the classification of comparison floorspace above, it is considered appropriate to make a distinction within the Retail Study between pure comparison floorspace and floorspace used for the sale of bulky goods. The Annex 1 definition includes a list of goods which are considered to fall within the bulky goods category as follows: Goods generally sold from retail warehouses where DIY goods or goods such as flat pack furniture are of such a size that they would normally be taken away by car and not be portable by customers travelling by foot, cycle or bus, or that a large area would be required to display them e.g. repair and maintenance materials, furniture and furnishings, carpets and other floor coverings, household appliances, tools and equipment for the house and garden, bulky nursery furniture and equipment including perambulators, bulky pet products such as kennels and aquariums, audio visual, photographic and information processing equipment, catalogue shops and other bulky durables for recreation and leisure. However, the Guidelines state that 'the list is not exhaustive – bulky goods not mentioned in the list should be dealt with on their merits in the context of the definition of bulky goods').

1.4
REVISED REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES FOR THE MIDLAND REGION POPULATION PROJECTIONS

The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region 2010-2022 (RPG) set a 2016 population target of 39,392 people for County Longford. High levels of housing delivery and significant in-migration to the County has resulted in the 2016 target being exceeded in advance of the forecasted period. A revised population target for 2022 of 44,603 people has subsequently been agreed with the Midland Regional Authority Technical Working Group, and this target provides the basis for population modelling carried out in this strategy.

1.5
THE RETAIL HIERARCHY

The Retail Planning Guidelines require that retail development and activity must follow the settlement hierarchy of the State. They outline that retail functions tend to reflect broad tiers of urban development including Metropolitan, Regional, Sub-Regional (including District Centres within larger urban areas) as well as Small Towns and Rural Areas.

1.5.1
NATIONAL SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY

The Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities published by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in April 2012 advocated strict guidance in relation to the sustainable organisation of retail activity in Ireland to reflect the existing national settlement structure. Taking account of historical patterns, in addition to preceding retail planning policies, this retail hierarchy reflected the broad tiers of urban development and recognised that such a system of classification is indicative only, with scope for overlap between the specific retail functions provided in each tier. The **Metropolitan level** of the retail hierarchy applies to the higher-level settlements of Dublin City, Cork, Limerick/ Shannon, Galway and Waterford and provides the broadest range of comparison goods shopping, including higher-order comparison and specialist retail functions. The **Regional level** of retail provision focuses upon the tier of Gateways, Hub Towns and other large settlements and provides for high-level regional retailing functions in localities including Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar, Ballina/Castlebar, Kilkenny, Mallow and Clonmel. The **Sub-Regional level** of the retail hierarchy, which incorporates Longford town, outlines the importance of such settlements in the provision of retail functions at the level of individual counties and how they will frequently feature many key comparison and convenience multiples. The **District Centre level** incorporates the designated urban growth centres of the Gateways, Hubs and large towns providing them with essential services, in addition to an appropriate level of retailing and amenities to serve their population catchments. The **Small Towns and Rural Areas level** of the hierarchy is characterised by basic convenience shopping functions and some limited incidences of comparison shopping. The final **Local Shopping level** tier applies to neighbourhood and suburban village stores, post-offices, casual trading and farmers' markets.

1.5.2
LONGFORD RETAIL HIERARCHY

The purpose of the retail hierarchy is to indicate the level and form of retailing activity appropriate to the various urban centres in the County. Taking a criteria-based approach enables the Council to protect each centre's overall vitality and viability whilst allowing each centre to perform its overall function within the County's settlement hierarchy.

It is the core concept of the retail hierarchy that the principal urban areas (county towns) are supported by key service towns and to a lesser extent local service towns and villages. As such this retail strategy focuses primarily on the upper levels of the hierarchy. It is important to note that this is not to deter or discourage smaller scale retail development and investment in the smaller villages. Rather, it is important to set a clear hierarchy which identifies where the distribution of new retail floorspace should be delivered and which is appropriate in scale and character to the hierarchical role of the centre.

The Longford County Retail Strategy 2009-2015, which was itself an update of the preceding retail strategy, established a three tier retail hierarchy, and was based on what was then the extant retail policy framework that existed within the County (2004). The adoption in 2012 of the Longford Core Strategy introduced a new and much revised settlement hierarchy, which is illustrated in Fig 1.2, below.

Fig 1.2:
Longford Settlement Hierarchy, as taken from Longford Core Strategy

Longford – Principal Town
Granard – Key Service Town
Edgeworthstown – Service Town
Ballymahon & Lanesboro – Local Service Towns
Village Network – Serviced settlements & rural serviced settlements

Taking account of the recently revised settlement hierarchy, as published within the Longford Core Strategy, the revised retail hierarchy consisting of five tiers has been adopted for inclusion in this strategy. This new retail hierarchy has been informed by the latest Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, published in 2010, and the Retail Planning Guidelines, published in 2012. The revised Longford County Retail Hierarchy is set out as follows:

Table 1.1:
Updated Longford County Retail Hierarchy

Hierarchy Level	Retail Hierarchy Settlement Designation	Settlements
Tier I	Principal Town	Longford
Tier II	Key Service Town	Granard
Tier III	Service Town	Edgeworthstown
Tier IV	Local Service Towns	Ballymahon, Lanesboro
Tier V	Villages, Rural Serviced Settlements and Hinterlands	Villages, small settlements and the Open Country side of County Longford

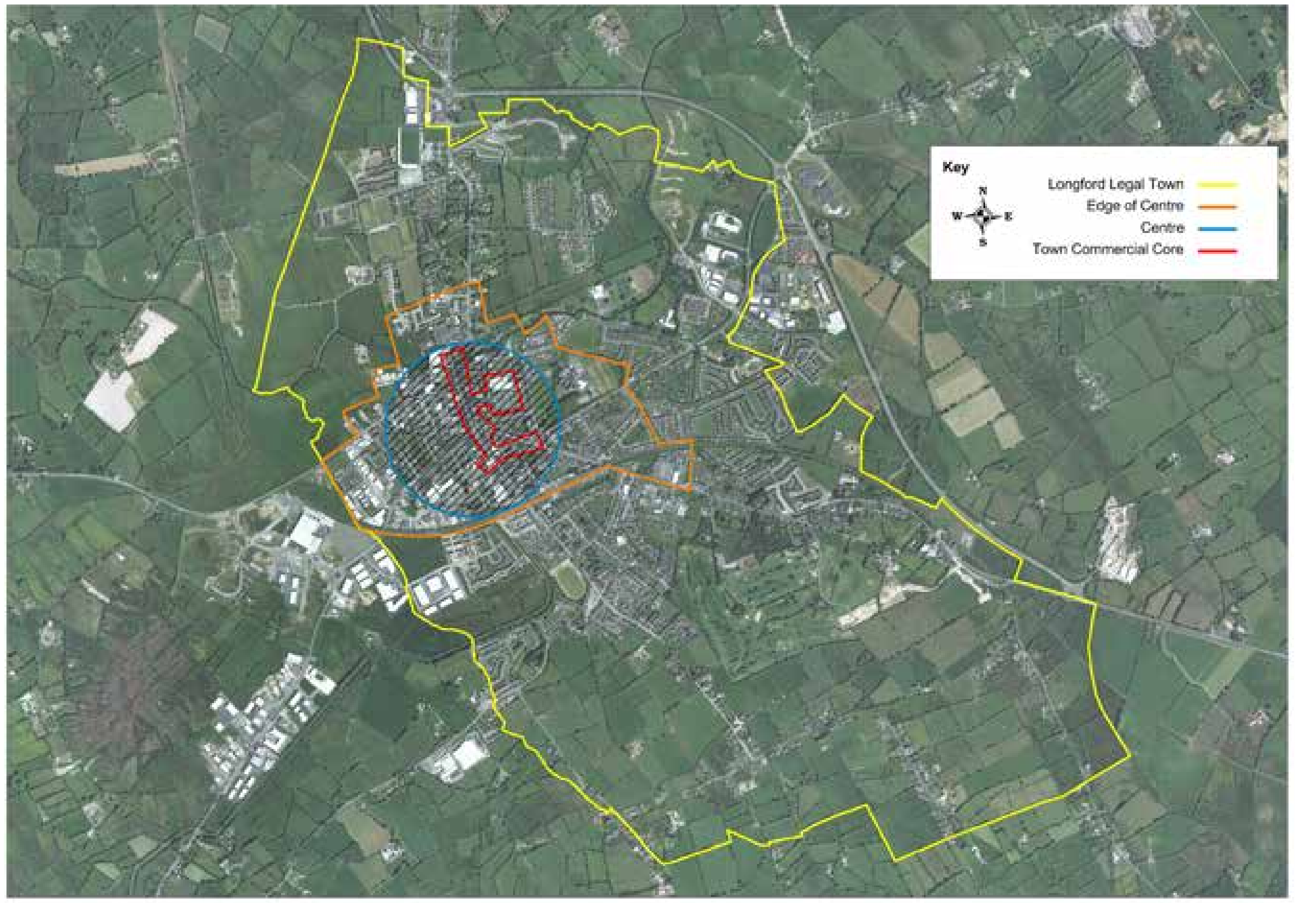
1.6
CORE RETAIL AREAS

A key policy objective of the Retail Planning Guidelines is the promotion of greater vitality in town centres through the implementation of a sequential approach to the location of all subsequent retail development. This sequential approach prioritises development within city and town centres or 'core areas' at the expense of more peripheral edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations, which traditionally have poorer functional and spatial linkages with the core. This approach recognises the importance of core areas as the most suitable locations for higher order fashion and comparison goods, as they are easily accessible for the majority of the catchment population and also provide a compact and sustainable critical mass of commercial activity and public amenities, thereby reducing the need to travel.

The assessment of the County's retail centres carried out under the previous Longford Retail Strategy Review made significant changes to the retail morphology of Longford Town by identifying a much larger Core Retail Area than had existed in previous strategies. This had been justified due to the unprecedented growth in the local population, retail offer and economic growth, which was seen as having necessitated a significant expansion of the core shopping area.

However, the economic downturn and rising levels of commercial vacancy in the intervening period, has effectively halted the advance of retail activity outwards from the commercial core and has reversed this trend, with such activity once again becoming predominantly clustered around the historic commercial core which has traditionally centred on Main Street. This trend has necessitated a rethink in policy terms and, as such, in this Retail Strategy the Council has sought to respond by redefining and resetting the Core Retail Area of Longford Town.

This revised Core Retail Area reflects the dense clustering of key commercial activities and is bounded by the primary thoroughfares of Main Street to the West and Dublin Street to the South, and by the secondary thoroughfare of Ballymahon Street to the South West. In accordance with the guidance on the location of all new retail activity set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines, Longford Town's Core Retail Area is to be the focus and preferred location for retail development during the plan period.



2.0 Retail Trend Analysis and Assessment of Competing Centres

2.1 CURRENT RETAIL TRENDS

The Retail Economy

The retail sector is a vital element of the Irish economy. Nationally, there are 275,000 people employed in the provision of retail services, which equates to the cumulative equivalent of the total number of those employed in ICT, agriculture, forestry and fishing, in addition to the financial and insurance sectors. Regionally, many of the largest towns exhibit the broadest retail offer, in keeping with the retail hierarchy set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.

This is not to discount the role of smaller towns and settlements, where the provision of retail services is often the life blood of communities, fulfilling the important role of providing local goods and services to the population and the surrounding rural hinterlands.

At present, retail sales remain subdued. Since the economic boom, sales have fallen by 25%. The hardest hit sectors have been furniture and lighting, books, newspapers and stationery, household equipment, hardware paints and glass, and electrical goods. This has led to a loss of about 50,000 jobs, directly impacting on communities and exchequer revenues. The effects of the recession has had a negative impact on many towns throughout Ireland, with contracting local economies no longer able to support the retail offer which had developed previously. This has resulted in an increase in vacancy rates within many towns and counties and impacted on the attractiveness of many areas as retail destinations.

Assessment of the most recent Retail Sales Index, published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO)[2] for July 2013, indicates that there had been an increase in the value of national retail sales, both in comparison with the previous months and with July 2012. In July 2013, the retail sales value index stood at 91.0[3], compared with 85.8 in June 2013 and 87.2 twelve months earlier in July 2012. However, it is worth noting that the overall retail sales index figures illustrate that there has been a continuous decline in the values of retail sales since 2008, falling from a peak of 110.8 in 2008. This decline has become less marked since 2010, but there was still an annual decrease of approximately one index point between 2010 and 2012. The fourth quarter of 2012 saw a slight recovery to 88.7 over the preceding quarters, but the first quarter of 2013 coincided with the third consecutive quarter of negative economic growth, as the country slipped back into a recession[4]. It is within this context that these figures represent some of the most substantial increases in the retail sales index since 2009, and only the second month since October 2010 that the index has been in excess of 90.

These increases have been attributed to a number of factors such as the good weather experienced over the summer months[5], and the reform of the motor vehicle registration system to break the year into two separate periods for the purposes of registering new vehicles. However, irrespective of the underlying reasons for this increase, it is hoped that this could mark the beginning of a sustained period of gradual economic growth.

The impacts of the decline in national retail sales and overall economic activity have disproportionately affected independent retailers, many of whom would have had higher costs bases than the multiples with which they competed. In the case of convenience retailers, many of the independent retailers who remain are now opting to join the multiple franchise groups. This has led to a proliferation of homogenous shop front designs and colour schemes replacing the more individual shop-fronts which have long been a distinctive feature of the typical Irish streetscape.

[2] CSO, 'Retail Sales Index', July 2013, 29/08/2013.

[3] These figures represent the value of all sales, inclusive of the Motor Trades. The base year for the index is 2005, when the value of retail sales was set at 100. The value of retail sales increased in both 2006 and 2007 before declining substantially in 2009 (from 110.8 in 2008 to 90.9 in 2009).

[4] O'Brien, D., 'Ireland's economy lurches back into recession', Irish Times, 27/06/2013.

[5] Anderson, N., 'Good weather brings out the sun for shops as food sales get a boost', Irish Independent, 29/06/2013, and Newenham, P, 'Retailers report boost in sales of garden furniture, barbecues and ice cream', Irish Times, 12/07/2013.

The Changing Nature of Retail Services in Ireland

The challenges the sector faces also goes beyond economic contractions and weakened domestic demand, due to the changing nature of shopping habits. The continued growth of online shopping is mirroring a shift in consumption patterns. A number of factors driving growth in this sector include customers' appetite for value for money and greater variety, the increased usage of mobile devices, improved security and convenience, as well as increased marketing and use of social media promoting online campaigns. In Ireland, an estimated 43% of people between the ages of 16 and 74 made purchases on the internet in 2011[6]. With an average expenditure in excess of €1,000[7], the most popular online purchases for Irish households in 2011 were 'other travel arrangements' (30%) and 'holiday accommodation (28%). 20% of online purchases in Ireland were for 'clothes or sports goods' and 14% were in 'films/music'.

One significant trend which has impacted on the viability of retail services in Irish centres, and especially town centres, has been the drive by retailers to increase the size of the floor plates in which they operate, precipitating the move towards out of town shopping centres and retail parks. Out of town or edge of centre retail has become a growing feature of the Irish retail offer since the 1980s but there has been a significant increase in the number of such centres, as well as in their size and scale since the early 2000s. These shopping centres and retail parks have become a feature of many urban centres throughout the country, consisting of a mixture of retailers catering to consumer demands for convenience, comparison and bulky goods. The proliferation of out of town shopping centres and retail parks has also coincided with the increasing market presence of large European and UK multinational multiples in the Irish market.

These trends, coupled with the difficult economic conditions, has seen sizeable increases in vacancy rates within town centres, as some retailers close and others simply move to alternative locations which better fulfil their requirements. Those that remain are forced to compete for the shrinking market share as the retail attraction of the town diminishes. The provision of parking has become another issue of note, as many towns now impose parking charges which are not applicable in out of town centres. Despite the cap on the size of retail units imposed by the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012, there remains a demand for larger multiple convenience retail units within most parts of the country. This is reflected in the large number of established convenience retailers now offering a growing proportion of comparison goods within their stores.

[6] CSO, 2012

[7] IMR Smart Knowledge Base, 2011)

In the case of the larger scale multiples, this move towards the provision of comparison goods is a reflection of the policy of increasing diversification which many are pursuing in an attempt to obtain a greater market share. These multiples are continuing to broaden the range of comparison goods which are available from their stores. Tesco in particular, who have the majority share of the national convenience trade within Ireland have become increasingly involved in the comparison market over the last decade. In addition they are also increasing their presence in the small and medium scale convenience market as emphasised by a recent announcement of five new stores in the cities of Dublin and Cork[8].

Table 2.1:
Multiple share of the Irish convenience market[9].

Retailer	Market Share (%)
Tesco	27.7
Dunnes Stores	21.9
Super Valu	19.7
Lidl	7.1
Aldi	6.7
Superquinn	5.5

The anticipated increase in online sales may have a significant impact on the future demand for retail floorspace in the medium to longer term. Some industry experts predict that the need for larger convenience/comparison stores will subside as an upward trend in home deliveries gathers pace. At present, a large proportion of the main high street comparison retailers and three of the six major convenience retailers offer online shopping with home delivery as an alternative to in-store shopping, with many multiple retail chains giving increasing priority to online aspects of their offer[10]. It remains to be seen if future trends in this area will provide for increased demand for storage and distribution facilities.

[8] McCabe, S., 'Tesco Jobs boost with 7 new stores', Irish Independent, 17/09/2013.

[9] Mulligan, J., 'Aldi and Lidl boost market share as Tesco loses ground', Irish Independent, 25/06/2013.

[10] Kelpie, C., 'Anxious time for workers as some Argos stores to close', Irish Independent, 25/10/2012.

2.2 ASSESSMENT OF COMPETING RETAIL CENTRES

Accessibility

The retail industry market is highly competitive and Longford's location relative to national transport linkages is a primary consideration in this regard. Two National Primary Routes, the N4 and the N5, which connect the West and East Coasts, converge on the County, in addition to the rail line linking Sligo to Dublin. The presence of these infrastructural links, which have undergone significant upgrades in the last decade, has made the urban centres of the Greater Dublin Area much more accessible than was previously the case. It is now possible to travel between Longford Town and Dublin City Centre in 82 minutes by car and 110 minutes by train, while the travel times from Longford to retail centres such as the Liffey Valley Centre or the Blanchardstown Centre by car can be as little as 74 minutes. A summary table of the various distances and travel times between the main urban centres of Longford and those which they compete with is presented below.

Figure 2.2:
Summary table of distances and travel times by road between the main urban centres of County Longford and the main urban and retail centres with which they compete[11].

		Longford	Granard	Edgeworthstown	Ballymahon
Athlone Town Centre	Distance	46km	54km	41km	22km
	TIme	43 minutes	48 minutes	37 minutes	22 minutes
Blanchardstown Centre	Distance	116km	115km	102km	106km
	TIme	1 hour 16 minutes	1 hour 14 minutes	1 hour 3 minutes	1 hour 12 minutes
Cavan Town Centre	Distance	56km	29km	42km	61km
	TIme	52 minutes	28 minutes	40 minutes	55 minutes
Dublin City Centre	Distance	119km	118km	105km	109km
	TIme	1 hour 24 minutes	1 hour 22 minutes	1 hour 11 minutes	1 hour 21 minutes
Dundrum Town Centre	Distance	127km	127km	114km	118km
	TIme	1 hour 24 minutes	1 hour 31 minutes	1 hour 11 minutes	1 hour 21 minutes
Liffey Valley Retail Park	Distance	109km	109km	96km	99km
	TIme	1 hour 14 minutes	1 hour 12 minutes	1 hour	1 hour 11 minutes
Mullingar	Distance	43km	43km	26km	30km
	TIme	37 minutes	35 minutes	24 minutes	26 minutes
Sligo Town Centre	Distance	90km	109km	103km	111km
	TIme	1 hour 14 minutes	1 hour 32 minutes	1 hour 24 minutes	1 hour 34 minutes

Figure 2.3:
Summary table of the travel times between the urban centres of County Longford which feature rail links and the available competing centres served by the same rail lines[12].

	Longford	Edgeworthstown
Dublin City Centre	1 hour 50 minutes	1 hour 35 minutes
Mullingar	30 minutes	18 minutes
Sligo	1 hour 25 minutes	1 hour 35 minutes

[11] Travel times and distances taken from Google Maps.

[12] Time table and rail travel time information current as of 22/10/2013, as obtained from Irish Rail website.

Competing Centres

In evaluating the retail alternatives which currently exist within easy access to the main settlements of County Longford, such as the Liffey Valley Shopping Centre and Retail Park, Dublin City Centre, or Athlone, it is clear that these regional retail attractors are amongst the biggest competition to the existing retail offer in the County.

Liffey Valley Shopping Centre

The Liffey Valley Shopping Centre and Retail Park (illustrated below) is a principal alternative destination owing to its convenient location and ease of access from the N4, in addition to its sizeable retail offering. The shopping centre itself offers a range of national multiples, including Carraig Donn, Dunnes, Easons and Lifestyle Sports, as well as large international comparison multiples such as Coast, H&M, HMV, Oasis, River Island and Topshop. The adjacent retail park includes Argos, B&Q, Carpet Right and Halfords, all of which would be classified as being within the bulky goods retail category. In addition to the retail offering, there are also other leisure amenities available, including a large multi-screen cinema as well as numerous restaurants and eateries. Unlike many of the more recent out of town retail parks which have been developed in the last number of years, there are no large convenience multiples located within this complex.

Blanchardstown Centre

The Blanchardstown Centre is recognised as one of the primary retail locations in the wider Dublin Region, and due to its location only a short distance from the M50, is easily accessible to people travelling from County Longford. As with Liffey Valley, the Blanchardstown Centre offers an abundance of free parking spaces within an extensive shopping centre and retail park complex.

The shopping centre offers a number of the large multiples, both Irish and international, and includes some of the largest department stores within the country such as Penneys, Debenhams and Marks & Spencers. As with the Liffey Valley Centre, it also plays host to a range of both Irish (including Dunnes, Easons, Lifestyle Sports and Newbridge Silverware) and internationally (French Connection, Oasis, River Island and Zara) based multiples. In addition, within the retail park there are a variety of convenience, comparison and bulky goods category retailers, including Atlantic Homecare, Harvey Norman, Mothercare, Next, Tesco and Mr. Price. This substantial retail offering is further reinforced by a wide range of other amenities including a multi screen cinema, bowling facilities, restaurants and eateries, a hotel and a library.

Dublin City Centre

The retail offering of Dublin City Centre, in keeping with its position at the top of the national retail hierarchy (as set out within the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012[13]) is the largest within the country. As with both Liffey Valley and the Blanchardstown Centre, the improvements in infrastructural linkages have enhanced the attraction of the city as a shopping destination to wider catchments across the country. The retail offering, which is located throughout a number of large shopping centres (including the Ilac Centre, the Jervis Centre and the Stephen's Green Shopping Centre), as well as shopping districts (such as the Grafton Street, illustrated below, and Henry Street areas) features a number of large department stores as well as flagship stores of many national and international comparison retailers.

Unlike the free parking provided in competing out-of-centre or suburban centres such as the Liffey Valley Shopping Centre and the Blanchardstown Centre, parking is not free and can be relatively expensive. However, critically this does not undermine its attraction as there are significant alternative modes of transport available, with regular train services available from both Longford Town and Edgeworthstown to and from Dublin City Centre to Connolly or Pearse Street Stations, as well as direct bus links from Longford Town to Dublin by both public and private operators.

13 Retail Planning Guidelines, Section 2.2.1, page 11.

14 Time table and bus travel time information for Bus Éireann route no. 466 current as of 22/10/2013, as obtained from Bus Éireann website.

Athlone

The town of Athlone is considered to be one of the primary shopping destinations within the Midland Region. Boasting a healthy and vibrant town centre, Athlone offers significant competition to retailers operating in the urban centres of County Longford. The opening of a substantial shopping centre within the town centre in 2007 supplemented the strong retail offer already in existence at Golden Island Shopping Centre. In addition, there is a sizeable retail park located on the periphery of the town on the Old Dublin Road which serves as a location to support a number of retail warehouse type operations providing a range of goods from convenience, comparison and bulky retail categories. The town offers a mixture of free and pay parking facilities, which offer substantial choice for those travelling by car, and there is a dedicated bus route which operates between Longford Town and the centre of Athlone on a daily basis[14]. The retail offer of the town itself is located within quite a compact area, with both shopping centres located within or close to the commercial core of the town. Amongst the retailers who operate from the town are comparison retailers Barratts, Clarks, Easons, and Oasis, with most of the main convenience retailers also having a substantive presence within the town.

Mullingar

Mullingar, like Athlone, is easily accessible from County Longford, due to the presence of the N4. As with many of the large regional towns over the last decade, both the retail offering and available floorspace of Mullingar has increased substantially. New shopping centres, such as the Fairgreen Shopping Centre located on the edge of the town centre, have improved choice significantly.

Mullingar, in spite of having a slightly smaller retail offering than that of Athlone, still represents a substantial alternative to shopping in County Longford. There are a number of the large scale comparison multiples, including Pennys, as well as a sizeable number or smaller multiples independent comparison retailers operating within the town.

Other Competing Centres

The Dundrum Town Centre, a more recent addition to the retail landscape of Dublin which first opened in 2005, is one of the largest shopping centres in the country. Unlike its competitors, the Liffey Valley or Blanchardstown Shopping Centres, Dundrum is slightly less accessible from County Longford, owing to its location approximately 1.5km from the Ballinteer exit off the M50. The shopping centre itself features in excess of 70,000sqm of retail floorspace, spread over 100 stores, which provides a wide ranging and diverse retail offer that includes high-end department stores alongside large convenience multiples.

Cavan Town also offers competition to retailers located in the North of County Longford, such as Granard. In addition to the substantial retail offering of the town centre itself, there are a number of retail parks which accommodate a number of large scale comparison and bulky goods retailers, with most of the main convenience multiples also having a presence in the town.

Sligo Town's location relative to centres in Longford means that retail competition only really extends itself to those people who are travelling to Sligo for other purposes, who may subsequently conduct their retail business there. Sligo town currently features two shopping centres, both of which are centrally located within the town. There are also a number of retail parks, located on the edge of the town at Carraroe and Cleveragh.

3.0 Health Check Analysis

3.1 RETAIL HEALTH CHECK ANALYSIS OF COUNTY LONGFORD

Retailing and the provision of retail services is one of the primary functions of any urban settlement. This healthcheck analysis has been undertaken to evaluate the retail functions of the main urban settlements of County Longford, assessing the attraction, accessibility and amenity of each centre with the aim of making evidence-based recommendations regarding future actions for their improvement. These actions will be formulated to reinforce the existing retail offering within each of the towns, and where possible expand it, through the suggestion of issues to be addressed or measures to be continued or extended.

Each of the primary settlements within County Longford has been assigned a position within both the settlement hierarchy and the retail hierarchy of the County. This position, in both cases, reflects both its size and role within the County, and outlines the functions which are assigned to it. This follows on from national and regional policy, and that currently formalised within the Longford Core Strategy.

Fig 3.1:

Illustration of the main settlements within County Longford.

3.2 LONGFORD TOWN

Longford Town is the primary settlement and largest population centre within County Longford. Centrally located within the County, and having the advantage of excellent quality local, regional and national linkages, the town has become a settlement of regional importance.

The value of the town and the support function which it provides to its residents as well as those of its hinterland has been recognised within both a national and regional context. The most recent Retail Planning Guidelines, as published in April 2012, have defined the town as a Level 3 settlement, assigning it the role of providing retail support at a sub-regional level[15]. The importance of the town within a local and regional context has also been recognised by the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, which has defined the town as being a principal town, while the Longford Core Strategy has also adopted this definition[16].

Attraction

In defining the attraction of Longford Town, its location is a key strength, both within the context of the County and in terms of its infrastructural linkages beyond the County. Due to its location within the national infrastructure network, there is a high volume of passing traffic, which brings with it vital retail expenditure inflow. The variety and diversity of the retail offer is much greater than that available in other settlements in the County across convenience, comparison and bulky goods retail categories.

Each of the main convenience multiples has a presence within the town. Since the completion of the previous Longford Retail Strategy, Dunnes Stores has developed a substantial new complex just on the edge of the town centre along the Dublin Road. This replaced a much smaller store within the town centre, with the new complex now featuring separate convenience and comparison units. Tesco operates from a location within the commercial core of the town, within the Longford Centre shopping centre. Planning permission was granted for a substantial redevelopment of this site in 2010, but it is unclear if this permission will ever be implemented. In addition, Super Valu, Lidl and Aldi all operate stores on the periphery of the town centre, while a number of small and medium scale convenience retailers operate from stores in and around the town.

Comparison retailers within Longford Town are, for the most part, clustered into two main areas, namely the commercial core of the town and within the N4 Axis Retail Park, on the northern edge of the town. A wide variety of independent comparison retailers operate within the commercial core of the town alongside a number of the multiples including Easons, Heatons, and a newly opened Shaws Department Store.

15 Retail Planning Guidelines, Section 2.2.3, page 11.

16 As defined within the Core Strategy of the Longford County Development Plan, 2009-2015, Page 25.

The N4 Axis Retail Park features a variety of retailers in both comparison and bulky goods categories in addition to a number of restaurants. The remaining comparison retail floorspace within the town is located within a series of small district centres within the periphery of the town.

Accessibility

Strategically located within the national transportation network, Longford Town forms an important interchange on the East West road network, giving excellent quality access to the town from the immediate hinterland and adjoining regions.

Accessibility within the town itself has been improved in recent years with the opening of the N5 Longford Bypass, which now diverts all through traffic directly onto the N4 to the North West of the town. This has seen the removal of a substantial amount of traffic congestion, and has eased both vehicular access and pedestrian permeability throughout the main commercial core of the town. This easing of congestion has been very beneficial to the town centre and the retailers who operate within it.

The provision of car parking within the town is good, with a number of both public and private car parks located at various locations in and around the town centre and periphery, all of which operate an hourly tariff system. There is also on street parking available throughout, and which is also subject to hourly tariffs. Free car parking is available at a number of car parks located in more peripheral locations within the town.

There remain some problems which can impact on the accessibility of the town and cause periodic congestion. Delivery and service vehicles accessing the various premises within the town only have access to a small number of loading bays, which can result in issues of double parking on occasion and can cause congestion.

Amenity

Longford is an attractive town, with a mature streetscape which features a variety of buildings of differing size, age and character. The amenity of its commercial core has benefited from the completion of the N5 Longford Bypass, which removed a lot of the heavy traffic from the town centre. The streetscape of the town has retained its local character, with a range of traditional shopfronts serving to maintain the town's distinctive identity. The recently completed Longford Town Centre, which remains vacant, has added to the streetscape, with the glass tower adjoining it providing a new and unique focal point to the Northern end of the Main Street.

Pedestrian linkages within the commercial core of the town have been improved substantially by the reduction in traffic flows and traffic congestion, but more benefit could be derived from further developments in this key area. There is a healthy diversity of uses within the commercial core, with a mixture uses between retail services and other service providers throughout the town centre.

Assessment

In summary, the retail offering within Longford Town appears to be reasonably healthy, particularly in the area of convenience retailing, with convenience multiples being well represented. However, comparison retailing in the town appears to have demonstrated the most sizeable decline since 2007, with a substantial rise in vacancy, especially in the more peripheral parts of the town and on Main Street North, where the issue of such vacancy has become particularly problematic.

In terms of redevelopment opportunities within the town itself, the sequential and sustainable redevelopment of brownfield sites should take precedence. The Longford Town Centre shopping mall for example, which has remained unopened since its completion a number of years ago has the potential to be brought on-stream or given an alternative temporary use in the medium to long-term. In addition, there is significant scope to redevelop the brownfield 'Townspark Area' which features a high proportion of commercial vacancy, as an employment growth centre for the town. However, it is the redevelopment of the existing Tesco site in the town centre (having the benefit of an existing planning permission) which would be of more immediate benefit to the town, given the central location of the site and its existing linkages with the Core Retail Area to the West. In accordance with the provisions of the Longford Core Strategy and the Regional Planning Guidelines, district centres will be considered in Longford Town and its environs.

The general quality of the public realm and streetscape within the town centre is good, although the trend toward increased vacancy rates does raise the possibility of dereliction becoming an issue in some areas. Similarly, while the overall amenity of the town remains good, there is still capacity for improvement, especially in the provision of pedestrian linkages and related infrastructure.

A brief assessment of rental asking prices for retail units within the town illustrates that location is a key factor with asking prices varying from €127.40 to €200.20 per square metre per annum for shop units. The sale price varies from between €2,400 and €2,600 per square metre. A similar assessment of the rental asking prices for retail warehousing units show that prices can vary from €24.39 to €53.71 per square metre[17].

Action

This health check has identified a number of key areas which require action:

– Identify and develop a sustainable use for the vacant Longford Town Centre shopping centre and former Connolly Army Barracks adjacent to the site;

– Develop an integrated complex or complimentary functionality between these two sites;

[17] Information taken from analysis of published retail property prices available on Daft.ie on 04/10/2013.

– Address vacancy levels at the Northern end of Main Street, reintegrating this part of the town into the commercial core;

– Promote the redevelopment of the current Longford Centre (Tesco) shopping centre which is within the commercial core of the town; and

– Engage in the revitalisation of the Townspark area, which was originally developed as an important out of town commercial driver on the South West of the town. This area should retain its focus on the generation of employment but its development should not be prioritised over that of town centre sites.

3.3 GRANARD

Located in the North East of the County, Granard is the second largest urban settlement in Longford, with a good range of shops, pubs, community facilities and services. The Longford Core Strategy identifies Granard as the '*Key Service Town*' in the County's revised settlement hierarchy. This County growth centre, which possesses key economic, administrative and social functions, supports the principal town of Longford, in addition to acting as an important driver for the local economies in its rural hinterland.

Attraction

In order to establish the attraction of Granard, it is necessary to examine its key defining characteristics. Having a traditional linear townscape, Granard's Main Street is defined by its terraces of 19th -20th century mixed commercial premises. In this context, vernacular-style shop frontages add a distinct sense of character and ambience at street level. This simple urban morphology is further complemented by a rich built and archaeological heritage. However, due to its location on the N55 national secondary route and its strategic role as a local and regional connector, Granard's attractive urban character is undermined by large volumes of heavy vehicular through traffic, which significantly impacts upon both local vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and public safety. This traffic congestion, in addition to high levels of haphazard on-street parking, negatively impacts on the quality, capacity and character of the town's core public realm, which has recently been regenerated as part of an Urban and Village Renewal Scheme.

Granard possesses a dynamic and diverse selection of local shops, cafes, pubs and leisure facilities to attract people into the town centre. The settlement's retail offer is clustered around the commercial core of Main Street and is typically dominated by retail service provision, such as cafes and pubs, convenience retail in the form of local grocery shops and specialist retail, including florists and hardware stores. There are few instances of the comparison or bulky goods retail categories in Granard and a limited offer of convenience multiples, with only the Super-Valu supermarket chain having a presence on Main Street within the town core.

A cursory examination of the commercial retail unit market in Granard has revealed that there is availability in the market throughout the settlement with concentrated levels of unit availability in streets adjacent to the commercial core, such as Barrack Street.

Accessibility
Granard benefits significantly from its strategic location on national road infrastructure, with the N55 that passes through the town forming an important link in the north-south transportation network as it passes through the midlands. This has allowed the town to develop as a gateway between the north midlands and the north-west, connecting Longford to the settlements of Cavan and Dundalk as well as the wider road network of Northern Ireland. The road connections between Granard and its surrounding hinterland are also relatively good, enabling it to fulfil its role as a key service town, enhancing the growth of its rural hinterland. However, it is also inadequately served by public transport, and as it is car dominated, does not cater to more vulnerable road users, including cyclists.

Amenity
While Granard possesses an attractive town centre in terms of its improved environmental quality and vernacular urban character, its amenity to potential customers and service users is greatly undermined by its congested core, lack of permeability, pedestrian safety issues and poor provision of amenity related infrastructure such of pedestrian crossings, high quality street furniture and passive recreation space.

Assessment
The retail offering of Granard remains in keeping with its position within the Longford County Retail Hierarchy, with a diverse mixture of retail outlets and general service provision. The accessibility and amenity of the town continues to be impacted upon by the presence of high volumes of vehicular traffic passing through the town.

An evaluation of the asking prices for retail property in the town indicates that they vary from between €52.62 to €92.86 per square metre, with differing sums relating to factors of location and quality of available floorspace[18].

Action
This health check has identified a number of key areas which require action:

– Implement a system to better manage and control traffic circulation and street parking; and

– Put in place improved pedestrian crossings and infrastructure

[17] Information taken from analysis of published retail property prices available on Daft.ie on 04/10/2013.

3.4 EDGEWORTHSTOWN

The location of Edgeworthstown, on the eastern side of the County, along with the presence of two important national road linkages have long defined the town's attraction, accessibility and amenity. As a result, the town itself has developed to become a strategic interchange in the national road network, and serves as a gateway to County Longford for those travelling from the east. Edgeworthstown has been defined as a '*Service Town*' within the Longford County Development Plan 2009-2015.

Attraction
As with Longford Town, the location of Edgeworthstown is a key strength, with the N4 national primary and N55 national secondary routes both passing through the town. This has allowed it to take advantage of the high volume of passing trade, and to offer a mixture of services which have become tailored to the needs of both local residents and those who are just passing through. The layout of the town is dominated by the Main Street which is oriented primarily on an East West axis, and was formally part of the N4 national primary route.

There is a diverse mixture of convenience and comparison retail units located within the town in addition to a small amount of retail warehousing, located on the western periphery of the town. The retail offer of the town is complimented by a range of other services including pubs, cafes, hairdressers and restaurants. There is a heavy concentration of retail activities within the core of the town, located along Dublin Street, Main Street and Pound Street, while there is a small concentration of bulky goods retail units located along the Longford Road. The majority of the retail premises within the town appear to be well kept, although vacancy does appear to be higher in more peripheral areas.

Accessibility
Edgeworthstown is very accessible, located as it is on an important interchange between the N4 national primary route, which links Dublin and the east of the country with the counties of Leitrim, Mayo, Sligo and Roscommon, and the N55, which connects the midlands to the North West. As well as this road linkage, there is also a rail service which operates between Dublin and Sligo, and which is located just to the south of the town. Car parking within the town centre is restricted to on-street parking.

The amenity of Edgeworthstown is dominated by its location within the national road network, with the town forming an important interchange between the N4 and the N55. The N55, which links Cavan town to Athlone, carries a high volume of HGV traffic, all of which passes through the centre of the town, with negative impacts on amenity.

The streetscape of the town is attractive, and is dominated by a largely traditional urban fabric and built form, which includes a mixture of stone front and plaster rendered buildings of various ages and functions. Many recent additions to the building stock of the town have taken place on the western periphery of the town. An example includes the terrace of stone fronted commercial and retail units, with first floor apartments, located on Pound Street and which has integrated very well into the existing streetscape.

Assessment
The retail offering which currently exists in Edgeworthstown is of sufficient quality and variety to continue to satisfy the role of a Service Town, as designated by the revised settlement hierarchy of the County Longford. There is also potential for further retail growth within the town, which would reduce the vacancy rates within the more peripheral parts of the town. While the presence of the N55 does create some problems, it is also a key strength for the town. Enhancements to the pedestrian linkages and general amenity of the town could bring about substantial benefits and alleviate the negative impacts of the N55 while retaining its benefits.

Action

This health check has identified a number of key areas which require action:

– Take measures to enhance the public realm and pedestrian linkages in town centre; and

– Look to minimise the impact of the N55 on the amenity of the town.

3.5 BALLYMAHON

Located to the South of the County, Ballymahon is situated between the larger settlements of Athlone and Longford Town. In this context, the urban centre provides for important local residential, retail, social and leisure functions. The Longford Core Strategy identifies Ballymahon as a '*Local Service Town*' within its settlement hierarchy.

Attraction
Ballymahon exhibits a traditional linear market town structure, with its commercial activity being predominantly clustered around a compact urban core centred on Main Street. The broad width of this central thoroughfare, relative to the height of the mixed commercial buildings which front onto it, combine to give Main Street a distinctive and spacious character. The quality of the streetscape and the associated public realm in Ballymahon is also good, with many traditional shopfronts still intact. There is also a generous provision of pedestrian infrastructure such as crossings and street furniture. The settlement is situated adjacent to the River Inny to the East of Lough Ree, which gives the locality its unique topographical character.

Ballymahon possesses a good range of retail outlets and services relative to its size, with a variety of small local cafes, pubs, grocery and specialist shops. There appears to be very few incidences of national or international retail multiples within the settlement, which consists generally of independent retailers.

Accessibility
Ballymahon is served by a relatively good road network which includes the N55 national secondary route from Athlone to Cavan and the R392 regional route. However, the town is relatively poorly served by public transport facilities and is heavily reliant on car-based access in comparison to some of the other settlements within the County. Car parking in the town centre is well managed and easily accessible, and does not pose a risk to pedestrian safety, detract significantly from the public realm or generate congestion in the town centre.

Amenity
Overall, Ballymahon exhibits relatively high levels of public amenity and a high quality townscape, and is able to provide a good mixture of retail services to residents and passers-by alike. It also features a good quality and well maintained public realm, in addition to high standards of vehicular management and pedestrian infrastructure.

Assessment
The compact nature of the urban core of Ballymahon, and the presence of the N55, which passes through a substantial part of the town core, has been a key economic strength for the town, and has helped to sustain retail activity. In terms of the dynamism of its commercial market at present, there are a number of retail units currently available for rent particularly in the town's Main Street, with rental prices ranging between €94 and €200 per square meter per annum.

Action
This health check has identified a number of key areas which require action:

– Continue to proactively manage car parking, circulation and public realm in the town centre;

– Proactive approach to maintaining/improving the built stock in the retail core; and

– Improve access to the town core by non-vehicular modes of transport.

3.6 LANESBOROUGH

Lanesborough which is defined as a *'Local Service Town*' within the Longford Core Strategy, functions to provide important local level retail, social, leisure and service functions to its wider rural.

Attractiveness
Located on the eastern bank of the River Shannon at the Northern perimeter of Lough Ree, the settlement of Lanesborough is characterised by a linear core urban form, known locally as 'Main Street', which had developed perpendicular to the adjacent river, rising gradually away from it. The townscape is defined predominantly by a non-uniform building line. The Main Street also features a high percentage of residential structures.

Lanesborough offers its community a limited mix of retail services such as convenience retail, along with some limited comparison retail, cafes, pubs and other commercial services, distributed intermittently along Main Street. A second key defining feature is its narrow and inconsistent public realm, which is dominated by car parking, heavy traffic flows and a poor quality hard landscaping, features which all conspire to make this urban centre inhospitable to pedestrians. Lanesborough offers its community a limited mix of retail services such as limited convenience retail, pubs, specialist shops and service retail, which are often not clustered together and distributed intermittently along Main Street.

Accessibility
Lanesborough, which is located adjacent to one of the main bridging points on the River Shannon, is well connected to its wider region by the N63 national secondary route which links Longford to Roscommon and also to the R392 regional road which links the town to Mullingar. As a result, the town is subject to regular traffic congestion, impacting on poor circulation within its commercial core.

Amenity
The existence of high levels of poorly managed on-street car parking, heavy vehicular congestion, poor sight lines and access/egress arrangements and the poor provision of pedestrian facilities, all conspire to significantly undermine the amenity of this settlement for the local community. In addition, the townscape possesses a very poor relationship with the River Shannon, with the buildings located on the lower reaches of Main Street failing to adequately utilise or respond to this an important local amenity.

Assessment
As with the example of Ballymahon, the presence of a high volume of passing traffic is an important strength for Lanesborough. The town itself has retained its functionality, and continues to support a range of important support services which can be availed of by the residents of Lanesborough and its surrounding rural hinterland.

Action:
This health check has identified a number of key areas which require action:

– Implement polices to improve public realm, pedestrian infrastructure and quality of streetscape;

– Improve quality and mix of retail provision; and

– Manage traffic congestion and implement traffic calming.

3.7 OTHER SETTLEMENTS

– **Newtownforbes**

– Newtownforbes is designated as being part of the '*Village Network*' within the Longford Core Strategy. Located to the north west of Longford Town, Newtownforbes plays a critical role in sustaining the viability of local rural communities by providing essential services such as housing, lower level retail and important social facilities that allow for local growth. Located along the N4 national primary route, the settlement is well connected to the wider region and also to its immediate rural environs via the local route L1005. Newtownforbes has a distinctive rural village character with good quality public realm and limited provision of local services and convenience retail. It also possesses good provision of car parking, a general lack of vehicular congestion and safe pedestrian access. In terms of its amenity, Newtownforbes' Main Street features a number of intermittent green spaces attached to institutional and community buildings.

Action:
This health check has identified a number of key areas which require action:

– Continue to proactively manage car parking, circulation and public realm in the town centre; and

– Ensure a good provision of convenience and local service retail is maintained going forward.

Drumlish
Drumlish is identified as being a part of the '*Village Network*' in the Longford Core Strategy and provides housing, local level retail and social facilities to its dependant rural communities, thereby acting as a local growth centre for the rural economy. The settlement of Drumlish is clustered around a central crossroads and is served by the R198 regional route which links it to Longford Town to the South. This rural village has retained much of its charm and is characterised by high-quality public realm and the limited provision of local convenience and service retail. It also possesses good provision of well managed on-street car parking, a general lack of vehicular congestion and a safe pedestrian environment.

Action:
This health check has identified one key area which requires action:

– Continue to proactively manage car parking, circulation and public realm in the town centre.

3.8 SUMMARY OF COMMERCIAL FLOORSPACE ACTIVITY SINCE 2007

The last Longford County Retail Strategy was prepared in 2007 and reflected an overtly positive market outlook at that time. It identified an additional convenience floorspace need of between 3,000–7,000sqm and an additional comparison floorspace requirement of between 7,000–16,000sqm for 2007-2015. At the time, this estimate was considered conservative; however the pronounced nature of the economic downturn that followed ultimately meant that the quantum of envisaged floorspace was not delivered by the market.

In line with national trends, Longford has experienced a sizeable decline in retail floorspace construction activity since 2007. The scale of this slow down is evident in the analysis of the quantity of planning applications permitted and subsequently advanced in the intervening period, which is set out in Table 3.1 below. While a significant amount of new floorspace was permitted across the different retail categories, very few of these applications were subsequently progressed beyond the planning stage.

It is worth noting that the majority of retail floorspace which has been delivered within County Longford since 2007 has been in the convenience category. As a result of this there has been very little change in the baseline figure for total retail floorspace within the County over and above that which was used in the formulation of the existing retail strategy for the County. Since 2007, some 14,673.40sqm of net retail floorspace has also lapsed through expired planning permissions in the County. A further 514sqm will also expire if not renewed or implemented by 1st January 2015.

Table 3.1:
Outline of all permitted, commenced and outstanding retail development planning permissions since 2007.

Granted and Commenced Retail Developements since 2007				
Retail Category	Permitted	Commenced	Expired or considered to be expired	Due to Expire By 01/01/2015
Total Convenience	2277.00	626.40	2267.20	514.40
Total Comparison	13410.00	71.20	1165.20	0.00
Total Bulky	2227.50	0.00	11241.00	0.00
Total	17914.50	697.60	14673.40	514.40

In addition to the limited growth in retail floorspace, activity since 2007 has also been characterised by an increase in vacancy rates in the County. Again, this mirrors national trends over this period. As illustrated in Table 3.2, a total of 10,745 sqm of retail floorspace is currently vacant across the County (17.73% of total). Table 3.3 summarises existing levels of retail floorspace in Longford, taking account of development activity and existing levels of recorded vacancy across the County.

Table 3.2:
Summary of all existing vacancy (2013) by retail category.

Total Vacancy by Retail Category	
Floorspace Category	m2
Total Vacant Convenience Floorspace	2274.99
Total Vacant Comparison Floorspace	2172.46
Total Vacant Bulky Floorspace	6298.27
Total Vacant Floorspace	10745.72

Table 3.3:
Summary of all existing retail floorspace, including 2007 and 2013 baseline figures and the vacancy rate for 2013, by retail category.

Granted and Commenced Retail Developements since 2007						
	2007 Baseline (m^2)	Development Activity 2008-2013 (m^2)	2013 Baseline (m^2)	Total Vacancy (m^2)	Floorspace In use (m^2)	Available Floorspace in Use (m^2)
Convenience	12613.00	626.40	13239.40	2274.99	10964.41	82.82
Comparison	11176.00	71.20	11247.20	2172.46	9074.74	80.68
Bulky	36130.00	0.00	36130.00	6298.27	29831.73	82.57
Total	59919.00	697.60	60616.60	10745.72	49870.88	82.27

3.9 HEALTHCHECK CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the results of the healthcheck analysis appear to indicate that, in spite of obvious and substantial difficulties in the retail sector over the last 5 years, the main settlements in County Longford continue to provide the necessary retail services required by their communities. Longford Town remains the most important retail centre within the County, and is the location for the majority of the retail floorspace within both the comparison and bulky goods retail categories. It is also the chosen location for the larger convenience multiples, who, with the exception of Super Valu, have chosen the town as their sole operations within the County. All of the other settlements within the County continue to fulfil their ancillary roles to the primary centre, supporting their local communities and surrounding hinterlands, in keeping with their respective positions within both the settlement and retail hierarchies.

Vacancy levels account for just over 17% of the total retail floorspace within centres across Longford. Significantly, the rate of occupancy within all three retail categories is between 80 and 83%. Retail vacancies were not a concern under previous health check appraisals carried out for the County. It is imperative that those retail units which are vacant at present are not allowed to become derelict. The use of windows for display and appropriate advertising can improve the environmental quality of areas. Going forward, there are a number of opportunity sites within the main towns which would improve and enhance the retail provision. The supporting towns provide a range of services to their surrounding areas. The development of these towns should not have a negative impact on the primacy of Longford Towns and should be in keeping with the existing scale and character of individual settlements.

4.0 Projected Floorspace Requirements

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section establishes the future retail floorspace requirements for County Longford within the convenience, comparison and bulky goods retail categories, as specified within the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012. The assessment has been produced having regard to existing floorspace capacity and projections[19] on the future demand for retail services within the County, and takes account of identified levels of vacancy detailed in Section 3.

This will ensure that future development requirements will absorb existing vacancy which may otherwise hamper the vitality and viability of centres.

In brief, the following methodology has been used to define the future retail floorspace requirements for County Longford:

- Undertake an estimate of the population at base year and design year;
- Estimate the available expenditure per capita on each of the retail categories (convenience, comparison and bulky goods) at the base year and design year;
- Compile a projection of the total available expenditure in the base year and design year for residents of County Longford to allow for assumed expenditure inflows and outflows;
- Undertake a projection of the likely increase of available expenditure which will support the provision of additional floorspace;
- Estimate the likely average turnover of new floorspace in convenience, comparison and bulky goods retail categories; and
- Estimate the capacity for additional floorspace within each of the three retail categories, taking account of the existing vacancy rates and planning permissions.

4.2 POPULATION

The population of Longford has demonstrated substantial growth since 1996, with the most sizeable increases occurring since 2002. An analysis of census figures between 2002 and 2011 reveals that the population of the County expanded from 31,068 to 39,000, representing an increase of some 25.31% in nine years.

This growth rate ultimately meant that County Longford had all but achieved its 2016 population projection by 2011. Revised figures are set out in table 4.1 below[20].

Table 4.1:
Recorded Populations and Population projections for County Longford.

2006	2011	2016 (Updated Projection)	2021 (Updated Projection)	2024 (Updated Projection)
34,391	39,000	41,547	44,084	45,670

The starting point in any assessment of future floorspace requirements is projected population growth over the plan period. In accordance with the revised RPG population forecasts, the population of the County is projected to increase by 6,670 people between 2011 and 2024, which reflects 17% increase over that period. Importantly, the majority of that growth will be accommodated within Longford town, with the population forecast to increase from 8,002 to approximately 13,235 persons over this timeframe. The level of envisaged population growth within Longford Town means that it should also be the primary location for the majority of additional retail floorspace which is forecast to come forward in the County over the plan period.

4.3 EXPENDITURE ESTIMATES

The expenditure analysis, upon which the subsequent floorspace turnover calculations are formulated, have been projected using figures derived from a number of Central Statistics Office (CSO) sources including the National Services Inquiry, the County Incomes and Regional GDP 2010[21] and the Retail Sales Index[22].

Per capita spend on an annual basis from 2013 to 2024[23] has been established using the population projections outlined above in addition to the expenditure projections which will be outlined below. The projection of future per capita spend for County Longford have been based upon an assumed increase of 1% per annum for both convenience and comparison goods from 2013 onwards. This growth rate is in line with the latest term economic outlook, and has been detailed in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2:
Projections of the available per capita convenience and comparison retail spend for County Longford.

Determination of Per Capita Spend on Convenience and Comparison Retail Sales Figures based on National Population, Disposable Income Indices					
		Annual Growth Rates (%)		Per Capita Spend (Ð)	
		Convenience	Comparison	Convenience	Comparison
2010	Per Capita Spend - Nationally	-	-	3474	3799
2010	Per Capita Spend – Adjusted for Longford County (national index = 100, Longford index = 89.1)	89.10	89.10	3,095	3,385
2011	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	-1.80	-1.80	3039	3324
2012	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	0.40	0.40	3052	3337
2013	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3070	3357
2014	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3101	3391
2015	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3132	3424
2016	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3163	3459
2017	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3194	3493
2018	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3226	3528
2019	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3259	3564
2020	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3291	3599
2021	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3324	3635
2022	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3357	3672
2023	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3391	3708
2024	Per Capita Spend – Longford County	1.00	1.00	3425	3745

[19] Some figures in this section may not sum due to rounding.

[20] The 2016 Original RPG Projection figures have been taken from the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022.

[21] CSO, 'County Incomes and Regional GDP', 13/02/2013.

[22] CSO, 'Retail Sales Index', July 2013, 29/08/2013.

[23] To include the remaining 2 years of the existing plan, the 6 year operational period of this strategy, plus three additional years, as specified within the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.

This table also illustrates an adjustment in the per capita spend for County Longford to account for lower average income levels when compared to the national average. The national per capita spend has been calculated based upon the total retail spend (inclusive of VAT) per capita in 2010. The Dublin Region has a higher level of disposable income (111.4 in 2010), which has the effect of inflating the national average.

The available disposable income in the majority of counties is less than 100, with CSO's County Incomes and Regional GDP 2010 report[24] indicating that disposable income in County Longford was 10.9 index points lower than the national average. Therefore, the available per capita retail spend in County Longford in 2010 (base year) for convenience goods was €3,474 and for comparison goods was €3,799. Using these per capita retail spend projection figures, the total available spend for convenience, comparison and bulky goods, as calculated, is presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3:
Projections of the total available expenditure for each of the three retail categories from 2011 to 2024.

Total Available Expenditure – Convenience/Comparison/Bulky Goods							
Year	Population	Convenience Per Capita Spend (€)	Comparison Per Capita Spend (€)	Convenience Total Available Spend (€)	Comparison Total Available Spend (€)	Convenience Total Available Spend – Excluding Bulky Goods (€)	Comparison Total Available Spend – Bulky Goods Only (€)
2011	39000	3039	3324	118538813	129627138	103701711	25925428
2012	39497	3052	3337	120528375	131802807	105442246	26360561
2013	40000	3070	3357	122792538	134278763	107423011	26855753
2014	40509	3101	3391	125599630	137348436	109878749	27469687
2015	41025	3132	3424	128470894	140488283	112390627	28097657
2016	41547	3163	3459	131407797	143699909	114959927	28739982
2017	42042	3194	3493	134304382	146867445	117493956	29373489
2018	42544	3226	3528	137264815	150104803	120083843	30020961
2019	43051	3259	3564	140290505	153,413521	122730817	30682704
2020	43564	3291	3599	143382889	156795172	125436138	31359034
2021	44084	3324	3635	146543438	160251364	128201091	32050273
2022	44603	3357	3672	149752395	163760492	131008394	32752098
2023	45135	3391	3708	153053944	167370874	133896700	33474175
2024	45670	3425	3745	156416825	171048324	136838659	34209665

Table 4.3 illustrates the projected increases in population, per capita spend in both convenience and comparison goods, and total available spend in all three retail categories from 2011 to 2024. This includes the complete operational lifecycle of the Retail Strategy, from 2015 to 2021, and the requirement for an additional 3 years, up to 2024. This shows the total available spend for all retail goods growing from approximately €248m in 2011 to a projected €306m at the end of this retail strategy period in 2021, and to almost €327.5m in 2024. This projected level of increase within the total available spend of the County represents projected growth rates of approximately 19.12% and 24.22% respectively.

[24] CSO, 'County Incomes and Regional GDP', 13/02/2013.

Table 4.4:
Projections of the total available convenience retail spend, as adjusted to account for inflow and outflow.

Total Available Expenditure – Convenience				
Year	Convenience Total Available Spend (€)	Convenience Total Available Spend Outflow (%)	Convenience Total Available Spend Inflow (%)	Adjusted Convenience Total Available Spend (€)
2011	118538813	15.00%	5.00%	106684932
2012	120528375	15.00%	5.00%	108475537
2013	122792538	15.00%	5.00%	110513284
2014	125599630	15.00%	5.00%	113039667
2015	128470894	15.00%	5.00%	115623805
2016	131407797	15.00%	5.00%	118267017
2017	134304382	15.00%	5.00%	120873944
2018	137264815	15.00%	5.00%	123538334
2019	140290505	15.00%	5.00%	126261455
2020	143382889	15.00%	5.00%	129044600
2021	146543438	15.00%	5.00%	131889094
2022	149752395	15.00%	5.00%	134777155
2023	153053944	15.00%	5.00%	137748550
2024	156416825	15.00%	5.00%	140775142

Table 4.4 illustrates the adjusted retail spend for County Longford from 2011 to 2024. In adjusting the total available convenience retail spend, it has been projected that approximately 15% of the total annual available spend on convenience goods within the County will be lost to competing centres.

In addition to the outflow referred to above, it has been projected that there will also be an inflow of retail spend. This has been estimated to be equivalent to 5% of the total annual available spend on convenience goods in County Longford. This inflow is primarily accounted for by passing trade and the use of the retail offering of the County by residents of neighbouring counties.

Table 4.5:
Projections of the total available comparison and bulky retail spend, as adjusted to account for inflow and outflow.

Total Available Expenditure – Comparison Non-Bulky Goods				
Year	Comparison Total Available Spend – Excluding Bulky Goods (€)	Comparison Total Available Spend Outflow (%)	Comparison Total Available Spend Inflow (%)	Adjusted Convenience Total Available Spend (€)
2011	103701711	10.00%	2.00%	95405574
2012	105442246	10.00%	2.00%	97006866
2013	107423011	10.00%	2.00%	98829170
2014	109878749	10.00%	2.00%	101088449
2015	112390627	10.00%	2.00%	103399376
2016	114959927	10.00%	2.00%	105763133
2017	117493956	10.00%	2.00%	108094440
2018	120083843	10.00%	2.00%	110477135
2019	122730817	10.00%	2.00%	112912352
2020	125436138	10.00%	2.00%	115401247
2021	128201091	10.00%	2.00%	117945004
2022	131008394	10.00%	2.00%	120527722
2023	133896700	10.00%	2.00%	123184964
2024	136838659	10.00%	2.00%	125891567

Total Available Expenditure – Comparison Bulky Goods				
Year	Comparison Total Available Spend – Excluding Bulky Goods (€)	Comparison Total Available Spend Outflow (%)	Comparison Total Available Spend Inflow (%)	Adjusted Convenience Total Available Spend (€)
2011	25925428	20.00%	1.50%	21129224
2012	26360561	20.00%	1.50%	21483858
2013	26855753	20.00%	1.50%	21887438
2014	27469687	20.00%	1.50%	22387795
2015	28097657	20.00%	1.50%	22899590
2016	28739982	20.00%	1.50%	23423085
2017	29373489	20.00%	1.50%	23939394
2018	30020961	20.00%	1.50%	24467083
2019	30682704	20.00%	1.50%	25006404
2020	31359034	20.00%	1.50%	25557613
2021	32050273	20.00%	1.50%	26120972
2022	32752098	20.00%	1.50%	26692960
2023	33474175	20.00%	1.50%	27281453
2024	34209665	20.00%	1.50%	27880877

As with the total available convenience retail spend, the total available comparison and bulky goods retail spend must also be adjusted. In doing so it has been projected that 10% of the total comparison retail spend will be lost to competing centres, but that the inflow of spend will also be much lower, at just 2%. In adjusting the total available bulky retail spend, the outflow lost to competing centres has been projected to be more substantial, at 20%, while the inflow of retail spend has been projected as being just 1.5%.

4.4 TURNOVER AND FLOORSPACE CAPACITY

This section identifies the turnover and floorspace capacity which will be used to calculate the subsequent minimum additional floorspace requirements over the lifetime of this retail strategy. The defined average turnover rate per square metre of floorspace in each of the three categories has been illustrated in Table 4.6. This methodology uses the total expenditure available within the County for each category and divides it by the amount of existing floorspace within that category. The resulting figure has been used as the basis for the projection of future floorspace requirements, through a comparison exercise against the projected disposable income which is available within the specific category. The overall 2013 baseline figures indicate that 59.60% of all retail floorspace in the County is of the bulky goods retail category, while convenience and comparison retail floorspace account for 21.84% and 18.55% respectively.

Table 4.6:
Current retail floorspace per retail category and estimated turnover per square metre for County Longford.

Retail Floorspace Analysis				
Retail Category	2013			
	Gross Floor Area (m^2)	Net Floor Area (m^2)	Net Area as a % of Gross Area	Net Area as a % of Overall Total Net Area
Convenience	16,549	13,239	80.00%	21.84%
Comparison – Non-Bulky	14,059	11,247	80.00%	18.55%
Comparison – Bulky	40,144	36,130	90.00%	59.60%
Overall Total	70,752	60,616		100.00%

Retail Category Turnover		
2013		
Adjusted Total Available Spend (€)	Net Floor Area (m^2)	Turnover Per M^2 (€)
110,513,284	13,239	8,347
98,829,170	11,247	8,787
21,887,438	36,130	606
231,229,892	-	-

4.5 ADDITIONAL RETAIL FLOORSPACE REQUIREMENTS

Table 4.7:
Outline of the cumulative projected additional retail floorspace requirements per annum, as adjusted for vacancy, from 2013 to 2024.

Additional Floorspace Requirements Adjusted for Vacancy Rates												
	Convenience				Comparison – Non-Bulky				Comparison – Bulky			
Year	Total Annual Cumulative Floorspace Requirement (m2)	Additional Annual Floorspace Requirement (m2)	Vacant Floorspace (m2)	Additional Floorspace Development Requirement (m2)	Total Annual Cumulative Floorspace Requirement (m2)	Additional Annual Floorspace Requirement (m2)	Vacant Floorspace (m2)	Additional Floorspace Development Requirement (m2)	Total Annual Cumulative Floorspace Requirement (m2)	Additional Annual Floorspace Requirement (m2)	Vacant Floorspace (m2)	Additional Floorspace Development Requirement (m2)
2011												
2012												
2013	13239		951.05		11247		1047.74		36130		2685.27	
2014	13845	605	346	0	11504	257	791	0	36956	826	1859	0
2015	14161	316	29	0	11767	263	528	0	37801	845	1014	0
2016	14485	324	0	294	12036	269	259	0	38665	864	150	0
2017	14793	308	0	602	12301	265	0	7	39517	852	0	702
2018	15119	326	0	929	12573	271	0	278	40388	871	0	1573
2019	15452	333	0	1262	12850	277	0	555	41279	890	0	2463
2020	15793	341	0	1602	13133	283	0	838	42188	910	0	3373
2021	16141	348	0	1951	13422	289	0	1128	43118	930	0	4303
2022	16492	351	0	2302	13716	294	0	1422	44063	944	0	5247
2023	16858	366	0	2668	14019	302	0	1724	45034	971	0	6219
2024	17227	369	0	3037	14327	308	0	2032	46023	989	0	7208

The methodology used to identify the future requirements for additional retail floorspace takes account of the existing baseline floorspace figure, including actual vacancy and an additional frictional vacancy, the calculated turnover per sqm of retail floorspace, and the projected available retail spend. This is replicated across each of the three retail categories. The key steps taken include the following:

- The total cumulative floorspace requirements are calculated for each year using the turnover per sqm and the available retail spend for each retail category;
- The baseline floorspace figure from the preceding year is subtracted from the total cumulative floorspace requirement to produce the additional annual floorspace requirement;
- The vacancy rate (as adjusted to allow for a 10% frictional vacancy requirement) is deducted from the additional annual floorspace requirement to define the additional floorspace development requirement, which is the final output of the exercise.

4.6 ADDITIONAL RETAIL FLOORSPACE REQUIREMENT SUMMARY

The initial baseline projections for floorspace requirements for the period to 2024 are set out in Table 4.7 above. These projections have been formulated to include adjustments for existing vacancy levels, as well as a frictional vacancy rate of 10% to ensure vital choice and competition in the market. Having regard to calculated demand, and identified vacancy, including the need to maintain a frictional vacancy rate, there is a requirement to plan for additional retail floorspace over the plan period.

The Retail Planning Guidelines advise that Retail Strategies should "*assess the broad requirement for additional development over the plan period… these assessments of future retail requirements are intended to provide* **broad guidance** *as to the additional quantum of convenience and comparison floorspace provision. They should not be treated in an* **overly prescriptive** *manner, nor should they serve to inhibit competition*". For this purpose, it is not the intention of this strategy to present figures as some form of cap on retail permissions in the County, but rather to guide the general scale of overall retail provision.

Significant consideration has also been given to the quality of existing vacant retail floorspace, including the prospective suitability of available floorspace to meet the future needs of retailers in the County. To negate prospective barriers to future activity and foster appropriate conditions to promote competition, growth and innovation in the retail sector locally, an additional allowance has been included within the identified range of future floorspace requirements. Following consultation with the Longford Local Authorities, consensus was reached that an additional floorspace minima of between 500 and 1,000sqm should be incorporated across the three retail categories. A summary of additional floorspace requirements over the period 2015-2021 is set out in table 4.8.

Table 4.8:
Summary of additional floorspace requirements over the 2015-2021 period

Additional Floorspace Requirements 2015-2021	
Retail Category	Floorspace (m2)
Additional Convenience	2,000 – 3,000
Additional Comparison	1,500 – 2,500
Additional Bulky	4,500 – 5,500

[25] The population of County Longford is expected to increase to 44,603.

5.0 Retail Strategy and Policy Guidance

5.1 RETAIL OBJECTIVES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the strategy contains key retail objectives to encourage and accommodate future retail development in County Longford. It also sets out criteria for the assessment of future retail proposals, in accordance with the overall aims of the Development Plan and the requirements of the Retail Planning Guidelines (DoECLG) 2012.

5.2 RETAIL STRATEGY OVERVIEW

It is considered that the majority of future retail floorspace requirements will be provided within the commercial core of Longford Town, taking account of its role as the Principal Centre in the County and the fact that 88% of envisaged population growth over the period to 2022[25] is expected to take place within the town environment itself. As detailed in Section 4.2, the latter should precipitate an uplift in demand for convenience, comparison and bulky goods floorspace as the plan period progresses.

The focus of providing new retail floorspace within Longford Town underpins the 'town centre first' approach of the Retail Planning Guidelines and will also strengthen the competiveness of the County as a whole relative to other competing centres, reducing outward revenue leakage.

The spatial distribution of new floorspace in Longford will be guided by the County Retail Hierarchy. Issues of location and scale are of paramount importance to the assessment of future retail proposals in the County. An overtly prescriptive approach in defining the scale acceptable in different areas could inhibit potential improvements to the vitality and viability of smaller centres. Providing a broad framework for assessment purposes, the guidance in Table 5.1 provides a suitably broad framework for assessment purposes, while allowing sufficient flexibility to be applied on a case specific basis.

Table 5.1:
County Retail Hierarchy

Hierarchy	Settlement Type	County Centre	Appropriate Retail Type
Tier I	Principal Town	Longford	Major convenience and comparison.
Tier II	Key Service Town	Granard	Large to Medium scale convenience and medium scale comparison.
Tier III	Service Town	Edgeworthstown	Medium scale convenience along with small to medium scale comparison.
Tier IV	Local Service Towns	Ballymahon Lanesboro	Medium to small scale convenience, along with some limited comparison, including tourism related comparison.
Tier V	Villages, Rural Serviced Settlements and Hinterland	Villages, small settlements and the Open Countryside of County Longford.	Predominantly lower order convenience, but not excluding tourism related comparison.

5.3 RETAIL OBJECTIVES

Having regard to the information presented above in relation to the healthcheck analysis of the main urban settlements of County Longford and the additional floorspace requirements of the County between 2015 and 2024, a series of retail objectives have been devised. The primary purpose of these objectives will be to inform the development of policies which will protect and reinforce existing retail offering and look to develop additional retail services, in keeping with the role of the settlements of County Longford as prescribed within the Longford Core Strategy and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines.

Specifically, these objectives will look to inform policies that will:

i. Ensure that County Longford possesses a clear policy framework that will inform both the conception and assessment of retail development proposals and help to guarantee that the strategic and local convenience and comparison retailing needs of the County are met;

ii. Maintain, and where possible, enhance the existing competitiveness of the County's main centres by facilitating the development of additional retail floorspace where it can be clearly established that such development will result in tangible improvements to the retail offering of the County;

iii. Encourage reductions in floorspace vacancy, taking account of suitability, obsolescence, and the identification of alternative uses for existing vacant floorspace within the urban centres of the County;

iv. Facilitate the regeneration of areas with scope for improvement or where there may be a high level of vacancy, obsolescence or emerging issues of dereliction, subject to the provisions of the Sequential Test;

v. Engage with the relevant stakeholders and incentivise to ensure that the environmental attractiveness of town/local centres is enhanced; and

vi. Address the issue of retail expenditure leakage out of the County to competing centres by looking to develop the retail offering in the County within key retail sectors where this leakage occurs.

In following these objectives, the goal of the Longford County Retail Strategy 2015-2021 will be to encourage the development of a healthy, vibrant and sustainable retail environment within the urban centres of County Longford.

5.4 RETAIL POLICIES

Having regard to the objectives which have been outlined above the following retail policies have been created. In formulating and adhering to these policies, Longford County Council will look to ensure that the development of all future retail floorspace is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Retail Planning Guidelines. In addition, these policies, as part of the overall Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021, can be seen to form a single integrated and coherent strategic policy framework which will ensure that all development within the County is carried out in keeping with the ideals of sustainable development.

The policies outlined have been created with the aim of supporting the expansion of the retail offering of County Longford in a sustainable manner. Therefore, these policies have been designed to encourage the reuse of vacant floorspace where possible. However, where the reuse or adaptation of vacant floorspace would have a negative impact upon a retailer's ability to compete, the construction of new retail floorspace would be permissible.

Any application for the development of additional retail floorspace would require a detailed assessment to ensure that it is in keeping with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area within which it is proposed and provided that it can satisfy the relevant criteria as established within this retail strategy and the Retail Planning Guidelines.

Policy 1: It will be Council policy to ensure that all retail development permitted accords with the relevant requirements and criteria as established within the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012 and the Longford County Retail Strategy 2015-2021.

Policy 2: It will be Council policy to permit retail development of a size and scale which is appropriate to the level of the town/ settlement area, including its population, as defined within the County retail hierarchy. This policy will aim to consolidate and reinforce all existing retail enterprises within the County, and permit the development of additional retail floorspace where such development is deemed to be appropriate by Longford County Council.

Policy 3: When bringing forward proposals for the creation of new retail floorspace, the Council will require applicants to undertake an assessment of the quality and suitability of existing and available floorspace in the County relative to the circumstances of their proposals.

Policy 4: It will be Council policy to discourage new retail development if they would either by themselves or cumulatively in conjunction with other developments seriously damage the vitality and viability of existing retail centres within the County. This policy is aimed at protecting the existing vitality and service provision of the towns, and particularly the town centres, of County Longford by preventing the development of retail enterprises in inappropriate locations or at a scale which would have a negative impact on retail competition within the County.

Policy 5: When assessing retail planning applications, it will be Council policy to have regard to the findings of the capacity assessment contained in the Longford County Retail Strategy 2015-2021, including the ability to counteract expenditure leakage. The onus will be on any applicant to demonstrate in a Retail Impact Assessment that the proposed floorspace is appropriate having regard to the quantum of floorspace required within that specific urban centre or settlement, in addition to evidencing all other relevant variables, as specified within the Retail Planning Guidelines.

Policy 6: It will be Council policy to encourage, in the first instance, developments which promote and protect the Longford Town Core Shopping Area as the primary location for high order comparison and large scale convenience retail development in the County, subject to the criteria of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012. In principle, this will not preclude the consideration of proposals in locations where mitigating and robustly justified special circumstances apply.

Policy 7: It will be Council policy to promote the reuse of vacant retail floorspace. Where no viable retail use can be sustained, alternative uses will be assessed on their own merits against the requirements of the proper planning and sustainable development of the areas within which they are located. This policy will be used to ensure that all proposals for the reuse of existing retail floorspace can be evaluated and the proportion of vacancy can be reduced. In addition the identification and introduction of alternative uses for vacant retail floorspace will reduce the possibility of such floorspace falling derelict.

Policy 8: It will be Council policy to look to encourage the consolidation of other non retail based services within the town centres of the County utilising existing vacant retail floorspace where necessary. This policy will aid in enhancing the vitality of town centres, encouraging them to maintain their role as employment locations in addition to reducing the proportion of vacant retail floorspace and recognising the value which non retail uses can contribute to the local economy through the provision of employment and general economic benefit.

Policy 9: It will be Council policy to continue to improve the public realm of urban centres through the encouragement of high quality civic design, including but not limited to the provision of attractive street furniture, lighting and effective street cleaning. In addition, the introduction of business improvement district type initiatives to the principal settlements of County Longford will be evaluated to establish the contribution that such proposals could make to the viability and vitality of town centres within the County.

Policy 10: It will be Council policy to undertake measures to improve the accessibility of town centres by developing a pedestrian and cyclist friendly environment, which improves safety and limits traffic congestion where possible. A particular focus of this policy will be the development of additional pedestrian crossings where necessary within Longford Town centre, as well as other settlements within the County where high volumes of vehicular traffic can be seen to inhibit pedestrian movement.

Policy 11: It will be Council policy to encourage and facilitate retail innovation, where appropriate, to help diversify the County's retail profile and offer. Where possible, this retail innovation should be directed towards existing urban centres and settlements in the first instance, but will not preclude the development of retail enterprises in other locations, where the retail innovation in question cannot be sustained within any alternative location. Such development proposals will be assessed on their own merits, and must satisfy the assessment criteria of the Retail Planning Guidelines.

Policy 12: It will be Council policy to require a Retail Impact Assessment to be carried out for development proposals in the following general circumstances:

a) Proposals featuring greater than 1000sqm of net floorspace for both convenience and comparison type developments in the four main towns;

b) Proposals featuring greater than 500sqm of net retail floorspace for both convenience and comparison type developments in district towns and other settlements;

c) Or where the Planning Authority considers the development may impact on the vitality and viability of a town centre.

The Retail Impact Assessment shall include, at minimum, the criteria set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.

Policy 13: It will be Council policy to ensure that all proposed retailing projects and any associated improvement works or associated infrastructure such as parking facilities, individually or in combination with other plans and projects, are subject to Appropriate Assessment to ensure there are no likely significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites[26] in the County.

5.5 CRITERIA FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF FUTURE RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

All applications for significant retail development should be assessed against a range of relevant criteria.

The Sequential Test
All applications for retail developments at edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations will be subject to the sequential test, where the following applies:

The Retail Planning Guidelines state *that the order of priority for the sequential approach is to locate retail development in the city/town centre (and district centre if appropriate), and only to allow retail development* **in** *edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations where all other options have been exhausted. Where retail development in an edge-of-centre site is being proposed, only where the applicant can demonstrate* **and** *the planning authority is satisfied that there are no sites or potential sites including vacant units within a city or town centre or within a designated district centre that are (a)* **suitable** *(b)* **available** *and (c)* **viable**, *can that edge-of-centre site be considered.*

Where retail development on an out-of-centre site is being proposed, only in exceptional circumstances where the applicant can demonstrate **and** *the planning authority is satisfied that there are no sites or potential sites either within the centre of a city, town or designated district centre or on the edge of the city/town/district centre that are (a)* **suitable** *(b)* **available** *and (c)* **viable,** *can that out-of-centre site be considered.*

[26] In accordance with requirements under Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive.

Retail Impact Assessments
Retail Impact Assessments will be required for significant retail development where due to its scale and/or location, it may impact on the vitality and viability of centres. These assessments will be prepared in accordance with the current Retail Planning Guidelines, which requires an applicant to address the following criteria and demonstrate whether or not the proposal would:

- Support the long-term strategy for city/town centres as established in the development plan, and not materially diminish the prospect of attracting private sector investment into one or more such centres;
- Have the potential to Increase employment opportunities and promote economic regeneration;
- Have the potential to increase competition within the area and thereby attract further consumers to the area;
- Respond to consumer demand for its retail offering and not diminish the range of activities and services that a centre can support;
- Cause an adverse impact on one or more centres, either singly or cumulatively with recent developments or other outstanding planning permissions (which have a realistic prospect of implementation) sufficient to undermine the quality of the centre or its wider function in the promotion and encouragement of the arts, culture, leisure, public realm function of the town centre critical to the economic and social life of the community;
- Cause an increase in the number of vacant properties in the primary retail area that is likely to persist in the long term;
- Ensure a high standard of access both by public transport, foot and private car so that the proposal is easily accessible by all sections of society; and/or
- Link effectively with an existing city/town centre so that there is likely to be commercial synergy.

Traffic and Transport Assessments
A Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) may be required for retail developments over a particular threshold (100sqm), as set out in the Traffic Management Guidelines 2003, and the Traffic Transport Assessment Guidelines 2007.

A TTA must examine the transport impacts of a proposed development, incorporating any subsequent measures necessary to ensure roads, junctions and other transport infrastructure in the vicinity of the development are adequate to accommodate the proposed development without causing additional delays to existing and future road based traffic. More importantly, TTA is important in demonstrating how to encourage a shift towards sustainable travel modes by those using the retail development in question.

5.6 CRITERIA FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENT TYPES

Large Convenience Stores
The Retail Planning Guidelines set a 3,000sqm retail floorspace cap on food store development outside the four Dublin Authority areas, and the cities of Cork, Limerick/Shannon, Galway and Waterford. This strategy absorbs this requirement, which applies to new stores as well as to extensions to existing retail premises.

Retail Parks and Retail Warehouses
Retail warehouse complexes generally comprise an agglomeration of retail warehouses grouped around a common car park selling mainly bulky household goods. There is an expectation that most of the goods purchased can be transported off-site by the customer and because of this they are generally located on the edge or outside of the built-up urban area.

The key consideration in determining the distribution of floorspace is defining the appropriate and sustainable location for such retail activities. In accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines there should be a presumption against the further development of out of town retail parks and a preference for sites in or adjacent to town centres to ensure the potential for linked trips and commercial synergy. Key criteria for the assessment of retail warehouse applications include scale and design of the development, appropriate vehicular access and the quantative need for such development. The Retail Planning Guidelines state that individual retail units should not be less than 700sq.m and not more than 6,000sq.m in size. These figures are gross floor area, including storage and garden centres. It is essential that the range of goods sold is restricted by planning condition to bulky household items as those defined within the RPGs such as household appliances, furniture and furnishings. The proportion of non bulky goods should be limited to 20% of the not truly 'bulky' goods and should be clearly delineated on the planning application drawings.

Local Shops
Local shops play a vital role in catering for the daily or causal needs of nearby residents or of those passing by. Primarily convenience outlets, they provide a readily accessible service for basic goods, especially for the less mobile members of communities.

Where appropriate, local shops shall be recognised in the relevant parts of the Development Plan, with ample provision for the establishment of other neighbourhood shops and services made in the zoning of additional land for residential development, where necessary.

Retailing and Motor Fuel Stations
Local shops attached to petrol filling stations are a growing sector of the retail market. However, the size of the shop associated with any petrol filling station should take account of the fact that large shops can attract additional custom, large numbers of cars can cause disruption and the preferred location for retailing is in town centres. The Retail Planning Guidelines state that when the size of such retail units is in excess of 100sqm the sequential approach should apply.

5.7 MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Retail Planning Guidelines advise planning authorities to regularly monitor trends in their areas, and update retail policies as appropriate. Recognising that the retail sector is one of the most dynamic sectors in the economy and that related trends, influences and information can change over time, the Council is committed to monitoring the contents of this strategy to ensure that:

i. The Retail Strategy and its baseline data are kept as up to date as possible;

ii. Mechanisms that are in place to monitor the progress of the strategy are appropriate and fit for purposes; and

iii. The Council can intervene in a positive and timely manner to address changing circumstances, as necessary.

6.0 Conclusion

The Longford County Retail Strategy 2015-2021 has been prepared for the Longford Local Authorities in accordance with the requirements of the Retail Planning Guidelines, 2012. The policies which have been formulated as part of this Retail Strategy will be implemented as part of the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021.

In compiling this Retail Strategy, due regard has been had to the most up to date information regarding population growth projections, the prevailing economic outlook and retail sales information. This has been used to provide a firm basis on which to inform future policy direction with the aim of enhancing and developing the retail offering of County Longford and the settlements therein.

ANNEX →

Annex 3: Rural Design Guidance

Rural Design Guidance For Residential Developments in Rural County Longford

Introduction

This guidance document is not intended as a set of rigid, prescriptive rules to which all new development must adhere, but a guiding set of principles that will act as an aid to potential developers, particularly in the early stages of the planning process.

Longford County has a unique and strong identity and character. One of the principal aims of this guide is to retain and strengthen this character for the benefit of its population and future generations. This does not mean that the countryside should be static or decline, it simply means that care should be exercised in the location and siting of developments in the Countryside.

This document has been compiled in the form of sections that follow a logical sequence in the establishment of a dwelling, from concept phase onto location and through to layout and detailed house design.

Photographs are provided throughout to illustrate points made in the text. These photos are from the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage for County Longford and as such, have a particular significance for the County.

It should be noted that pre-planning meetings are always advised in the case of applications for the development of houses in rural County Longford to discuss potential issues and prevent delays in the planning process once initiated.

Stage 1 Basic Concepts

The basic requirements of the end user should be considered prior to the drawing up of detailed plans for the development of a dwelling in rural County Longford. It is recommended that the potential applicant engage the services of a suitably qualified professional at this stage.

These requirements will have significant implications for the location, design, layout and appearance of the finished dwelling and should be carefully considered. They will include, but are not limited to, the following issues:

NEED TYPE

There are many categories of home owner and the house location, siting and design should be chosen to reflect this need. These include owners with young families, empty-nesters, holiday homeowners, home-office users and those with sheltered housing requirements. The category of user should be reflected in the design process.

LONGEVITY AND ADAPTABILITY

Consideration should be given to the ability of the dwelling to accommodate the changing needs of a household, thereby allowing a family to reside in it over a lifetime, changing and adapting as needs be.

SUSTAINABILITY

This incorporates the concepts outlined above, combined with location, siting, choice of building materials and finishes and the use of design initiatives and technology to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

The location of the dwelling in relation to places of work, education, recreation and other activities is a consideration, as is the siting of the dwelling to achieve maximum shelter from prevailing winds and rain while benefiting from solar energy.

Choice of materials is important in terms of the sustainability of their production methods, how they are delivered from their place of manufacture and their inherent sustainability, i.e. how well do they wear and can they be repaired/maintained.

The use of alternative energy sources such as solar cells, geothermal solutions and wind energy should be considered at this point as it is much more efficient for these elements to be integrated into the overall house design rather than attempt to retrofit at a later date.

BUDGET

Transport, fuel requirements, decoration and furnishing, boundary and surface treatments are some of the many details that contribute to the ongoing development costs that may be hidden at the preliminary stages.

Stage 2 Site Selection

Careful site selection can address many issues that could otherwise prove costly and time consuming to resolve at a later time in the design process. Developments should be integrated into and work with the landscape as opposed to dominating it, for example, sites with natural screening and shelter provided by hedgerows, trees and topography should be utilised to reduce the impact of the proposal in the wider landscape and preserve privacy.

Site selection with a view towards the utilisation of natural features will also reduce the need for costly earthworks and landscaping and increase the sustainability of the project (see *Site Layout* and *Landscaping Sections* in *Stage 3*).

The potential for the development to benefit from passive heat and solar energy through appropriate orientation should also be maximised, an important consideration at site selection stage.

Road safety is an important concern. Sites with poor access/ sightlines or those that require the removal of significant amounts of roadside hedgerow should be avoided. New accesses onto National roads are generally not permitted.

Site selection that maximises the use of existing features will help to create an appropriate backdrop for a development, providing visual integration with its setting, privacy and shelter.

The availability of services for the site should be considered as part of the site selection process and included in the budgeting phase. The visual impact of service/access provision can sometimes be greater than that of the development itself, i.e. overhead wiring, access roads cutting through contours, masts and aerials for T.V./broadband connection.

Hedgerows, ditches and other established roadside boundaries are important landscape elements that significantly contribute to the visual amenity and biodiversity of an area.

At this stage, potential applicants should consult the Longford County Development Plan for potential locational issues in terms of landscape vulnerability, which can include areas of archaeological, ecological and visual sensitivity. Other areas such as infrastructural study corridors and areas of known aquifer vulnerability may be best avoided.

Stage 3
Site Layout

A well considered site layout will maximise the benefits of choosing the appropriate site as outlined above. The layout will need to accommodate all aspects of the development, including domestic effluent disposal, site services and access.

Existing site features such as topography and landcover, farm buildings, walls etc. should be used to maximise privacy, screening and shelter. Avoid breaking the skyline in elevated areas as this adds significantly to visual impact.

The proposed dwelling should be located away from areas prone to flooding, where the water table is close to the surface or where drainage appears sluggish, as indicated by ground conditions such as seasonal ponding, poaching by livestock and a visual inspection of dominant vegetation types.

Developments should be carefully located on sloping sites to minimise cut and fill requirements.

Care should be taken to avoid vulnerable features such as wells and watercourses and potentially sensitive archaeological areas.

Maximising passive solar gain is an important element of the site layout process. Generally, glazing should be minimised on northern elevations to conserve heat and maximised on southern facades to capture solar gain (this issue will be addressed further in Stage 4 – House Design).

ACCESS AND ROADSIDE FRONTAGE

The majority of dwellings in rural County Longford are located along public roadsides. Traditionally, these dwellings were located on the roadside edge, many at a 90 angle, sometimes with outbuildings opposite, creating a street-like relationship with the carriageway.

The advent of high speed vehicles and the necessary accompanying road safety standards has abolished this practice in the development of new dwellings.

Dwellings now tend to be set-back, with a large front lawn, running parallel to the road frontage with the original boundary treatment removed and a straight tarmacadam driveway cutting across contours from the entrance back to the dwelling.

Driveways and entrances create a significant visual impact, particularly in upland areas and roadsides with well established hedgerows and a high level of visual enclosure.

Access roads should be inobtrusively located and designed to follow, as opposed to cut across, land contours. Driveway design should incorporate surface water drainage provisions to prevent run-off on to adjacent roadways and subsequent surface damage.

Hard surfaces and parking areas should be screened from view where possible, preferably to the rear of the building(s).

A combination of sympathetic boundary treatment, good site selection and appropriate driveway design enhances an attractive rural setting.

Accesses and front boundary treatments should aim to minimise removal of existing hedgerows, ditches and stone walls, which are often significant contributors to the character and biodiversity of a rural area. The maintenance of the hedgerow at a suitable height or the relocation of the proposed entrance to a more appropriate position should be considered above removal.

Whitewashed, barrel-style piers with stone wall splays on each side form an attractive entranceway commonly seen in rural areas.

Where removal is unavoidable, sensitive set-back replacement should be carried out to reflect the original treatment and retain the boundary as a functioning wildlife corridor where possible.

Proposed new boundary treatments and accesses should take cognisance of traditional practice in the area and aim to enhance, rather than detract from the existing roadside character.

Care should be taken at design stage to ensure adequate sightlines are achieved by maintaining wall and vegetation below 1.2m for required distances

There are a broad range of traditional entrance treatments in County Longford, some of which are pictured here.

Stone walls are commonly used, into which features and detailing have often been inserted to add interest and break monotony. Backplanting with vegetation and/or the use of native climbing species can be used to soften the effect of a development from the roadside.

Pedestrian gates were once a common and attractive feature of front boundary walls that have waned in popularity as vehicles have become more prolific.

Painted wrought iron gates and associated steps, piers and stiles are recognisable features throughout the rural area that create interest and variety in frontage treatments. Front boundary walls, where blockwork is used, should always be plastered/rendered and/or painted and capped.

LANDSCAPING

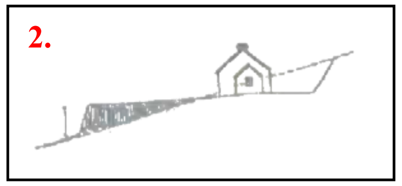
The primary purpose of landscaping in these guidelines is to link the proposed dwelling with its surrounding countryside. As discussed in previous sections, mature trees and hedgerows on or adjacent to the site should be retained where possible.

Additional planting should utilise native species indigenous to the area in order to help the proposal blend effectively. Large expanses of "pool table" lawns, edged with exotic species and highly visible against surrounding agricultural landscapes, should be avoided. Plant groupings should form organic shapes and soften building lines from external view points.

Planting of shelter belts using species indigenous to the local area can be useful in buffering high winds, creating shelter from driving rain and shade from strong sunshine, as well as increasing the privacy of dwelling and its attendant spaces.

The promotion of biodiversity and retention of wildlife corridors is an important consideration, particularly in or adjacent to protected habitats or other ecologically sensitive areas. Block planting of suitable native woodland species can address these issues.

Earthworks such as cut and fill should aim for gentle, natural looking slopes (Diagram 1.) rather than truncated shelf-like projections with an artificial appearance (Diagram 2.).



Excavated material should be spread to mould with and softly curve around the original contours. Additional planting should be utilised to further soften the outline of the dwelling against face of the cut, thereby blending the development into the hillside.

Stage 4
Detailed house design

House design should be a detailed response to the specific conditions of the site, combined with the basic concepts identified at Stage 1.

SHAPE AND FORM

Simple shapes work best in the Countryside. New developments should take their cues from the vernacular architecture that exists in the area. Bulky forms should be avoided or mitigated where possible by appropriate roof design and detailing (see Diagram) – long plans may prove a suitable alternative.

The roof profile, chimney positioning, porch detailing and window treatment on the house opposite emphasises horizontal bulk and is at odds with traditional proportions and appearance.

Simple amendments such as those illustrated opposite successfully address the balance and create a dwelling much more in keeping with County Longford vernacular building tradition

Simple, clean roof lines are preferable to fussy complicated shapes. Pitches should generally fall in the range of 40˚- 45˚.

Proportions are particularly important in rural situations in terms of visual impact. Care should be taken to preserve vertical emphasis on the front or visible elevation, and maintaining a high solid to void ratio (i.e. more wall than opening).

Distinctions are generally not made between single and two-storey dwellings, except where there are potential privacy/overlooking issues, where the dwelling is proposed in an elevated area and/or where the construction of a particular type prevails.

The labourer's cottage, pictured left, is a distinctive feature of Longford's rural environment and but one example of vernacular building type. These dwellings were constructed from the 1880's on and many remain in existence today, particularly in the south and east of the County and in the vicinity of the Canal.

These dwellings consist of a simple plan with the bedroom contained in the attic space. Simple roof profiles and horizontally emphasised proportions dominate the appearance.

Annexes and Garages

Annexes such as conservatories, sun-rooms and garages should appear as forms similar but subordinate to the main form of the dwelling. Materials used should reflect those of the main dwelling.

Garages should generally be separate from the main dwelling or appear so through appropriate setback.

Outbuildings were commonly grouped around the main dwelling, creating a courtyard or street-like enclosure or grouping of buildings. This clustering effect is more desirable than the establishment of large, stand alone double garage structures that compete with the main dwelling for visual dominance.

The above picture illustrates how annexes and extensions were addressed in their traditional form. The annexes are clearly subordinate to the main body of the dwelling, which maintains a stand alone presence and a distinct vertical emphasis in its proportions.

MATERIALS AND FINISHES

Traditionally, natural and locally sourced materials were favoured in dwelling construction. Traditional building forms, materials and detailing were designed as a response to local climatic conditions, reducing exposure to the elements and thereby minimising heat loss and water ingress.

Natural and traditional materials such as wood and stone also facilitate repair rather than replacement, e.g. uPVC versus wooden windows and doors, an important consideration in the sustainability of a development.

Modern materials and heating methods have allowed a greater range of finishes and detailing, many of which can look incongruous and ill-suited to countryside situations.

In addition to visual considerations, the need for sustainable building solutions would point towards the use of locally sourced products that reduce dependence on fossil fuels in terms of their manufacture, transport and longevity.

Building features and finishes more suited to warmer climates, such as balconies and open arched porches, will be discouraged.

Natural, locally sourced stone will be considered as a finish material where appropriate, however, the use of reconstituted concrete cladding and other artificial cladding materials will be discouraged.

WINDOWS

Painted hardwood finishes are favoured above uPVC and aluminium finishes, both in terms of appearance and sustainability.

Horizontally emphasised windows should be avoided, as should fussy uPVC glazing, particularly where sub-divided by internal glazing bars.

The windows pictured here illustrate traditional forms that exist in rural County Longford, many of which lend themselves to modern interpretation in terms of proportion and scale.

The use of plaster banding and reveals further defines the feature and creates interest. Note how division and sub-division are used to maintain a vertical emphasis in each case.

DOORS AND PORCHES

Doors should be simply designed and comprise a minimum of materials. Glazing should be restricted to the upper half of the door. Patio type or double doors should be avoided on the front elevation of the dwelling

Porches and recessed doors were traditionally used to combat adverse weather conditions. Porches can also be used as a design feature to turn corners and create active frontage on two sides of a dwelling.

Fanlights and slit windows are often used to allow light in to hallways and entrance areas, usually with decorative effects such as stained glass and mullions.

The use of brightly painted hardwood doors can be a useful device for adding a splash of colour in to an otherwise neutral façade, with attractive results.

EXTERNAL FINISHES

The external finishes of a dwelling are particularly important in terms of its compatibility and ability to harmonise with the surrounding landscape. Painted nap plaster or rough/wet dash finishes are appropriate in this setting, as are coloured renders.

The use of brightly painted doors and windows can be used to brighten up a render finish

Large expanses of red and/or yellow brick are not appropriate in rural County Longford as they are not locally sourced, have not been traditionally used as a finish material and are more appropriate to urban locations. In certain circumstances and locations, and depending on the design of the dwelling, the limited use of brick as a detailing material only may be considered.

Dry dash finishes are difficult to maintain and have a tendency to leach minerals, leaving permanent and unsightly vertical streaks down external walls, and, as such, are not encouraged.

ROOFS

As discussed at Stage 3, roofs should be simply designed. This also follows for roofing materials which should be blue or blue/back slate or tile, with a matte or semi-matte finish. Ridge tiles should generally be of the same colour as the main roofing material, except in certain areas where terracotta/pointed ridges are part of the vernacular.

Pitched or hipped roofs are generally acceptable. Extensions or garages/outbuildings should have a similar roofing material of a similar pitch. Half-hips, dutch gables and mansard roofs are generally not acceptable (with the exception of Ardagh village and surrounds, where half-hipped roofs are established by tradition).

The roof and roofing material is an important element in the visual impression of a dwelling, particularly in terms of how the bulk of the building is articulated. Traditional rural built forms were long in plan and appearance. Pitches are usually set between 40˚- 45˚.

Hipped roofs can be utilised to reduce the visual bulk of square plan houses, an effect that is negated where chimneys are placed at either gable end.

Chimneys are important visual features in a dwelling and should be located on the ridge line where possible, particularly in the case of hipped roofs, or located to the rear. The traditional style chimneys illustrated above are all substantial structures and read as strong design elements. Thin, insubstantial chimney structures should be avoided.

Care should be taken to create an overall design response at roof level. Aerials, satellite dishes and other receivers should be screened from view where possible.

CONTEMPORARY HOUSE DESIGN

Whilst it is evident from the aforementioned design guidance that consideration must be given to the existing and traditional built heritage of County Longford, there is also a growing desire to build homes that reflect advances in technology and fulfil the needs of modern lifestyles. Successful contemporary design in Longford will be measured by how well these objectives are met.

Design proposals of this nature should provide 21st century architecture that is innovative, sustainable, environmentally conscious and firmly of its time and place. Proposals should not seek to replicate, mimic or imitate, but fuse new building technologies and styles with the built character of what has gone before, interpreting traditional in the contemporary context.

Contemporary and inventive design is a welcome addition to the rural countryside. However, given that successful contemporary design is site specific, original and inventive, it is difficult to be prescriptive. In this regard proposals should be expertly and sensitively handled. Accordingly, it is strongly advised to engage the services of a skilled architect and consult with the Local Authority at pre-planning stage.

Contemporary rural house (left) granted planning permission at Mollyglass, Co. Longford. Credit; CAST Architecture. Photo sourced from http://castarchitecture.ie/?project=rural-house-ii-longford

Contemporary extension (below) at Newcastle Demesne, Ballymahon, Co. Longford. Credit; ODOS Architects. Photo sourced from http://www.e-architect.co.uk/images/jpgs/ireland/ballymahon_house_o010310_rh3.jpg

ANNEX →

Annex 4: Landscape Character Assessment

1. Introduction And Context

This Document Has Been Prepared With Reference To The Draft Landscape And Landscape Assessment Guidelines For Local Authorities As Issued By The Department Of The Environment In June 2000[1] (Hereinafter Referred To As "The Guidelines").

[1] It is recognised that during the statutory plan preparation period, revised guidelines were issued in June 2014 by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht entitled "A Draft National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2014 – 2024". However, in line with the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) it was not within the scope of the prescribed timeframes to facilitate the consideration of these revised guidelines at that point in the County Development Plan process.

As The Guidelines Are Still In Draft Format, Extensive Study Was Carried Out Into The Area Of Character Assessment, And This Document Draws Heavily On Recent Works Throughout The Country And The Uk. The Publication "Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance For England And Scotland", Released By The Countryside Agency And Scottish Natural Heritage Was Used Extensively Due To Its Compatibility With The Draft Guidelines.

An emphasis on landscape *Character* was maintained in the formulation of this assessment. Character represents the individuality of an area based on its particular combination of features and elements. This approach contrasts with the evaluation method, which rates one particular landscape against another.

In order to formulate an effective development management and policy-making tool, the scope of the assessment must first be defined.

1.1 SCOPE

1.1.1 PURPOSE AND AIMS

One of the primary aims of the completed assessment is to inform the policy formulation and decision-making process in relation to the siting, design and material content of new developments.

This process is interlinked with policy documents at a national regional and local level and it is an aim of this assessment to translate the essence of these documents into a workable local context, including the following:

- National Spatial Strategy
- Government Guidelines on sustainable rural housing, location and siting of windfarms, mobile phone antennae and support structures, quarries etc.
- Midland Regional Planning Guidelines
- Longford County Development Plan
- Longford County Heritage Plan
- Local Area Plans and Village Policy Statements

While it is an accepted fact that the landscape is not a static entity, the level and direction of change, which is deemed acceptable over a period of time, must be ascertained in order to facilitate effective and efficient development control and environmental maintenance systems.

The methodology involved in this process will produce a clear, concise and transparent background for landscape preservation, conservation and enhancement policies for the county, through the use of existing material such as soil data, landcover information and hydrological sensitivity. This will be combined with information from the public, such as the areas and places within the County that form the building blocks of its unique identity and existing policy at all levels throughout the planning process.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The aim of this assessment is to identify, and attempt to quantify, the landscape attributes that make Longford unique. As such, stakeholder input is a basic element of this document.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

1.2.1 DESK STUDY

The initial investigation involved study of available material on the natural factors that influence the landscape. This included information on geology, landform, drainage, soils, landcover and vegetation. Cultural factors such as land use, settlement patterns and the change over time of these factors were also studied and mapped. This resulted in the landscape character types and areas in the following chapters.

1.2.2 FIELD SURVEY

The landscape types and areas derived from the desk study were then analysed in the field, whereby aesthetic and perceptual aspects, perceived character and individual condition and potential sensitivity were assessed.

These components were then classified, resulting in maps defining character types and areas, which are then described and the key characteristics of each area identified.

1.3 CURRENT LANDSCAPE POLICIES

This section details the various national and local policies that relate to the landscape at present.

NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

The NSS refers to the Midlands as a rural area that is changing and calls for policy responses that support communities where agriculture is under stress through promoting diversification in enterprise, local services and tourism. Reference is made to the protection of landscape, water resources and habitats in order to support this policy response.

Conservation of cultural identity is an important element in the development of rural areas and includes the protection of natural and other heritage resources.

Rural areas are considered in terms of a national resource, including natural environment, landscape and natural heritage, which are essential to underpin strengthened rural economies and the national economy.

Resources referred to are agricultural land, water resources forestry and landscape quality.

In relation to the broad strategy for the midlands region, the NSS identifies the rural areas to the south of Longford and north of Granard as rural areas with strong potential for diversification. The area to the north of Longford and north and east of Ballymahon is identified as having village strengthening and rural area opportunities. The central area, taking in Longford and Edgeworthstown, is defined as a broad national transport corridor.

The importance of unspoilt landscapes and inland waterway networks in the Midlands region and the accessibility of these areas to Dublin is recognised in terms of its future potential to complement the agricultural sector with additional tourism and recreational activity. The potential for the worked out bogs to be utilised in the production of wind energy with ancillary manufacturing servicing and development activities is also noted.

MIDLAND REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES

The following is the vision for the Midlands region upon which the policy framework contained in the guidelines is based:

By 2022, the Midland Region will be a successful, sustainable and equitable region full of opportunities for its expanded population achieved through:

- Enhancing the critical mass of the region by combining the strengths of the linked gateway of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar, as envisaged in the NSS with those of the principal towns of Longford and Portlaoise.
- Developing the full potential of rural areas in the region in a manner that is compatible with the strengthening of the urban structure of the region.
- Offering a distinctive lifestyle rooted in a high quality living environment, rich in heritage and landscape value.
- Harnessing the central geographical location of the region at the "heart" of Ireland with more interregional links than any other region in Ireland, to build a strategically focused network of transport and communications links.
- Ensuring that the natural environment of the region such as water quality, landscape, and biodiversity is protected, maintained, and enhanced, where appropriate, as a basis for future sustainable development in the region.

The vision outlined above relates strongly to the landscape of the area as both an entity where the functions required to drive the region take place and also a strong element of the culture and identity of the region that sets it apart from other areas in the Country.

Chapter 3 deals with the development of rural areas in the region and Section 2 of the guidelines outlines the strategic goals and Planning Considerations for the Region.

Goal 11 is of particular relevance in terms of the development of rural areas and landscape implications:

To develop and market a distinctly unique image and identity for the region that will attract investment and economic activity to the region.

The development of the image of the region as the heart of Ireland, an area with a high quality of life in a relatively unspoilt environment, will rely on the continued protection and enhancement of valuable natural resources (such as agricultural land, and amenities such as the lakes, rivers, canals, bogs and uplands) and the built heritage of the region. The preservation of the environmental integrity, water and air quality and the visual environment, will play an important role in maintaining this image which is vital for the attraction of investment and population growth.

Longford County is located in the northern development area as defined by the guidelines, for which the following specific development proposal has been included

Focused promotion and marketing of the natural heritage and cultural resources of the area and its associated high quality of life, which is vital for its development and a valuable contribution towards the identity of the region as a whole.

The following common spatial issues are relevant to the development of landscape policy and are outlined in Section 7:

Environmental Issues
The midlands have specific environmental advantages that can be brought together in order to foster a unique green image for the region. The recommendations under each issue aim to promote and strengthen awareness of the high quality of life that exists in the region and how this can be maintained in tandem with enhanced economic growth.

Agriculture
The future development of agriculture in the region should take cognisance of the following issues:

- *Existing strong agricultural areas should be prioritised for development in this sector.*
- *Diversification of agriculture should be promoted to revitalise the social and economic climate in rural communities, particularly in areas of marginal land.*
- *Targeted promotion of agricultural activities should take place in areas where conditions are best suited for individual specialities, e.g. arable farming in the south, cattle fattening enterprises in central area etc. Land that is agriculturally important should be protected from inappropriate development.*
- *Industrial development should be promoted in appropriate rural areas*
- *Environmentally sustainable agricultural practices should be promoted*

Waterways
Policy should be formulated in relation to inland waterways, taking account of the following issues:

- *The leisure and amenity potential of the inland waterways of the region should be investigated and promoted where appropriate, particularly in line with the tourism industry.*
- *Re-opening of canals and connections between them should be prioritised as a major element in the identity and tourism potential of the region.*

Bogland
The following issues should be considered:

- *Alternative uses for cutaway and cutover boglands should be investigated, particularly in relation to the alternative and renewable energy industries*
- *The prominence of boglands in the social, economic and cultural development of the region and as a defining element in its identity should be recognised and promoted.*

Forestry
The following issues should be considered in formulating forestry policies:

- *Deciduous forestry should be promoted as an alternative land use in suitable areas of land, particularly in areas of agricultural decline*
- *The amenity and leisure and other spin-off industrial potential of forestry should be promoted in tandem with afforestation or re-afforestation plans.*

Natural and Built Heritage
In summary, to capitalise on the heritage assets of the region, the following issues should be considered:

- *Common heritage themes should be utilised to promote and market an identity for the region, for its internal population and in terms of the tourist industry*
- *Heritage elements should be protected through a co-ordinated effort between all four planning authorities to ensure consistency of approach.*

Extractive Industries
Extractive industries are based on a finite resource that needs to be managed in a sustainable manner, taking account of the following aspects:

- *Extractive industry should be monitored in line with best practice Guidelines issued by the industry.*
- *The importance of the aggregates industry to ensure an adequate supply of aggregates to implement infrastructure under the NDP is acknowledged, as is the requirement to protect this non-renewable resource.*

LONGFORD COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN, 2015-2021

The County Development Plan outlines several landscape policies in relation to landscape, which are mainly contained in Section 6. Additional policy areas including the settlement strategy at Section 2.1.6 and rural areas at 2.1.6.5 and 3.2.2 also outline policies in relation to landscape and environmental protection.

Section 3.2.2 relates to sustainable rural policy, including the aims of minimising the negative impacts of development on agriculture and the landscape and minimising the spread of urban generated rural housing around existing pressure areas and sensitive landscapes.

Policy WS10 contains policy to restrict and curtail development in areas of known aquifer vulnerability

Annex 3 refers to the proposed design guidelines – it is proposed that this landscape character assessment will inform the formulation of the design guidelines; therefore, the preparation of both documents should be carried out in tandem. It should be noted design guidelines have also been prepared and are in form.

Section 3.2.2.1, policy HOU RUR 1 deals with the suitability of a development in terms of the sensitivity of the rural area.

Policies HOU RUR 2, 3 and 4 deals with the sustainability of rural houses based on those who intend to reside in them.

Section 4.5 deals with tourism policy, which includes the extension of amenities, water based and walking in particular. Several areas are listed as base locations for the utilisation of specific natural resources while protecting them from unacceptable degradation as a result of their usage.

Chapter 6 states that the planning Authority will control development in protected areas – scenic views and prospects, ridge lines, broad zones of the lakes, European sites- where this has the potential for negative impacts on the scenic, heritage and cultural assets of the county.

Chapter 6 deals with environment and amenities and issues such as sustainability, prevention of pollution, litter, conservation and protection of heritage and amenities and recreational amenities. Sections 6.1 and 6.2 are possibly of most relevance to this document. The chapter covers policy on the conservation and preservation of monuments, Archaeological, architectural and heritage objects, flora, fauna and wildlife habitats, landscapes and inland waterways, geology, gardens and parks. European sites are listed in section 6.2.2. of the plan.

CONCLUSION

The policies outlined above set a clear and positive framework for the protection and enhancement of landscapes in County Longford and the natural resources, cultural heritage and social identity that lies within and arises from them.

2. Landscape Character

Character can be defined as a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another. Landscape character assessments differ from landscape evaluations in that they attempt to classify landscapes on their individuality rather than defining one as better as or worse than another.

Landscape can be defined as embracing all that is visible when looking across an area or areas of land. Longford County has a varied and diverse landscape for its small physical size. The upland areas of the northern county contrast sharply with the gently undulating pastoral land of the south and south east, the flat clear views over the Shannon wetlands to the river to the west, Lough Ree to the south-west, and the acres of boglands, wetlands and woodlands throughout the County.

The landscape of the County is not only important in the attraction of tourists, as has been the major emphasis on landscape preservation in the recent past. The distinctive topography, landcover and landscape elements of the County lend its population and communities a sense of identity and belonging. The aim of landscape character assessment is to identify the elements of the landscape which create this uniqueness and the extent to which it is possible to alter these landscapes before unacceptable consequences arise. The following are examples of such consequences:

- Unacceptable degradation of environmental quality, as in the case of pollution of potable water supplies/fish kills etc
- Loss of irreplaceable archaeological artefacts
- Loss or fragmentation of important natural habitats
- Irreparable damage to architectural heritage
- Privatisation of access to lakes, rivers, heritage items and scenic areas
- Visual destruction of important areas that are recognised as fundamental elements in the identity of the county.

The guidelines propose that all Local Authorities classify the landscapes in their area according to their character, values and sensitivity. The character is defined as a product of landform and landcover, including vegetation and landuse.

Every act of development changes a landscape. This change can be positive, neutral or negative. It is government policy that in deciding for or against development that the appropriateness of that development within the given landscape context, as defined by this landscape character assessment, be considered.

2.1 COUNTY OVERVIEW

2.1.1 LANDFORM

Landform is concerned with the spatial and formal arrangement of landscape components as a natural product of geological and geomorphological history.

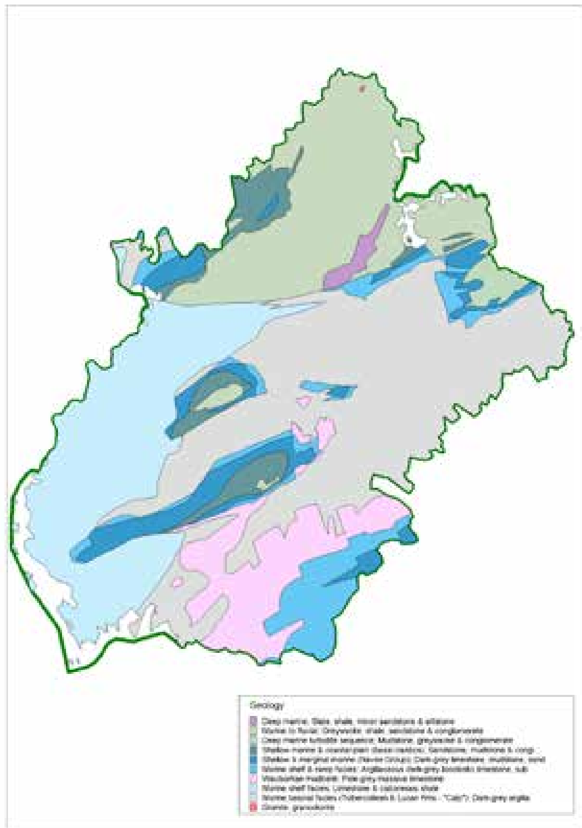
(a) Topography
The topography of the County can be roughly divided into three types; flat wetlands in the basins of the Shannon and Lough Ree to the south and southwest, the Inny to the northeast and central peatland areas of the County.

The north and northwest is characterised by typical drumlin topography, with the southeast distinguished by the gently undulating limestone pastureland of the Irish Central Plain.

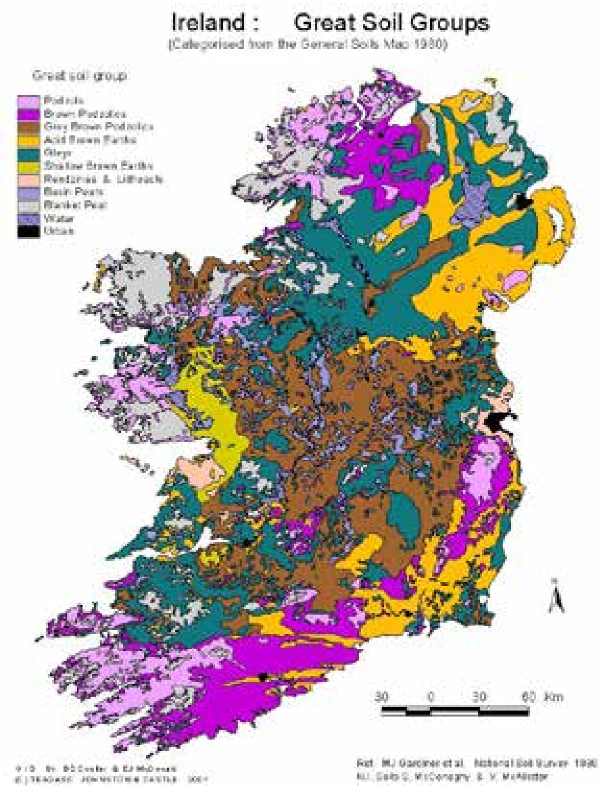
(b) Geology and Soils
Much of the underlying geology of the County is predominantly carboniferous limestone. Ordovician and Silurian shales intrude to the northeast. The bedrock geology of the County is illustrated in greater detail in the accompanying geology map. However, there is no absolute data on the drift/surface geology that occurs within the County. The Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) hopes to conduct a full study of the County, including details on the surface geology. This data will allow for a more detailed characterisation and description of the evolution of landscape character within the County.

A layer of glacial till overlies this geology and has been moulded in places to form Drumlins. This geology results in moderately well drained clay loam soils over much of the County, with bands of poorly drained clay loam and an associated fringe of poorly drained silting clay loams with inter drumlin peats to the north of the county.

To the west of the county lie vast expanses of basin peat with some marshland. Some of the lands adjacent to Lough Ree are comprised of shallow, well-drained loams.



Bedrock Geology of County Longford (Source GSI)



Soil types have an extensive influence on the environment of the County, dictating the landcover and landuse and the extent of both. All aspects of life are influenced either directly or indirectly by soil types, including settlement patterns, transport routes, communications infrastructure, location of archaeological deposits and economic activity. Soils represent an important and non-renewable natural resource.

Longford County can broadly be categorised into three areas for classification under the great soil groups. The north of the County (the area mainly above the 100m contour) is mainly composed of gley soils, while a broad strip of basin peats runs diagonally from mid/north west to south east. Pockets of gleys and basin peats abound throughout the County. The remainder of the soils are broadly classified as grey brown podzolics. The map shown on the previous page indicates illustratively the soil groups that can be found within the County.

Gley soils are heavy, poorly drained soils not given to arable cultivation without extensive drainage and artificial enrichment. This is reflected in the pattern of agricultural activity in the northern section of the County, which tends to have smaller, more fragmented landholdings with extensive farming practices.

Landspreading of farm effluent and application of fertilisers in these areas is a delicate balance, given the poor permeability of the soil and the proliferation of waterbodies in this area, many of which are protected as European Sites and vulnerable to eutrophication through excessive nitrate run-off from land.

Threats to surface water are further increased through the poor viability of these smaller farm units as permission is sought for dwelling sites to augment farm incomes and the soil's poor percolation characteristics render them unsuitable in the most part for conventional septic tank methods of domestic effluent disposal. These problems are consistently highlighted by the Northern Regional Fisheries Board in submissions on planning applications in the area.

Due to their relatively poor agricultural characteristics, a substantial portion of these soils has been subject to afforestation, with substantial and long-term visual impacts. The forestry industry has now turned toward the use of more productive soils. The implications of this trend have yet to become apparent, but may include the proliferation of non-managed exotic monoculture forestry tracts in previous permanent pasture regions and large areas of acidified soils.

The peat soils of the County have been harvested in antiquity, yet only on an industrial scale over the last few decades. The large scale harvesting of peat has an inordinate visual impact, given the flat nature of the landscape in which it is found and, as such, the visibility of the operation and its results over large distances.

The method of harvesting also contributes to the visual impact with large mounds of plastic covered milled peat glinting in the sunlight for kilometres and large amounts of airborne particulates being generated and dispersed during dry weather.

The biggest single environmental impact of peat harvesting is its subsequent burning to generate electricity and heat, instantaneously releasing CO_2 that has remained locked inside this carbon sink for thousands of years and contributing to the global greenhouse effect. The power station at Lanesboro in the west of the County, operated by ESB and Bord na Mona, also abstracts water from the Shannon for use as a coolant. This water is then returned to the river at a substantially higher temperature, impacting on the flora and fauna of the river system at this point.

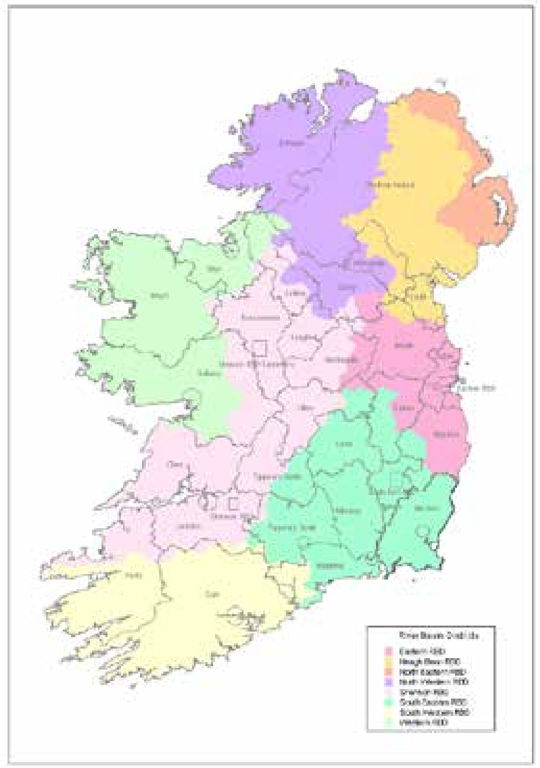
The re-use of cut-away bog is an important issue that has yet to be addressed, that may have wide-ranging implications across a broad range of environmental sectors. This is also true of the power station itself, due for decommissioning in the next two decades.

Grey brown podzolics are more suited to agricultural practice, reflected in the number of larger landholdings and intensive farming, particularly dairying, where these soils exist. These areas exhibit a distinct landscape character, typified in the "Goldsmith Country" of the southeast County, where verdant rolling pastures predominate, with intermittent stands of mature trees and crumbling demesne walls.

Mapping of geology, in particular the drift geology, in the Longford area is poor to date.

(c) Drainage patterns

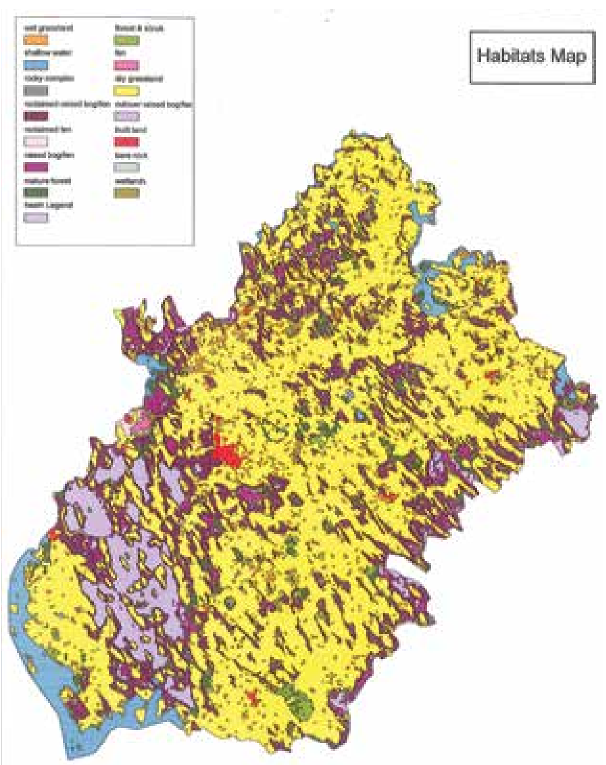
Most of County Longford is situated in the Shannon basin and lies along the north eastern shore of Lough Ree. The northern section of the County lies within the Erne catchment to the southwestern shores of Lough Gowna. The major Rivers in the County are the Camlin, which drains the midsection of the County and meets the Shannon at Clondra and the Inny, which runs along most of the southeastern county boundary to enter Lough Ree south of Ballymahon. The map overleaf shows the River Basin Districts.



Numerous lakes dot the northern section of the County, the largest of which is Lough Gowna, forming the boundary with Cavan. The north-western boundary of the County is formed by a string of lakes along the Leitrim border.

2.1.2 LANDCOVER

Landcover in County Longford can be broadly categorised into several areas as indicated in the thematic map shown below (based on Teagasc and Corine data).



As can be seen, the dominant landcover category is dry grassland, which indicates the continued importance of agriculture in the landscape. The interspersion of bog and fen, much of which is cutover and reclaimed, also represents a significant element in the landscape.

2.1.3
HUMAN INFLUENCE

(a) Settlement pattern

The County Development Plan identifies fourty-one designated settlements, which are relatively evenly dispersed throughout the County between north and south. There appears to be a current trend towards more dispersed forms of rural settlement. It is a stated aim of this character assessment to evaluate the ability of certain landscapes to absorb such settlement forms and inform policy decisions accordingly.

Settlements within County Longford

The population of Longford has been subject to devastating changes since famine times which had a dramatic impact on the settlement pattern of the County. Between 1841 and 1996 Longford County lost a staggering 74% of its population (from 115,491 to 30,166)[2]

This historical trend of depopulation would appear to be reversing, with a modest 3% population growth between 1996 and 2002 being followed by a more substantial 10% growth up to 2006. Census 2011 results show that Longford's population has continued to grow strongly since Census 2006, increasing by 4, 609 persons to 39,000 persons. This represents an increase of 13.5% per cent over the 5 year intercensal period. There implications of this growth on the landscape are inevitable, not just at a County level but also on a national one, as demands for accommodation, transport and communications and other modern essentials spiral upwards.

Several major architectural phases are represented in County Longford, indicating the length and intensity of settlement within the County. The following are some examples:

– *Prehistoric:* Corlea Bog trackway, Flint implements at Lough Kinale

– *Early Christian/Celtic Churches:* St. Mels, Ardagh, St. Diarmuids, Inchcleraun Island

– *Medieval:* Chancel Church and Augustinian monastery, Inchcleraun, Abbeyshrule, Abbeylara, All Saints Priory, Saints Island, Clondra Abbey, Rathcline castle, Castlerea, Elfeet, Mornin.

Castle Forbes

Corlea

– *16th/18thc:* Castle Forbes (built 1628, rebuilt after fire 19thc) Water garden, Rathcline Castle, Market house, Longford

– *18th/19thc:* Ledwithstown house, Ardagh Glebe, Castle Cor, St. Johns Church, Longford, Kilcommock (ruin), Courthouse, Longford, Clock tower, Keenagh, Coolamber Manor, Carriglass Manor, Ballymacormack COI, Newtownforbes COI, Ballinalee COI, Killoe COI, Forgney COI, Ardagh COI, Ballymahon COI, Keenagh COI, Edgeworthstown COI, Taghshinny RCC, Newtowncashel RCC, Lanesboro RCC, Market house Ballymahon.

– *Victorian:* St. Mels Cathedral, Longford, St. Mel's Diocesan Seminary, Longford, St. Mary's Granard, Edgeworthstown RCC, Longford and Edgeworthstown Railway Stations, Bank of Ireland, Longford, Ulster bank, Longford, rebuilding of Castle Forbes.

It should be noted that the presence of these features might not accurately illustrate the age of a particular settlement but rather the static nature of development in a particular area.

Significant work has been carried out by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in the identification of architectural structures of merit throughout the County through the preparation of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. This inventory is invaluable in the augmentation of the list of protected structures for the County, a process to be carried out in tandem with the preparation of the new County Development Plan.

(b) Agriculture

While the agricultural industry remains an important element in the national and local economy, it is extremely vulnerable to global changes and EU policy reform. The habitats map illustrated previously indicates the dominance of agricultural land in a County context. Substantial changes in the maintenance and management of agricultural land will therefore have an inordinate visual impact at this level.

Recent changes in agricultural practices have lead to trends toward enlargement in the more fertile, south eastern areas of the County, while fragmentation has occurred in the less profitable drumlin landscapes of the northern County, as farmers strive to maximise farm income from smaller, less fertile tracts of land. Farm fragmentation often occurs in the form of selling of half-acre sites for houses along road frontages. This coupled with the fact that the land in these areas is amongst the poorest in the county, the most elevated and visible, the least efficient in terms of the disposal of domestic effluent and require the removal of substantial sections of hedgerows for access purposes, the potential for landscape impact is particularly high.

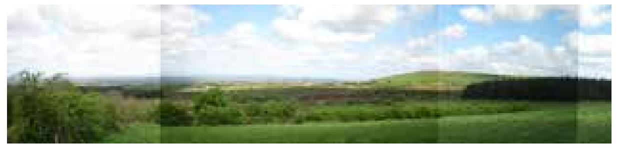
Grant aid and legislation are major factors in the determination of farming practices throughout the Country. Schemes such as the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme promote environmentally sensitive practices and are taken up to a greater degree throughout the County. Habitat identification and conservation, hedgerow replacement and maintenance and watercourse protection are some of the measures introduced relating to landscape.

The introduction of the nitrates regulations, in tandem with grant aided schemes for the construction of farm buildings and effluent storage, have the potential to create a significant visual impact throughout the Country. The number of planning applications for slatted sheds increased significantly during this period. These regulations also place limits on livestock numbers on land which may influence vegetation growth, particularly in marginal areas where poaching is a particular problem over the winter period.

(c) Forestry

The development of forestry has a significant impact on the landscape of the County, particularly as areas chosen tend to be marginal and elevated, two factors that can equate with the most scenic areas of the County. The most familiar landscape impact of forestry is the use of non-native species planted in strong geometric patterns in elevated areas that create a stark and artificial impression when viewed from a distance.

Attempts have been made to address this issue through guidelines adopted by the industry in new planting, such as careful mix of species, particularly along forest edges and maintenance of the harvest to minimise negative visual impacts.



Areas of Forestry within the County

However, there are several more subtle ways in which forestry can influence the perception of landscape. The slow and steady growth of trees can lead to the gradual and therefore imperceptible loss of views and prospects that might otherwise have been framed or enhanced by judicious and well planned planting.

(d) Archaeology

Proposals to include Archaeological landscapes have been included in submissions to the County Development Plan. As can be seen from the following map which illustrates the Record of Monuments and Places, the County is rich in archaeological heritage, particularly in the Granard area.

[2] *"North Leinster"* Casey C. Rowan A., 1993 Penguin

It is proposed that the Council engage in consultation with the relevant section of the department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in order to designate, protect and promote awareness of this heritage aspect. The DoECLG have proposed the designation of archaeological landscapes, which will cover areas of intense archaeological deposits. It is suggested that any such designation, once complete, should form part of this assessment.

(e) Culture
It is envisaged that the preparation of this document will run in tandem with the preparation of the heritage plan and result in the identification of the cultural elements that make Longford unique so that these can be protected and or promoted as part of the Council's duties and activities.

Cultural heritage includes landscapes made famous by literary figures, mythological legends and historical events. Festivals, fairs and community activities may also be included, particularly where they have a spatial dimension.

2.2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNITS

The Clare Landscape Pilot Study differentiates between Landscape Character types and **Landscape character areas**. Landscape character types (LCT) are defined as landscapes that may occur in many areas throughout the Country and are composed of similar combinations of elements such as topography, geology, drainage and settlement patterns, landcover and use. **Landscape character areas** (LCA) are sections of the County that are treated as a unit in visual and physical terms, and that may consist of several landscape character types.

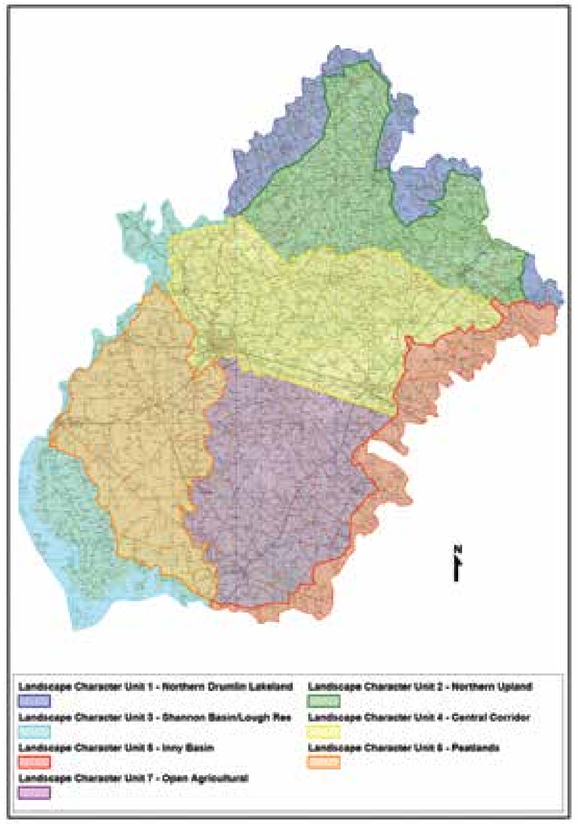
Landscape Character types in County Longford would include the peatlands/wetlands, Shannon basin and northern uplands. Landscape character areas are the individual representation of a landscape character type, e.g. Begnagh Bog.

Longford is a relatively small County with a low number of well-defined Landscape Character Types. These broadly correlate with Landscape character areas, as they tend to be geographically specific and the predominantly flat nature of the landscape facilitates topographical definition of units. For this reason, it is considered that a landscape character unit, combining both LCA and LCT as defined in the guidelines, is an appropriate method of assessment in this instance.

In broad terms, there are seven basic landscape character units in Longford which are illustrated on the map overleaf (Please also consult Appendix 1 for maps of each area.)

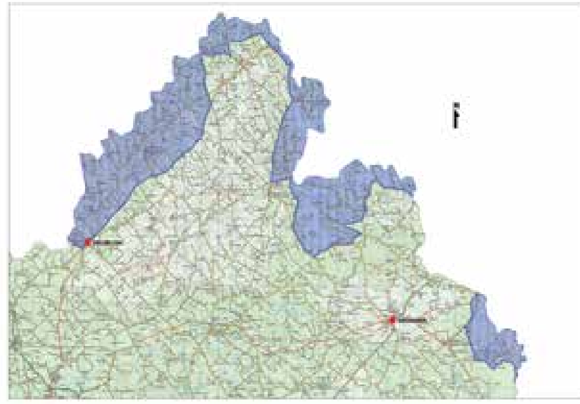
- Unit 1 – Northern Drumlin Lakeland
- Unit 2 – Northern Upland
- Unit 3 – Shannon Basin/Lough Ree
- Unit 4 – Central Corridor
- Unit 5 – Inny Basin
- Unit 6 – Peatlands
- Unit 7 – Open Agricultural

A general overview of the County is provided, following which each Character Unit is assessed in turn, providing details on the landform, characteristics, threats and degree of sensitivity of the each area.



LANDSCAPE UNIT 1 – NORTHERN DRUMLIN LAKELAND

Location and Physical Characteristics
This area consists of the North West fringe of the County and extends from Drumlish in the west to the County boundary in the north. This landscape unit also includes the areas surrounding Lough Gowna and Lough Kinale in the east of the County (also see map of the area in the context of Longford in Appendix One).



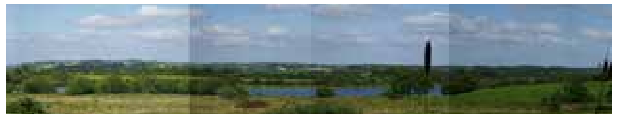
The southern boundary is mainly formed by the R198 Regional route from Longford to Arva, the Aughnacliffe to Enaghan Road and other relevant features such as the 100m contour line.

Lough Sallagh in the North-West fringe of the County

Views are available to the north into Counties Leitrim and Cavan, which more or less mirror the landscape inside the Longford Boundary.

- **Landcover**
  Landcover consists of predominantly small agricultural holdings, interspersed with bogland, which becomes more dominant toward the eastern boundary of the unit and lakeland areas that dominate on the western County Boundary.

- **Topography**
  The area primarily consists of rolling drumlin landscape, with agricultural land tending to be tightly enclosed and bounded by small but well established hedgerow species, at times permitting limited views of the string of lakes that border the County.

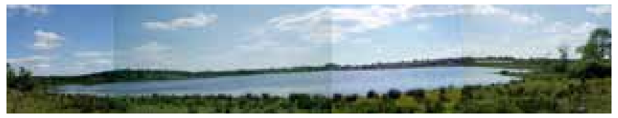


Annagh Lough

- **Geology/Soils**
  The soils in this area are predominantly poorly drained gley soils with some peats.

- **Drainage patterns**
  Drainage patterns are extremely complex, giving way to peatlands in the valley of the Black River and the vicinity of Annagh Lough. This area type includes the Lough Gowna Complex to the northeast of the County (included in An Foras Forbartha *Inventory of Outstanding Landscapes in Ireland*, 1977) and Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough in the northeast.

  Drainage is divided between the two major River catchments of the Shannon to the southwest and the Erne to the northeast.



Lough Nabelwy

Human Influence

- **Settlement pattern**
  The settlement pattern in the area is highly dispersed due to the nature of the topography and its influence on the agricultural practices in the area. Drumlish and Ballinamuck are the only settlements in the area, with the main concentration of development centred on these villages. Drumlish has seen a substantial level of development over the period of the previous two Development Plan periods relative to its size with a number of recently added housing developments situated within the development boundary. Ballinamuck has also experienced a level of housing development in recent times but at a much lesser rate to that of Drumlish.

Ballinamuck Village from the North

- **Transport and Communications**
  The road pattern throughout the area is relatively sparse with an emphasis on north-south communication. The undulating drumlin nature of the topography of the area is unattractive to mobile telephony infrastructure and other masts/antennae support structures, these preferring the higher ground of the adjacent areas, while retaining strong intervisibility from this area.

- **Agriculture**
  Agriculture tends to be extensive and part-time in nature, given the limited capacity of the soils in the area. Farms tend to remain fragmented, which reinforces and perpetuates the patterns of small, tightly packed fields and highly dispersed settlement.

Pylons, Farmullagh

- **Industry and services**
  Industrial development in the area is limited given the lack of concentrated settlement and the poor road network.

  In common with the majority of rural areas throughout the Country, utility poles and overhead wiring line the roadsides and traverse fields. Two sets of 110 kV electricity lines and their associated pylons enter the County at Farmullagh and Corglass and create a striking landscape impact.

  Coarse fishing and angling on the numerous lakes is an important element of the tourist industry in the area.

- **History, Archaeology and Culture**
  Known Archaeology in the area is comparatively sparse, with the exception of the islands and shores of Loughs Gowna and Kinale and in the vicinity of Cloonagh and Mullinlaghta to the east of the area. The Black Pig's Dyke, an important linear earthwork, commences at Dring on the southern shores of Lough Gowna and runs down toward Lough Kinale.

  The 1798 battlefield and associated sites and monuments are significant culturally important items and are located at and in the vicinity of Ballinamuck.

- **Recreation and Amenity**
  The potential for recreational and amenity development in the area is high, given the lakeshore frontage that exists for walking, angling and swimming. The local community has established a swimming pool at Annagh Lough.

Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of much of this landscape can be classified as **LOW** to **MEDIUM** with some **HIGH** sensitivity in the vicinity of the lakes and designated scenic routes

- **Threats**
  - Loss of inherent character due to altered landscape management practices arising as a result of EU agricultural policy reforms/further decline in agriculture
  - Removal of existing network of hedgerows and boundaries distinctive to the area through farm fragmentation/road frontage and ribbon development
  - Loss of integrity of important historical sites and cultural heritage, such as 1798 battlefield, due to insensitive or poorly located development
  - Agricultural activity and residential development at lakeshores or within their visual areas.

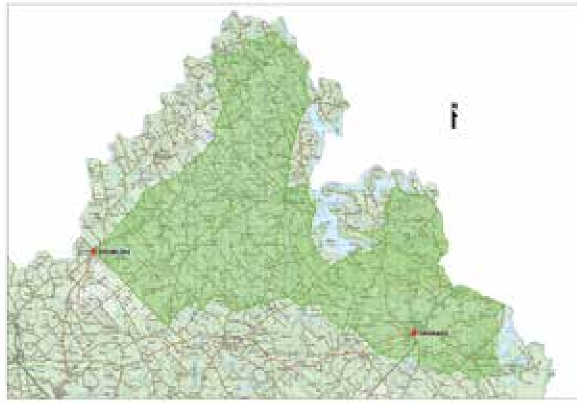
- **Opportunities**
  - Dense field patterns and substantial boundaries provide an enclosed landscape that can accommodate appropriately sited development without major landscape change
  - Opening up of access to lakeshores for amenity purposes

Policy Responses

- Support appropriate development in areas of population decline
- Encourage setting back of dwellings into fields retaining existing plot size and boundary treatment
- Permit hedgerow removal only where necessary for road safety and, where removal is required, encourage replacement with native hedgerow species
  Encourage access to lakes and watercourses and development of tourist accommodation within or in the vicinity of settlements, while monitoring amenity development /restricting access in environmentally sensitive locations.
- Restrict housing on lakeshores and within their visual areas.

LANDSCAPE UNIT 2 – NORTHERN UPLAND

Location and Physical Characteristics
This unit consists of the central northern section of the County, stretching from Drumlish in the west to Moyne in the north, Esker in the south and including the towns of Granard and Abbeylara in the east, up to and including the county boundary with Cavan.



Many of the important views listed in the County Development Plan are located in this landscape unit.

- **Landcover**
  Forestry is well established in the area with large coniferous and mixed forestry tracts at Corn Hill, Edenmore and Crott, with smaller pockets scattered throughout the area.

  Boggy areas predominate to the western boundary in the lower reaches of the river valleys where drainage becomes sluggish and a transition zone is formed between Landscape units 1 and 2.

Topography
The majority of this unit lies above the 100m contour line to the north of the County and contains Corn Hill, Edenmore and Crott.

Visible from a significant distance, given the flat nature of the surrounding Midland and Border Counties, the highest point is 278m at Corn Hill. There is high intervisbility between this area and other isolated upland areas such as Ardagh Mountain in the south of the County, the Hill of Uisneach in Westmeath and Sliabh Bán in County Roscommon.

- **Geology and Soils**
  Predominantly Gley Soils, much of which is in typical drumlin formation.

- **Drainage patterns**
  Drainage in the northern section of the unit is dominated by the Lough Gowna Lake complex, which falls under the catchment of the River Erne. The southern portion is drained towards the Shannon via the Camlin and Inny Rivers and their tributaries.

Human Influence

– **Settlement pattern**
The main settlements within this unit are Granard, supported by the villages of Abbeylara, Moyne, Legga, Bunlahy and Aughnacliffe.

While there has been significant activity in terms of planning applications in Granard and environs recently, few of these have been translated into actual development.

Abbeylara, a short distance to the southeast of Granard has also seen significant growth over recent times.

The village of Aughnacliffe (overleaf) and its environs enjoys views over Lough Leebeen and Lough Gowna, a possible factor in the number of development proposals in the area - over 100 dwellings have been granted in the village over the previous two Development Plan periods, a portion of which have been developed. Many of these new developments are highly visible due to the steeply undulating nature of the topography of the village, which provides enclosure to and otherwise linear and ribbon-like settlement pattern.

Moyne and Legga are located to the north of the County near the Cavan border off the R198 regional route, while Bunlahy is located to the south of the area in the vicinity of Ballinalee. These settlements were designated due to their existing level of service provision and/or facilities, such as church, school, and crèche, playing pitches etc., which provide natural congregation areas. Development has yet to become established to any significant degree in these settlements.

Rural housing in the area follows the dense pattern of extensive agriculture and the complex road network, tending to be highly dispersed with some local concentrations.

– **Transport and Communications**
The area is served by an extensive county road network, which is heavily influenced by the elevated topography and associated drainage patterns. Many of these roads are little more than laneways through the hills and valleys and are substandard in width and alignment.

The height of Corn Hill in relation to the surrounding Midland topography has made it an attractive site for the establishment of communications masts, which remain a substantial landscape feature.

A portion of the now disused Cavan railway lies to the east of Abbeylara.

– **Agriculture**
Agriculture in this area tends to be extensive, given the poor soil, drainage and access characteristics, and results in a similar but somewhat less enclosed field pattern than Landscape Unit 1. This more open feeling in the landscape may also be attributed to the elevated nature of the topography.

– **Industry and services**
Industrial development in the area is limited, with the exception of the Granard area, where the Keirnan Feed factory dominates the landscape for a substantial distance on the approach from Ballinalee. Other industrial developments, including Pat the Baker, are predominantly located within the town where their scale is contained and their landscape influence is minimal.

The Roadstone Quarry at Moyne (left) exerts a considerable landscape influence over Lough Naback, however, this serves to lessen the influence of the pylons and associated 110kv overhead wiring traversing the unit from east to west at this point.

– **History, Archaeology and Culture**
This landscape area has a particularly high concentration of archaeological heritage, most notably to the eastern side of the unit where the megalithic tombs at Aughnacliffe, the Black Pig's Dyke running from Dring to Lough Kinale, the Abbey at Abbeylara and the old town at Granardkille are substantial landscape features with important national heritage and mythological associations.

Holy wells are important cultural landscape features and are scattered throughout the eastern section of the unit.

– **Recreation and Amenity**
Mainly confined to sports grounds and GAA pitches.

Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of much of this landscape can be classified as **MEDIUM to HIGH**

– **Threats**
  • Potential future development of large-scale utility infrastructure in the upland areas
  • Encroachment of forestry onto important upland slopes and interference with designated scenic views
  • Potential loss of material and/or integrity of setting of archaeological features and artefacts
  • Potential loss of character of existing towns and villages
  • Further loss of population in Granard creating settlement pressure in surrounding rural area and historic landscape
  • Encroachment on protected views by dwelling units.

– Opportunities
  • Towns and villages throughout the unit are capable of accommodating substantial additional development to remove pressure from sensitive areas
  • Potential for further tourism related development, particularly in Granard

Policy Responses

– The development of coherent countywide framework for large-scale utility infrastructure including identification and designation of permitted and restricted areas.

– The concentration of heritage artefacts and features in the eastern section of this unit may warrant the designation of a specific historic landscape to ensure heightened public awareness and their continued protection.

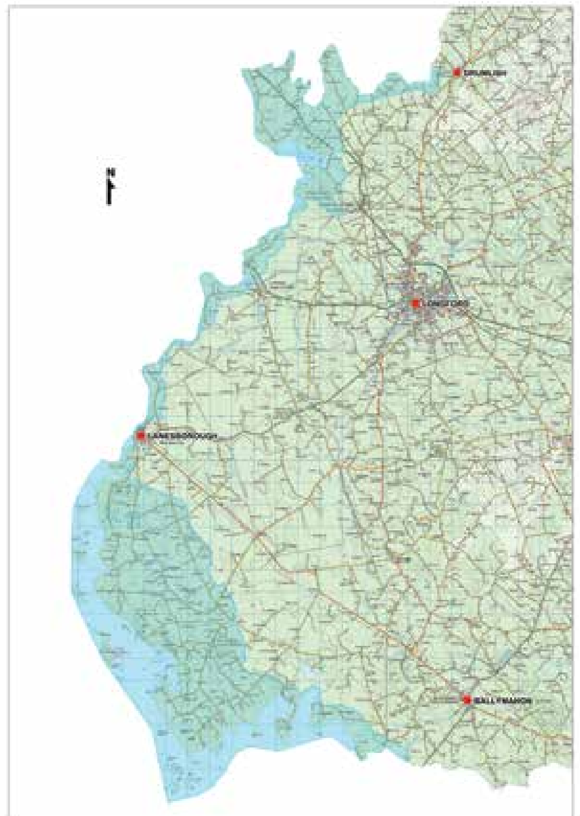
– Facilitate co-ordination between Coillte/Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine and natural Resources forestry strategies and development Plan Policy

– Develop identity and character in new developments in towns and villages through the application of area specific design criteria laid out in design guide.

– Protect views and prospects.

LANDSCAPE UNIT 3 – SHANNON BASIN/LOUGH REE

Location and Physical Characteristics
This unit is located along the western boundary of the County forming the border with Counties Leitrim, Roscommon and Westmeath and taking in the Rivers Shannon, Inny and Rinn and Lough Forbes and Lough Ree.



– **Landcover**
This unit has large amounts of water cover with inland marshes, bogland and tracts of deciduous forestry in the northern section around Lough Forbes. Land cover becomes less diverse travelling south of Lanesboro on the western shores of Lough Ree, with poorly drained agricultural land forming the majority of the landcover in the area.

Relatively small and isolated pockets of bog and marshland create important habitats at Fortwilliam Turlough, Commons North and Portanure, while the Portanure Pine Woods are an important stand of trees on the shores of the lake.

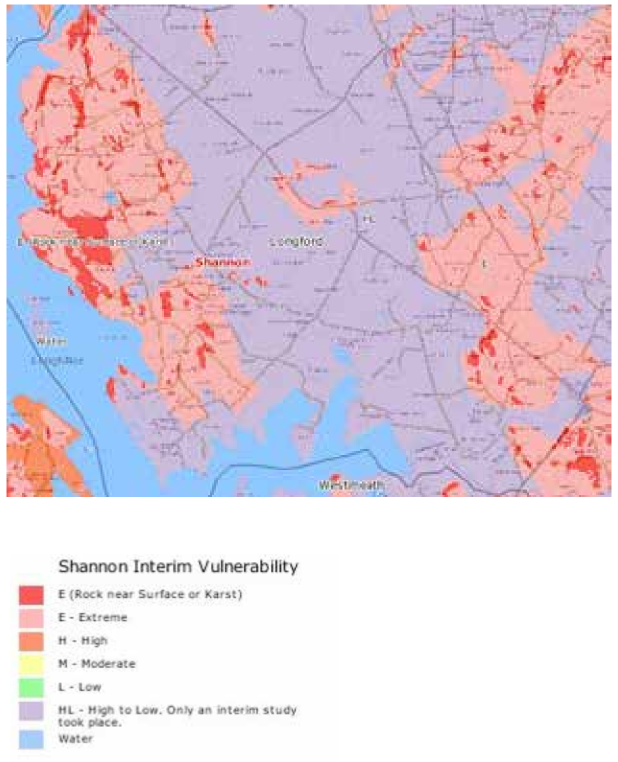
– **Topography**
  Lough Ree is interspersed with several small, uninhabited islands and the predominantly flat landscape provides for panoramic vistas across the lake at numerous locations.

  Small hills such as those at Newtowncashel, Cullentra and Rathcline (none of which break the 90m contour line) appear much larger in this context and act as punctuation marks in otherwise homogenous topography.

  The area around Lough Forbes is relatively inaccessible and visibility limited due to extensive afforestation.

– **Geology**
  Much of the geology in the area to the south of Lanesboro is classified as a regionally important aquifer.

  The Geological survey of Ireland has classified this area as highly to extremely vulnerable by the Geological survey of Ireland (GSI - see map).



– **Drainage patterns**
  The River Shannon enters the northwestern fringe of the County south of Rooskey, where it is joined by the Rinn River in Lough Forbes. Views of the watercourse are limited in this northern section due to a combination of local topographical and landcover characteristics.

  The Shannon continues towards Clondra where it is joined by the Camlin River and on towards Lanesboro where it broadens out into Lough Ree. This area is particularly susceptible to flooding.

  To the south of the County, the Inny enters Lough Ree via the Owenacharra River.

Human Influence

– **Settlement pattern**
  The only significant settlement in the unit is Newtowncashel, a small village located in an elevated position commanding extensive views over the lake. The area has witnessed relatively low levels of development in recent times.

  This lack of a defined urban or village structure means that the area is under particular pressure for once-off rural settlement, which is generally dispersed throughout the area, although to a lesser extent than the north of the County.

  Some areas of concentrated ribbon development have occurred in the vicinity of adjacent settlements, such as Fisherstown at Clondra and along the Rathcline Road south of Lanesboro.

– **Transport and Communications**
  The area is traversed to the north by three of the four national routes that run through the County, the N4 north of Newtownforbes, the N5 at Clondra and the N63 at Lanesboro. The remainder of the road network is relatively sparse except for the southern section and consists of third and fourth-class county roads and supporting networks of lanes and boreens.

– **Agriculture**
  Agriculture in the area is, in a similar vein to the majority of the County, extensive in nature. The requirements of the nitrates regulations in terms of effluent storage and the structures required to facilitate these standards, is likely to have significant landscape impact over the coming years.

– **Industry and Services**
  Industry and services are limited in the area given the highly dispersed nature of the settlement, however, those that exist have considerable visual impact. These include:

  - County Council Water treatment Plant – Lough Forbes
  - Former denim factory (Burlington) at Fisherstown
  - Power station at Lanesboro

  The former denim factory at Fisherstown is an immense structure (in the region of 29,000m2) the impact of which is reduced given its isolated position, single storey nature and the predominantly flat landscape in which it is situated. The factory is currently occupied by a timber-frame dwelling distribution company.

– **History, Archaeology and Culture**
  Castleforbes Demesne is a private estate located to the north of the unit within extensive woodlands.

  Extensive early Christian remains are located in the south of the unit and on Saints Island and Inchcleraun.

  Waterways corridor study has identified the potential for the discovery of underwater archaeology which is not addressed at present in the County development Plan.

– **Recreation and Amenity**
  Access to and awareness of water courses and water bodies tends to be restricted in this area, given the limited road network in the vicinity and landcover barriers such as forestry and wetlands.

  Parking and amenity areas have been established at Loughfarm, Bleanavoher and Barley Harbour.

  An extensive amenity area has been developed south of Lanesboro, which is extensively used as a walking route by locals and has been zoned for further amenity related uses under the Lanesboro Local Area Plan.

Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscapes in this unit range from **MEDIUM** - along the southeastern border of the unit - to **HIGH** sensitivity - along the shores of the lake, islands, the riverbanks, and in the vicinity of the Aquifer.

– **Threats**
  - Pollution of ground and surface water sources from residential or intensive agricultural development
  - Inappropriate development and privatisation of lakeshores and riverbanks
  - Road network insufficient to cater for large numbers of visitors associated with tourism development
  - Loss of important archaeological and architectural features and/or their setting, underwater and lakeside archaeology in particular
  - Proliferation of invasive species – Japanese knotweed, rhododendron, zebra mussel – threatens biodiversity and ecosystem functioning

– **Opportunities**
  - Development of Amenity areas along lakeshore
  - Development of accommodation base within existing village
  - Strong community involvement in village development (Tidy Towns)

Policy Responses

– Restrict development in the vicinity of the lakes and maintain aquifer protection zone for 1km around boreholes at Carrowroe

– Effluent treatment systems in the vicinity of the lake to have nitrogen and phosphorous cleansing capabilities

– Prepare Village policy statement for Newtowncashel to include provision for the protection of scenic route

– Promote appropriate schemes for the control/eradication of invasive species

LANDSCAPE UNIT 4 – CENTRAL CORRIDOR

Location and Characteristics
This area consists of the centre of the County and includes the settlements of Newtownforbes, Longford Town and Edgeworthstown extending in a northerly direction towards Drumlish in the west and Granard in the east. The southern boundary is mainly formed by the N4 National route from Longford to Mullingar.

- **Landcover**
  As with the rest of the County, the main landcover constituent in this unit consists of agricultural pastures. The urban fabric of Longford Town, Edgeworthstown and Newtownforbes also cover extensive areas.

  Deciduous and mixed forestry are present in pockets throughout the centre of the unit, notably at Carrickglass and Farraghroe.

- **Topography**
  The land in this unit is relatively flat and low-lying, rarely breaking the 100-metre contour line, meaning that trees, field boundaries, buildings and other features generally restrict views over any significant distance.

  This is contrasted with areas of distinct demesne type landscapes such as at Moatfarrell/Corbeagh.

View across agricultural landscape at Corbeagh

- **Geology**
  Aquifer

- **Drainage patterns**
  Drainage is toward the Shannon via a complex network of Rivers and Streams accessing the Camlin River, which is subject to seasonal flooding.

Human Influence

- **Settlement pattern**
  The urban network is strongest in this area of the County, with a defined hierarchical system dominated by the settlements of Longford, Edgeworthstown and Newtownforbes, which lie along the main transport routes. Edgeworthstown and Longford exhibit a certain amount of commuter traffic to the Dublin area, but not yet to an economically significant degree.

  Ballinalee is located to the northern portion of the unit and has experienced some development in recent times, consolidating the existing settlement within its defined envelope.

  A Local Area Plan was prepared for Carrickglass in 2004, adding this area to the list of designated settlements in the County. There is little visibility into the remaining demesne, which is largely contained by mixed tree planting which forms a NHA due to its importance as a habitat. Permission has been granted for over 30 housing units, a retirement village, a hotel, golf course and the refurbishment of the protected manor house. The remaining elements outside of the main demesne walls, particularly the walled garden on the western side of the regional route, and the gates and lodges in the main demesne walls create notable landscape features and a particular atmosphere in the area.

  Smaller designated settlements in the area include Kilnatruan on the R194, Enybegs and Coolarty.

  Significant pressure exists for "one-off" housing development along the R198 regional route from Longford to Arva and there is an established ribbon development pattern in place in the Clonbalt/Cloonrollagh/Creenagh area. This pattern is repeated at Kilnashee and Cloonagh further north along this route on the approach to Drumlish.

- **Transport and Communications**
  The road network is at its most dense at this point given the relatively favourable flat topography of the area. All four national routes (N4 – Dublin/Sligo N5- Longford/Castlebar, N55 Athlone/Cavan, N63-Longford/Roscommon) traverse this Landscape Unit.

  The Dublin/Sligo Rail line traverses the County through the Central Corridor.

  Almost one-third of the planning applications for large-scale communications infrastructure in the County have been made in this area.

- **Agriculture**
  Agriculture in this area is well developed in comparison to much of the County, with a wide range of agricultural activity, from large-scale dairying activity to smaller scale extensive uses, particularly to the west of the area.

- **Industry and Services**
  The main industrial centre of the County is centred at Longford Town, with major installations at Lisnamuck/Templemichael, Townsparks, Ballymacormack and the Athlone Road.

  Edgeworthstown has two large factories, C&D Pet foods and Paul & Vincent.

- **History, Archaeology and Culture**
  A wide range of architectural and cultural heritage is present in this area, with the important occupied demesnes of Castleforbes and Carrickglass. Former settlements have left their mark on the landscape at Farraghroe, Corbeagh and Moatfarrell.

- **Recreation and Amenity**
  A wide range of recreational facilities are available at Longford Town, including leisure centres and swimming pools, with planning permission granted for additional facilities in the vicinity and at Carrickglass and Edgeworthstown.

  The Mall sports complex and walkway through Longford is an important and widely used amenity, augmented by Sli na Sláinte (around Longford bypass) and proposed for further links as part of the Longford Town Development Plan.

  The Camlin River is a slow moving river. It holds good stocks of bream, roach and hybrids with some tench to 5lbs. Fishing is into depths of about 5ft to 10ft in normal conditions. There are some good stretches, but can be difficult to find for first time visiting anglers.   Anglers can have good sport here particularly during the early summer months. The Camlin River is part of the Midland Fisheries Group of Shannon Regional Fisheries Board managed waters and requires a fishing permit

  There are also a number of GAA and soccer pitches within the Unit and a golf course in Longford Town.

Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscapes in this unit is generally **LOW**. Potential areas of **MEDIUM** to **HIGH** sensitivity exist in the vicinity of protected woodlands, riverbanks and in the vicinity of the Aquifer.

- **Threats**
  - Pollution of Groundwater sources in the vicinity of the aquifer to the north of Longford Town
  - Loss/fragmentation of important agricultural land/tree stands and woodlands
  - Continued ribbon development in pressure areas

- **Opportunities**
  - High capacity for absorption of additional development
  - Existing strong urban network upon which settlement strategy can be based

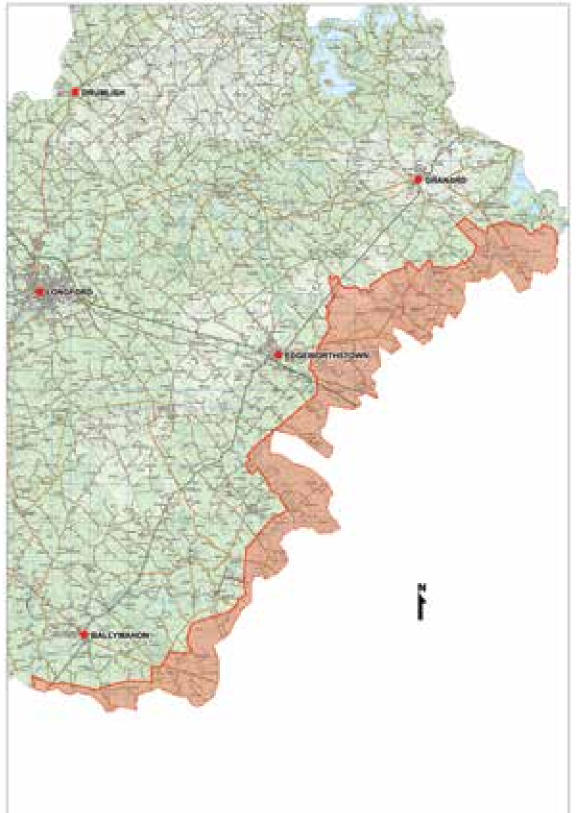
Policy Responses

- Restriction of development in pressure areas
- Relaxed restrictions in areas of high capacity
- Groundwater protection scheme to be installed around potential groundwater supplies
- Important areas of agricultural land to be identified and protected from further fragmentation
- Encourage use of existing large-scale communications infrastructure for future proposed developments

LANDSCAPE UNIT 5 – INNY BASIN

Location and Characteristics

This area is located to the east of the County and forms the border with County Westmeath.



- **Landcover**
  The landcover in this area is dominated by peatlands and mixed woodlands interspersed with pastures of varying quality.

- **Topography**
  The area maintains a relatively flat and level topography.

- **Drainage patterns**
  The Inny River makes its way from Lough Kinale in Unit 1 and follows the County Boundary for a time before veering south into County Westmeath and Lough Derravarragh. The River re-enters County Longford east of Legan and continues west toward Ballymahon and onto Lough Ree.

  The Inny dominates the drainage pattern of the area. Flows tend to be sluggish given the nature of the landcover and topography. There is one seasonal lake to the north of the region, however visibility of the lake and the River from the public road is poor and awareness of these features low, with the possible exceptions of locals and seasoned anglers.

Human Influence

The difficult nature of the terrain has meant that human influence on the landscape of the area has been limited in comparison to other units.

– **Settlement pattern**
  There are two designated settlements in this unit, one in the south at Forgney and the other in the North at Lisryan. Settlement is greatest in the areas outlying Legan and Edgeworthstown, while Lisryan in particular has experienced some growth in recent times.

– **Transport and Communications**
  The area is roughly bisected between north and south by the N4 and the Dublin-Sligo rail line running parallel. The remainder of the road network in the area is sparse, composed mainly of portions of County roads and small laneways.

– **Agriculture**
  Agriculture in the area appears well developed in reclaimed areas

– **Industry and Services**
  There are few industries in the area given the limited road network and unstructured settlement pattern.

  Services are generally confined to a local level, such as primary schools, shop, GAA pitch etc. and these facilities are generally located within the two settlements of Forgney and Lisryan.

– **History, Archaeology and Culture**
  Coolamber Manor

  Goldsmith – Forgney Church, Hill, Pallas

– **Recreation and Amenity**
  Mainly confined to local GAA pitches.

Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscapes in this unit are generally **LOW**. Potential areas of **MEDIUM** to **HIGH** sensitivity exist in the vicinity of protected woodlands, riverbanks.

– **Threats**
  • Continued depopulation and associated loss of landscape management

– **Opportunities**
  • Existing designated settlements in the area provide potential for population growth

Policy Responses

– Target growth to existing settlements

– Encourage provision of facilities to strengthen settlements

– Facilitate rural housing where appropriate and in accordance with normal planning criteria

LANDSCAPE UNIT 6 – PEATLANDS

Location and Characteristics
This area is located in the west of the County and includes the settlements of Lanesboro and Clondra and extends towards Ballymahon in the south.

– **Landcover**
  Located in the western half of the County, this area is dominated by extensive tracts of raised bog interspersed with mixed forestry and areas of scrubby vegetation.

– **Topography**
  The topography is notably flat, with the majority of the land lying below the 50m contour line. This, when combined with the limited vegetation cover and extensive peat land cover mean that views are available across wide areas throughout the unit.

– **Drainage patterns**
  Drainage patterns in the area are heavily influenced by artificial means employed to retain water levels and prevent inundation of commercial peatlands. The Shannon system is the main natural influence, draining the area via the Camlin, Fallan and Bilberry rivers. Seasonal flooding persists in the northern sector, particularly in the vicinity of the Camlin River.

Human Influence

– **Settlement pattern**
  The settlement pattern in this unit tends to be less dispersed and more focussed into the designated towns and villages than other areas, given the difficult nature of the terrain.

  The Main settlement in the area is Lanesboro. Lanesboro is located on the River Shannon at the northern end of Lough Ree and at the junction of the N63 to Roscommon and R392 to Mullingar. Historically an important fording point of the Shannon, Lanesboro declined in strategic importance with the development of Athlone to the south. The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midlands have recognised this strategic location and role, designating Lanesboro as a local Service town in the urban hierarchy of the region, to provide local level retailing, social and leisure facilities.

  Clondra is a small settlement located on the Royal Canal and at the confluence of the Camlin and Shannon Rivers, which is important in terms of its character, scenic quality and tourism potential. Local community interest in the development of the village is high.

  Killashee is a small settlement located on the N63 that has seen substantial residential planning applications under the Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme.

  Derraghan consists of a housing estate built by Board na Mona for its workers. Set in the centre of commercial peatlands, the area is distinctive in settlement and landscape terms, given its design, layout and density in relation to its remote location, there has been little development in the vicinity in recent years. The installation of traffic calming signage along the R392 creates an urban effect along an otherwise remote rural setting.

  One off development in the area tends be confined to specific pressure areas, for example, Kilmore/Cloonmore and Tullyvrane/Lehery outside Lanesboro.

– **Transport and Communications**
  The road network, particularly in the southern section, has been curtailed by the hostile landscape conditions, however communication lines become more complex in the vicinity of Longford and the Royal Canal to the north.

  The road pattern around Lanesboro, particularly the R392 that travels east to Ballymahon, is notable due to its straightness and lack of consideration for the topographical features that it traverses. This is a former toll road, constructed in the 18th century and connecting Dublin to the main areas of industrial activity in the Country, at which time, Lanesboro marked the western boundary. The straight road and predominantly flat topography create a distinct and unique landscape experience while travelling across the unit.

  The remains of an ancient toher road, constructed of timber, can be seen at Corlea Bog.

  The Royal Canal is an important landscape feature, not only due to its heritage associations but also its wider influence on the landscape including features that were built to support it, such as the bridges, towpaths, lock keepers cottages and lock gates. Works are ongoing on the opening up of the canal, which will have a considerable impact on how the landscape is perceived throughout the area.

  The area is well served by mobile and broadband wireless communications.

– **Agriculture**
  Agricultural potential in the area is limited given the nature of the dominant landcover, however, some reclaimed sections of land support large pastoral farming enterprises, particularly in the northern sector.

– **Industry and Services**
  The ESB power station at Lanesboro dominates the landscape of the area for a considerable distance, particularly at night time. Much of the industrial development in this unit is planned adjacent to the power station where it is anticipated that the landscape impact will be limited.

– **History, Archaeology and Culture**
  The area has a strong industrial history in terms of the historical harvesting of peat and the transport of the finished product along the Royal Canal. The landscape impacts of this history are manifested in the industrial architecture and archaeology that abounds throughout the area.

  The Corlea visitor centre interprets an iron-age bog road built across the boglands to the south of the unit. Bord na Mona preserves the boglands in the vicinity in conjunction with the Department of the Environment

– **Recreation and Amenity**
  • Canal/Clondra Harbour

  • Longford Town football ground

  • Future use of peatlands

Landscape Sensitivity

The visual sensitivity of the landscapes in this unit are generally **LOW**, as their flat nature allows development to be accommodated with minimum screening needed to achieve integration into its surrounds. An exception to this designation is the vicinity of the Royal Canal, where sensitivity is **HIGH**.

In environmental terms, sensitivity can be generally termed **MEDIUM** to **HIGH** due to the limited capacity of the receiving environment to cater for additional effluent loading.

– **Threats**
  - Inappropriate development in the vicinity of the Royal Canal
  - Pollution of ground and surface water due to inadequate or malfunctioning effluent treatment systems

– **Opportunities**
  - Existing and potential recreational and amenity development
  - Ability to accommodate development in appropriate areas

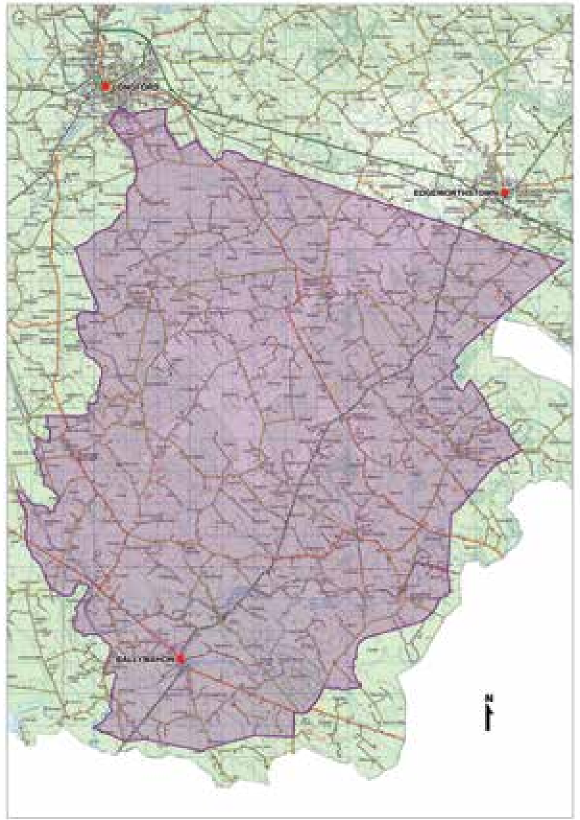
Policy Responses

Identify appropriate areas for development

Develop guidelines for screening and siting measures to facilitate development

LANDSCAPE UNIT 7 – OPEN AGRICULTURAL

Location and Characteristics
This area is located in the east of the County and contains twelve settlements including, Ballymahon, Ardagh and Keenagh. The unit extends from below the N4 Longford to Mullingar road towards the southern edge of the County.



– **Landcover**
Located in the southeast of the County, this area contains the most versatile agricultural land in the County and is generally characterised by larger, open fields, interspersed with mature trees. Plantations of deciduous and mixed woodland punctuate the landscape.

– **Topography**
The northern section of the unit contains the most elevated area, including Farnagh Hill and Ardagh (Bawn) and Castlerea Mountain, all of which contain full and/or intermittent scenic views listed for preservation under the County Development Plan.

The southern and eastern sections of the unit consist mainly of gently undulating pastoral land.

– **Drainage patterns**
Drainage in the southern and eastern section of the unit is dominated by the River Inny, which is fed by numerous tributary streams and rivers. The northern section drains toward the Camlin River.

Human Influence

– **Settlement pattern**
This unit has the most developed urban structure of the County, being served by twelve designated settlements. Settlements tend to be established longer than in other units throughout the County and as, such, generally exhibit a strong character, identity and sense of community.

One-off and ribbon development tends to be more pronounced in the northern section of the unit, tapering off to the south where the more agriculturally productive lands are located.

Ballymahon is the largest of the settlements in this unit, having a population in the region of 1563 at the last census. The town has its own unique character, with a wide street and strong horizontal and vertical building lines. Good examples of relatively intact Victorian architecture line the eastern end of the Main Street, while the centrally located courthouse occupies a plaza-like position.

Pressure for development in Ballymahon has been steady over the last number of years with over 800 housing units granted within the settlement envelope.

A significant number of these applications have translated into completed houses, considerably altering the appearance of the town. The most notable change has been at the Inny Bridge, where the old mill has been refurbished and an additional apartment building constructed within a linear parkland setting along the banks of the River.

A substantial townhouse and apartment development has taken place on the approach from Mullingar, which has significantly altered the appearance of the area where linear one-off development dominated.

Moydow is centrally located within the County and is a small settlement with a nucleus of a church and school.

Keenagh village, located to the western boundary of the unit, is a well-established settlement in a linear formation, located along the R397. The village has witnessed a substantial level of development over recent Development Plan periods relative to its size. Fortunately, most of these developments have managed to retain a sense of village character and identity in terms of their layout and design, relating strongly to the street and, by utilising backland and infill sites, maintaining a pedestrian emphasis to the village. A commensurate increase in the level of social and community facilities available will help to ensure the viability and cohesion of village life in this settlement.

Ardagh is a former estate village located to the northern section of the unit. A consistently high performer in the Tidy Towns Competition, the village has a wealth of architectural heritage, which defines the settlement and creates a unique sense of place. Historically important as an Episcopal seat, the central area of the village remains relatively undeveloped and has an Architectural Conservation Area in place.

Abbeyshrule is a small village located on the Royal Canal and the River Inny. The substantial industrial architecture associated with the Canal, the Abbey, associated graveyard and the flat, pastoral environs create the distinctive ambiance of the settlement. Two housing estates are situated in the centre of the village both of which respect the scale and character of the settlement in terms of their layout, density and design.

The designated settlement of Ratharney is located nearby, at the junction of the R399 and R393. Centred on the existing shop and petrol pump (now unfortunately closed).

Barry, Taghshinny and Colehill are small settlements clustered around a central nucleus, such as a post office in the case of Colehill, schools and pubs in Taghshinny and a "street" containing a shop in the case of Barry. Each is well established with distinctive architecture and features in each case.

Carrickboy and Ballycloughan are located to the east of the unit. Ballycloughan lies 2km south of Ardagh on the R393. The settlement consists of recent single-house development in a linear format centred on the parish church. The use of bright colours, distinctive boundary treatments and sculpture give a village feel to what would otherwise appear as standard ribbon development.

Carrickboy is located approximately 1km further south along the R393 at its junction with the N55. Consisting of a garage, former pub and a handful of houses, there is little to perceptually tie development together as a settlement. The nearby school may have a potential role in the creation of an identity for this village.

Legan is a well-established settlement on the eastern border of the County in the parish of Kilglass. Adjacent to the former Foxhall Glebe, with its important architectural and archaeological remains, the village has developed in a linear fashion with a central nucleus where the majority of recent development has taken place. Facilities in the village are well articulated.

– **Transport and Communications**
The road network in the unit is relatively dense, with the exception of the elevated areas around Ardagh and Castlerea Mountain. The N55 traverses the unit from northeast to southwest, and is served by a network of five regional routes.

The Royal Canal is important as an amenity, a landscape feature and a significant influence on the history, culture, architecture and archaeology of the area. The waterway traverses the southern portion of the unit.

The area contains almost one quarter of the mobile communications infrastructure in the County.

– **Agriculture**
Agriculture exists mainly in the northern section of this unit.

– **Industry and Services**
The majority of industry and services are provided within Ballymahon and these include Scientific Games Worldwide Services Ltd, Kepak and Readymix. It is considered that their respective locations within the town have minimal landscape impact.

– **History, Archaeology and Culture**
This area holds historical and cultural significance with the Irish writer Oliver Goldsmith as he spent time within this area of Longford.

The location of the Royal Canal within this unit also meant that a number of the settlements evolved around the Canal and indeed some of the traditional architecture within this unit is reflective of this.

– **Recreation and Amenity**
The Royal Canal and River Inny provide important amenity and recreation facilities within the unit. The Inny Kayaking Club which is based within Ballymahon has developed over the years and optimises use of this recreational resource.

Abbeyshrule Airport has developed significant aviation facility within the village of Abbeyshrule and is extremely popular with aviators from both Ireland and the UK.

Landscape Sensitivity

– **Threats**
- Inappropriate development within the vicinity of the Royal Canal and River Inny.
- Encroachment of development onto the upland areas with potential interference with designated scenic views.
- Potential loss of character of existing towns and villages including unsympathetic residential developments in areas of high architectural quality, particularly within the heritage village of Ardagh.

– **Opportunities**
- Existing and potential recreational and amenity development, particularly with relation to the River Inny and Royal Canal.
- Existing strong settlement base which has capability to absorb further development.

Policy Responses

Fast track the formulation of Local Area Plans/ village policy statements throughout the county to create, preserve and enhance village character.

Promote the development of adequate community and social facilities in smaller villages to maintain character, identity and pedestrian scale.

2.3
IDENTIFICATION OF VISUAL UNITS

Visual units can be described as areas defined by spatial enclosure and pattern, which are determined, by landform and landcover.

Boundaries of visual units can usually be divided into several or a combination of the following:

The physical limits of a view or prospect

The physical limits of a water catchment

The "gateway" between areas contrasting in their degree of spatial containment

Identification of visual units is a complex process, not least because the visual limits of an area can span several counties.

2.4
IDENTIFICATION OF IMAGE UNITS

Image units are generally composed of landscape areas that are dominated by a major focal point, where a visual field results from the association of this part of the landscape with this feature. Obvious examples of image units in the Longford context would include Ardagh Mountain, Corn Hill and the many lakes, rivers and other waterways throughout the county. These features exert a disproportionately large impact on their surroundings by reason of their size; shape, colour and how they interact with adjacent landscape components.

3.
Landscape Values

Landscape values can be described as the environmental or cultural benefits, including services and functions that can be derived from various landscape attributes.

The following landscape elements are considered to be important within the County.

In addition, the importance of existing artefacts etc. contained in the SMR and NHAs, SACs, SPAs and ASIs were emphasised and their continued protection underlined.

Feature	Location	Value
Boglands	Begnagh, Clonard, Killashee, Commons North, Curry Bog.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural
Rivers	Shannon, Inny, Camlin and associated banks and callows	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural
Lakes	Lough Ree, Lough Gowna, Lough Forbes, and other lakes in the County and associated shores and islands.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological
Uplands	Ardagh mountain, Cairn hill	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological
Archaeological sites, artefacts, structures and objects	Mornin and Castlerea castles, Abbeylara, Abbeyshrule, Saints Island, Inchcleraun, Granard Moat, Granardkille.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological
Woodlands	Newtownforbes, Newcastle, Derrycassan, Carriglass, Portanure, Legan.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical.
Architecture	Mill buildings, the Royal Canal and its associated structures, built fabric of towns and villages, churches, courthouses.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious.

4.
Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of a landscape can be described as the measure of its ability to accommodate change or intervention without suffering unacceptable effects to its character and values.

In order to assess sensitivity, it is necessary to evaluate what development, if any, it is possible to locate within any given area without causing negative impact on the landscape character or values of that area.

Where it is considered that development can be located within a particular area without giving rise to negative impacts, this landscape can be deemed to be of a low sensitivity.

Conversely, an area where development would seriously damage character or damage/eliminate irreplaceable values associated with a landscape, this landscape can be termed highly sensitive.

Areas which are considered as sensitive fall into the following categories:

Areas, structures artefacts, ruins, objects, views and routes identified as important within the County.

Areas listed as Natural Heritage Areas and/or Special Protected areas at national level and areas included in the European Communities (Conservation of Wildbirds) (Amendment No.2) Regulations, 1996.

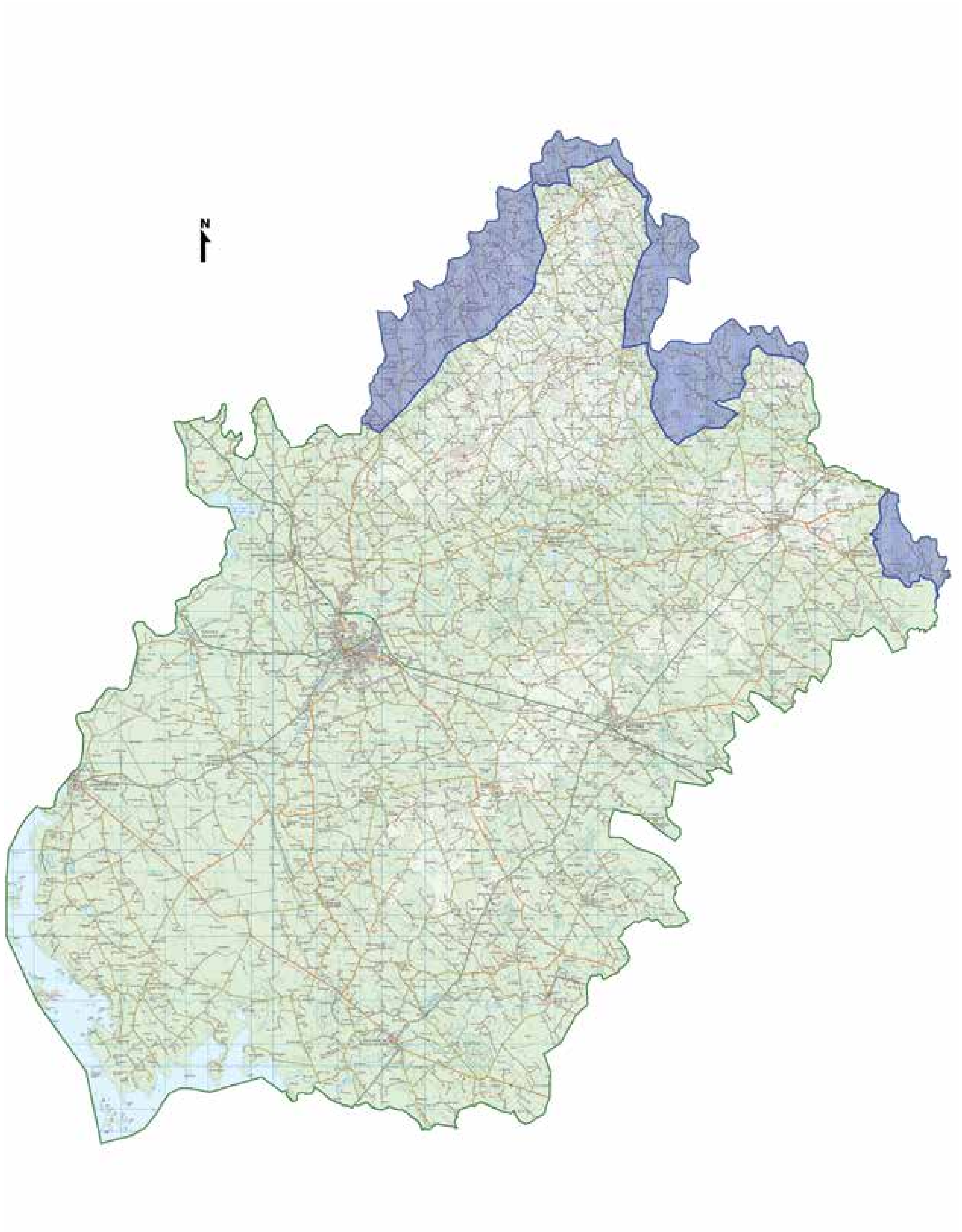
Views listed for protection in the current County Development Plan, 2015-2021.

Views/tourist designations on published maps of the County

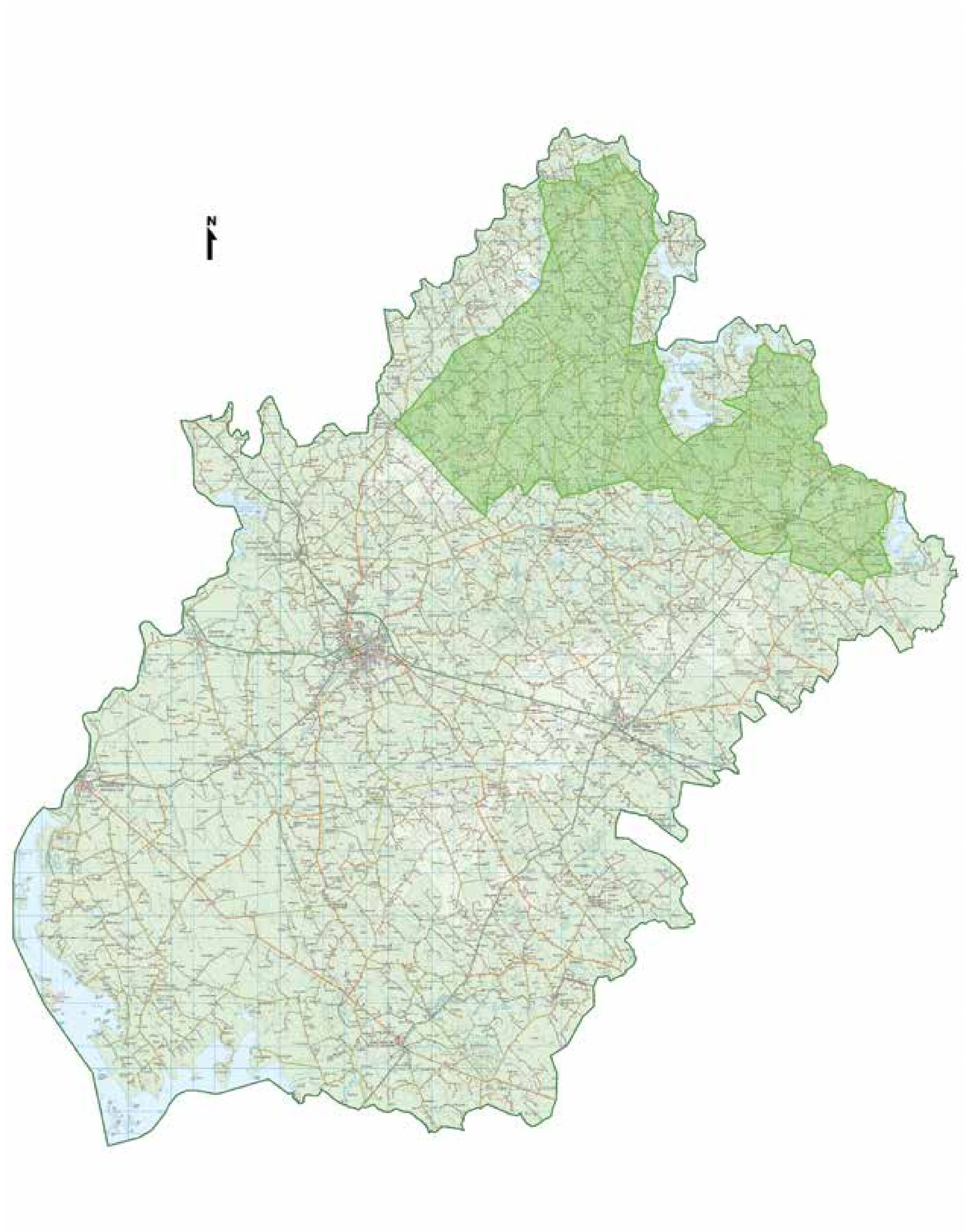
Recognised areas of literary/cultural importance

Appendix 1

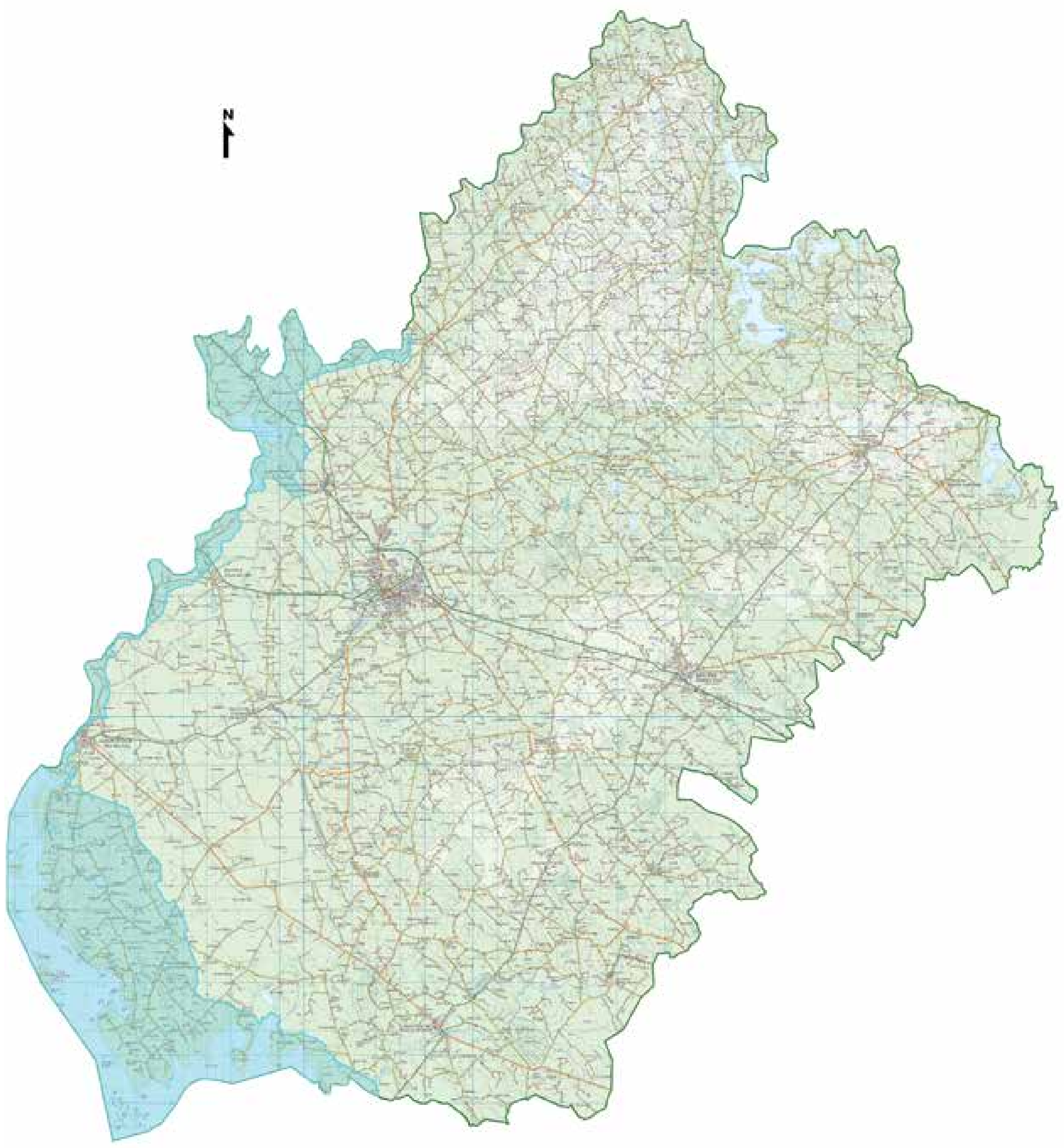
Landscape Unit 1:
Northern Drumlin Lakeland



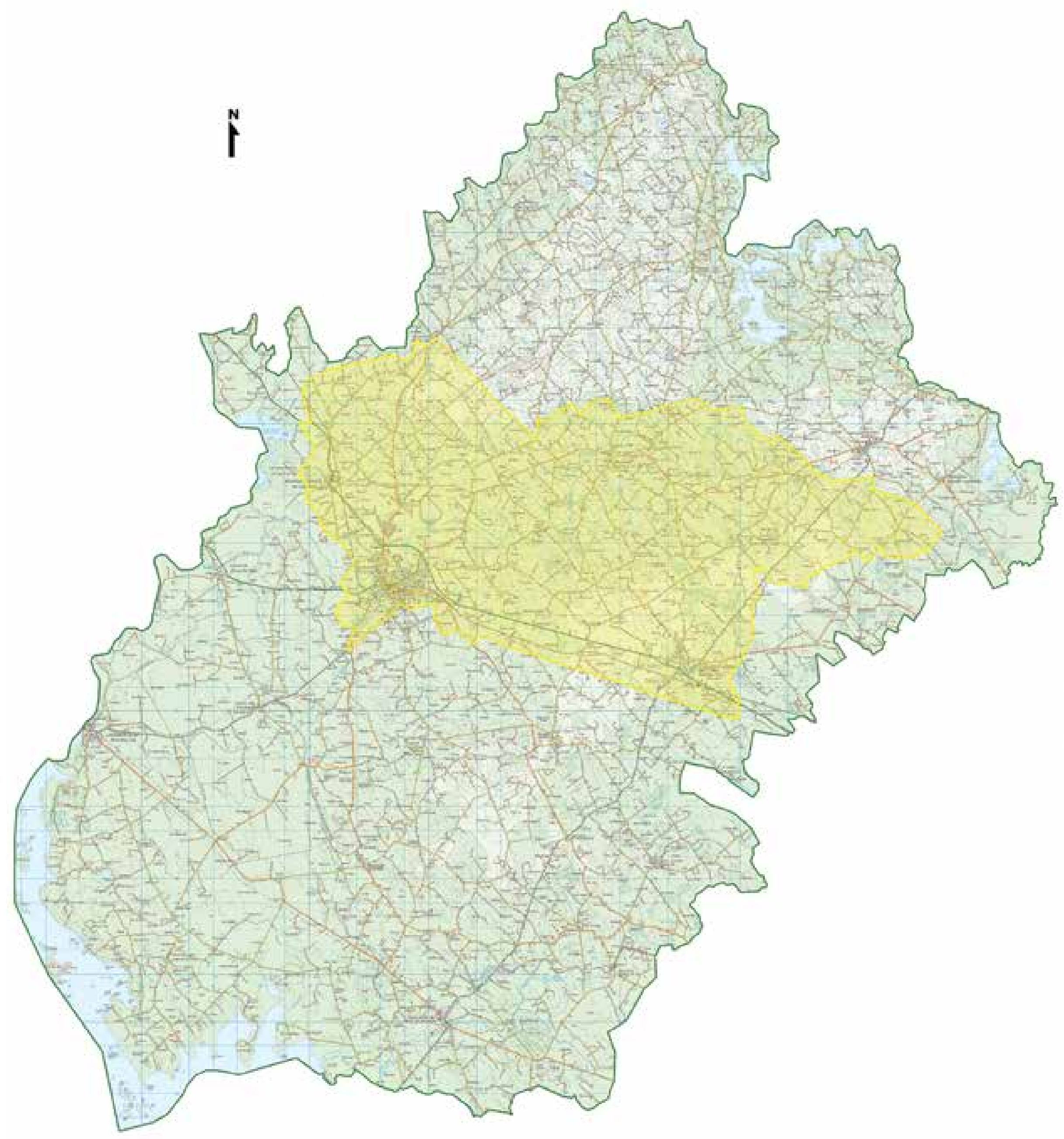
Landscape Unit 2:
Northern Upland



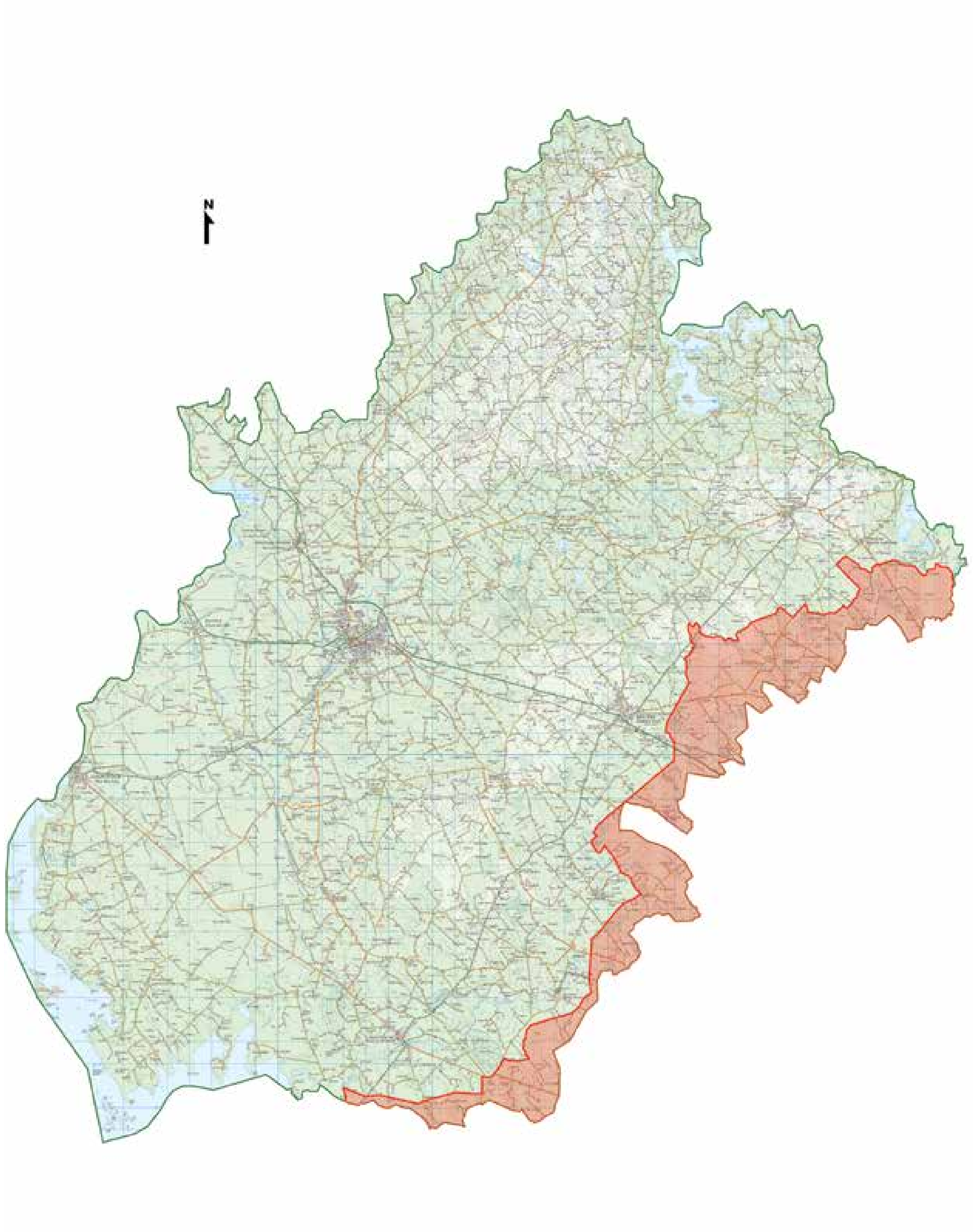
Landscape Unit 3:
Shannon Basin/Lough Ree



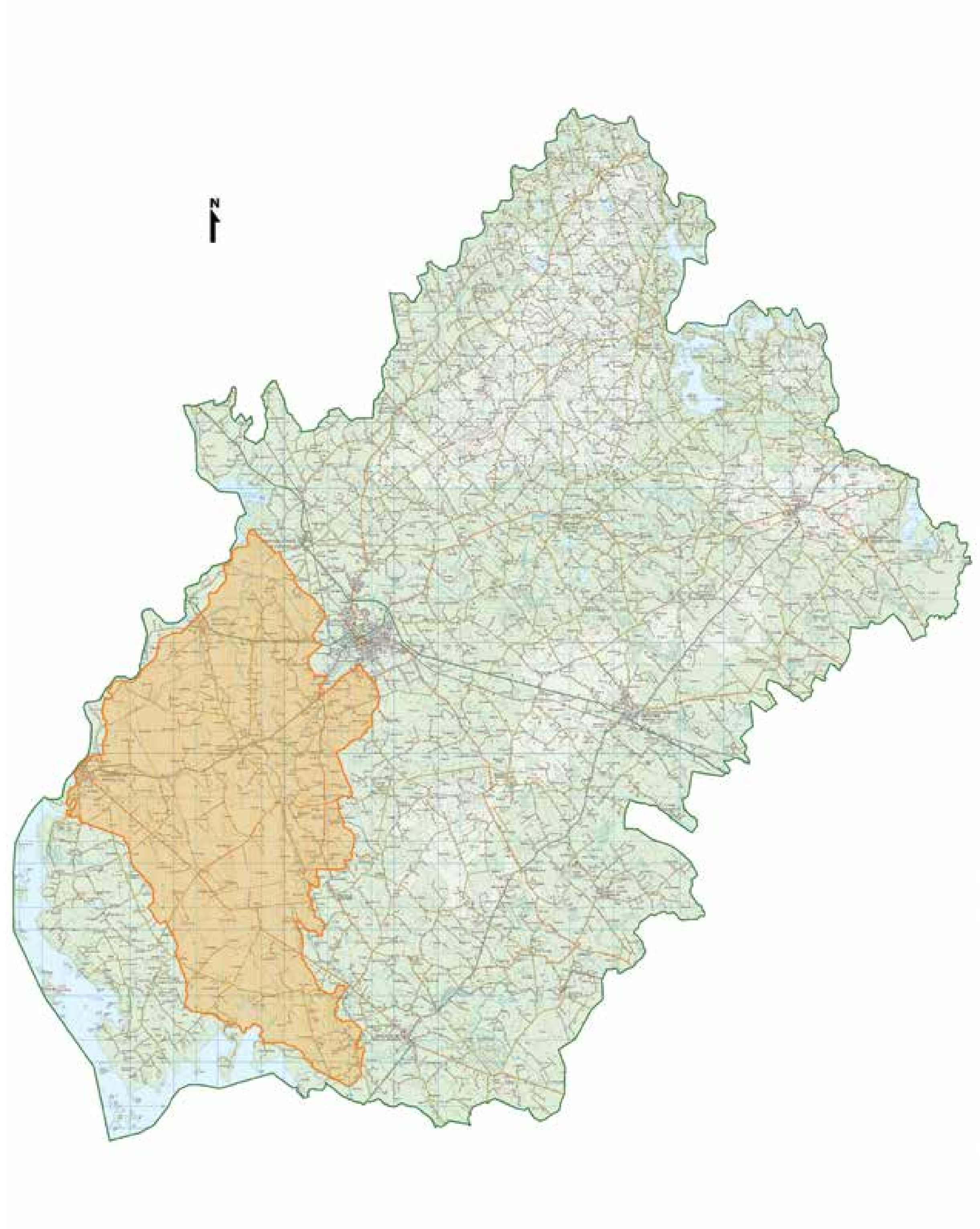
Landscape Unit 4:
Central Corridor

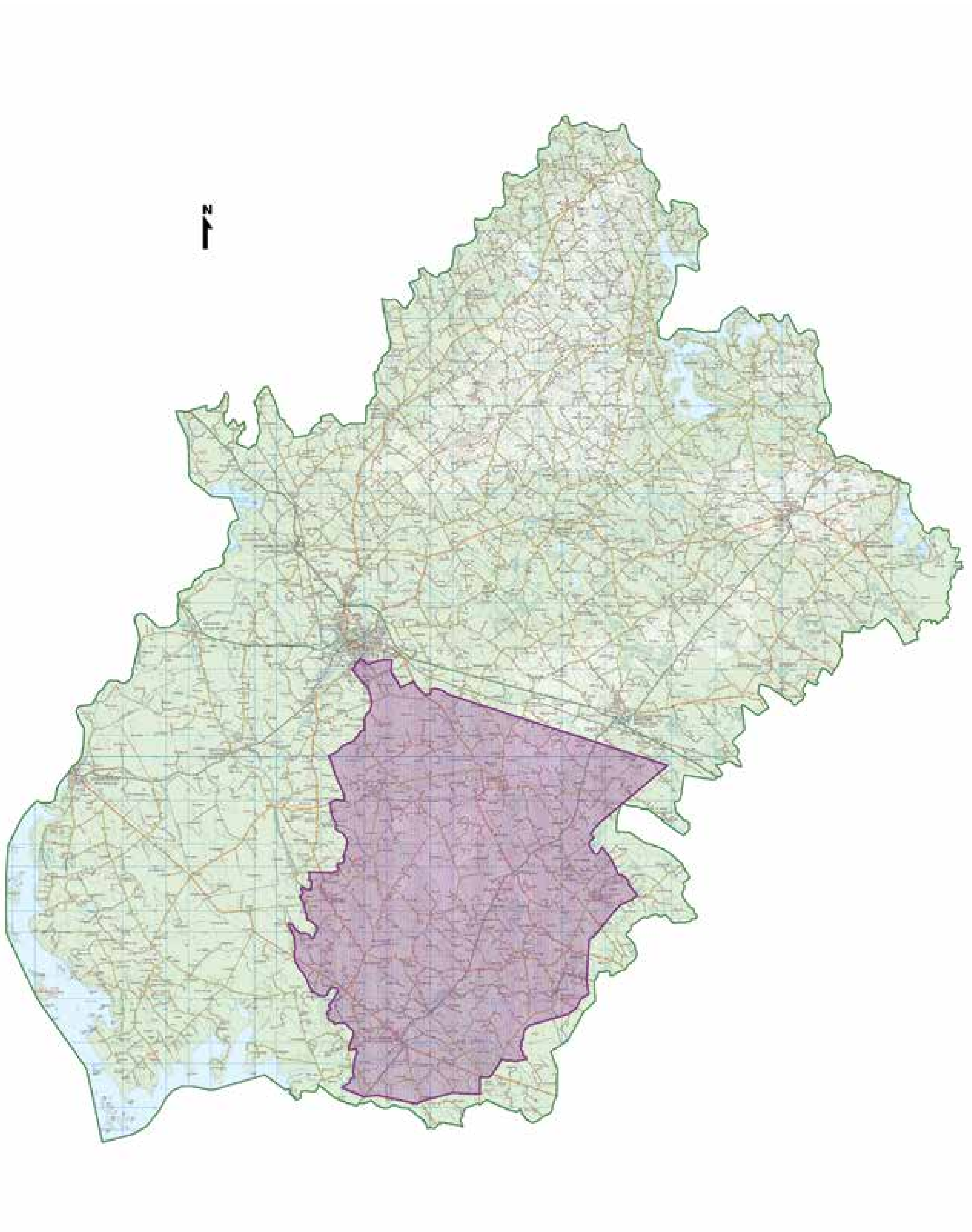


Landscape Unit 5:
Inny Basin



Landscape Unit 6:
Peatlands





ANNEX →

Annex 5:
Corlea Archaeological Settlement and Biodiversity Project

September 2013
Prepared by Planning Section,
Longford County Council, September 2013.

Pic 1: Rehabilitated and re-colonised bog.

1
Scope of Works

1.1
INTRODUCTION

Keenagh Community Co. Op and Wetlands Heritage Ireland propose to create an Archaeological and Biodiversity Project on a portion of rehabilitated cutaway bog at Corlea, Longford.

It intends to carry out this project in association with Bord na Móna, Corlea Trackway Centre, Longford County Council, Longford Community Resources Ltd., and the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht with close consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This project would compliment the existing facilities at the Corlea Centre and provide further educational and interpretation of the area's history, archaeology and biodiversity.

The project has wide ranging scope, benefiting visitors to the Corlea Centre, Schools as well as improving the wider tourism attractions of Longford and the Midlands. The proposal is a stand alone project that may represent a first step in a broader development proposal of the gradual conversion of cutaway bogs in Longford to Biodiversity Parks. These emerging Biodiversity Parks could then be linked with the Shannon, Lough Ree and the Royal Canal to create a Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. Indeed it may be possible in time to utilize the Royal Canal as a Walking/Cycling route from Dublin to Longford and connect in with routes across the cutaway bogs and the Shannon to the Mayo and Sligo roads.

These broader longer term development goals would provide Longford and Roscommon with major amenity and tourism facilities of international importance and attraction. The plans for the Corlea project will be sympathetic with the conservation and biodiversity action plan of Bord na Móna. It is also intended to develop the project in a sustainable manner bearing in mind the rich cultural and natural heritage resources of the area. The principles of Ecotourism providing for a destination with a set of standards based on sound environmental practices highlighting all that the region and its people has to offer will guide the development of the project.

1.2
PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT:

The initial purpose of the project is to provide an additional archaeological and ecological open air facility based around the existing Corlea Trackway Centre. The proposed project will provide visitors with educational, interpretive and family orientated facilities to experience what life was like in early Ireland. In addition they will be provided with an introduction to the bogs and their wonderful biodiversity.

1.3
PROJECT SEQUENTIAL FRAMEWORK

The existing facility at Corlea Visitor Centre presents and interprets an Iron Age bog road which was built in the year 148BC across the boglands to the River Shannon. This Trackway is the largest of its kind to have been uncovered in Europe. Inside the building, an 18 metre stretch of preserved road is on permanent display along with Display Boards and artifacts. Bord na Móna and the Heritage Service have carried out conservation work on the surrounding bog to ensure that it remains wet and a living healthy bog. Now it is intended to extend the Centres visitor facilities over time.

Pic 2: Corlea Centre, Kenagh, Longford.

Table 1.
Timeframe for projects.

2013	Corlea Visitor Centre existing
2014/15	Corlea Archaeological & Biodiversity Project
2014/15	Link with Royal Canal
2015/2022	Project Link across bog to Corlea Centre
2015/2022	Royal Canal walking/Cycling route to Mullingar
2025/2030	Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

Keenagh Community Group now has the agreement of Bord na Móna to develop approximately 12 acres of cutaway bog near Corlea Centre for a recreated Iron age type settlement and to present the developing Biodiversity of a rehabilitated cutaway bog. This area has its own existing car park and shall be initially linked back to the centre and Keenagh by a dedicated walking route along the public road. This project will be developed in 2014/5. An important aspect of the proposal is that it be delivered in a very cost effective manner requiring minimal resources in input from the various bodies involved.

The above proposed walking trails and the Corlea Centre have the potential to be linked with the adjoining Royal Canal in the period 2014/15. This will facilitate boating, walking and cycling visitors coming from Dublin and travelling to the West via Longford and the Shannon to visit Corlea Centre.

As the portion of bog immediately adjoining the Corlea Project site is worked out and re-habilitated by Bord na Móna it is hoped to develop an additional area of bog with a direct link back to the Corlea Centre. This would provide a dedicated walking trail through the bog presenting the developing biodiversity. It is expected that a portion of the low lying bog shall be re-watered and colonized with appropriate native plants, birds and fish. The timetable for this portion of the project to be achieved is expected to be between 2020-2025.

There are current proposals to link Dublin to Mullingar and Longford Town to the Shannon.via the Royal Canal as walking cycling routes. It is envisaged in time (2020/2025) that the Royal Canal link will be continued from Mullingar through Longford to the Shannon thus improving access to Corlea.

Pic 3: Royal Canal potential walking and cycling routes. (photos sourced from Benbulben Photography at http://www.flickr.com/photos/37681288@N00/3666751434/in/set-72157624247068608/)

When the bogs have been worked out by Bord na Mona over the next 10/20 years one of the options under consideration is that they be used as Nature and Biodiversity locations. The existing bog rail tracks could then be utilized as additional walking/cycling tracks to increase the network through the emerging Mid Shannon Wilderness Park (See below) linking with the ISPCA Animal Refuge at Derryglogher and on to Lough Ree at Lanesboro. Indeed it may also be possible to link a walking/cycling route from Dublin through Longford and across the Shannon to Strokestown, Roosky and on to Westport and Sligo.

1.4
AN ECOTOURISM PROJECT

It is intended to use the principles of Ecotourism in the development of the Corlea Project. There is an established criterion which must be met in order to qualify for the ecotourism label. These cover a wide range of practices in eight key components of ecotourism as follows:

- Environmentally sustainable practices
- Natural area focus
- Interpretation and Education
- Contributing to Conservation

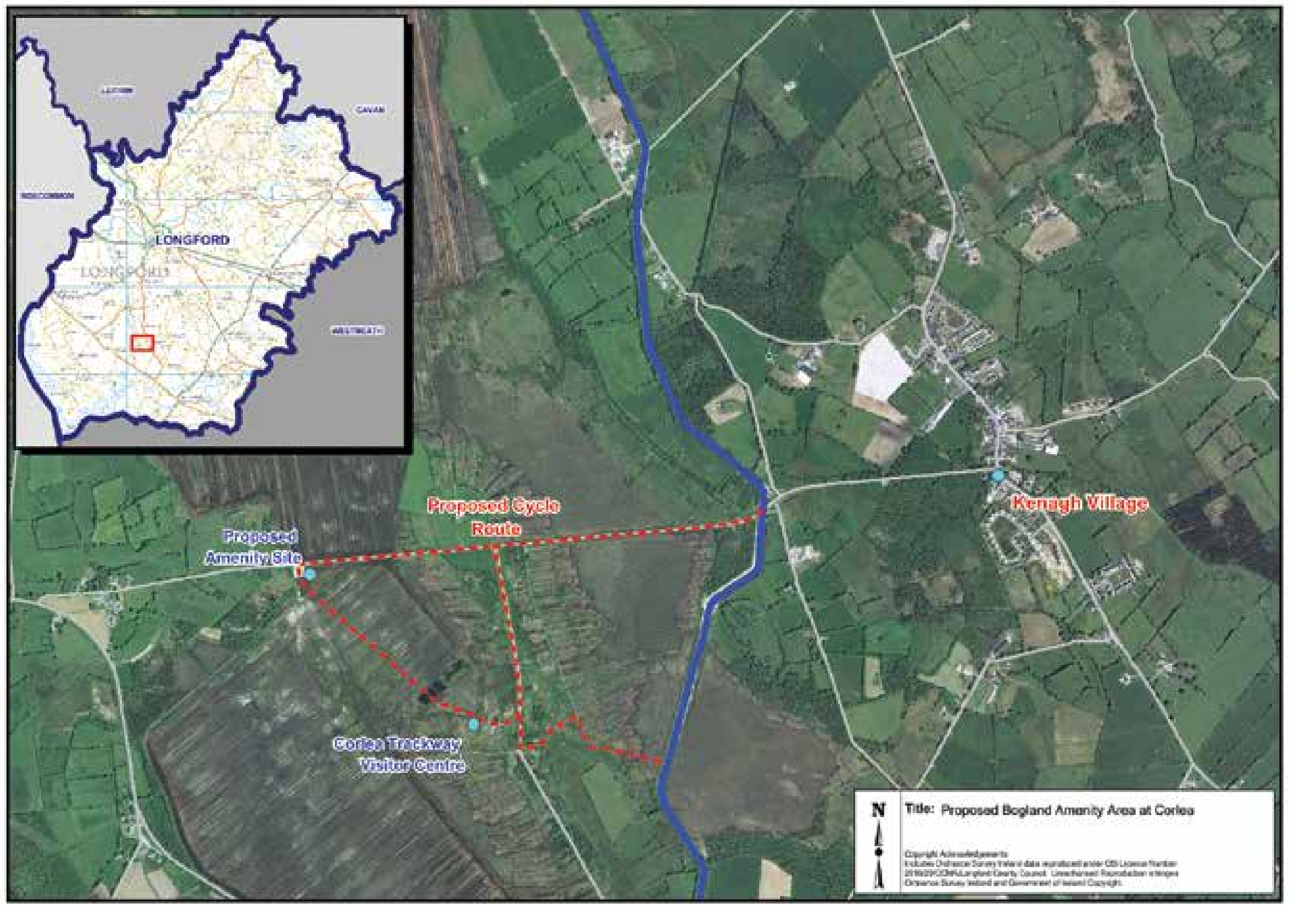
- Benefiting local Communities
- Visitor Satisfaction
- Responsible Marketing and Communication
- Cultural Awareness and Respect

The Corlea Project will incorporate many if not all of the above practices. By meeting and possibly exceeding in above areas, the project will indicate its dedication to educating the visitor and tourist about the native natural world and local culture. This environmentally innovative and socially responsible project will have a very positive impact on the environment and local communities.

2. Description of the Project

The proposed Corlea Archaeology and Biodiversity project is to be located on a Bord na Móna site on the Lanesboro Road out of Keenagh Village. This portion of road has been developed by the Keenagh Community Group for amenity purposes. A footpath has been provided which is popularly used by local people. It links the village to the Royal Canal and out to the Corlea Centre as well as a circular walking route via Mosstown and back to Keenagh.

Map 1:
Site of Corlea Archaeological and Biodiversity Project



The project is in two parts: 1. Archaeology, 2. Biodiversity.

2.1 ARCHAEOLOGY:

The bogs of Longford have been the subject of a number of archaeological surveys and excavations and have proven to be very rich in evidence of human activity since prehistoric times. A number of remarkable wooden trackways dating from the Iron Age have been found including that at Corlea. Other smaller and simpler sites, dating from the Bronze Age to the early medieval period, were also investigated in the vicinity of the Corlea Trackway. These included brushwood pathways and less substantial track ways.

Some 25km north west of Corlea in the townland of Edercloon a dense complex of trackways and structures was excavated.

The proposed Corlea archaeological open-air facility will consist of a series of outdoor architectural reconstructions primarily based on archaeological sources including the findings in the Longford Bogs such as those at Corlea and Edercloon. It will present simple copies of archaeological structures and materials to provide an interpretation of how people lived and acted in the past.

Specifically a number of very simple hazel rod huts shall be constructed and roofed with turf sods. A fire place and a number of home made tools and containers shall be provided. In addition very simple trackways and bog platforms will be constructed replicating those found in the area. Additional hazel rods and sods shall be available to allow children to build their own hut.

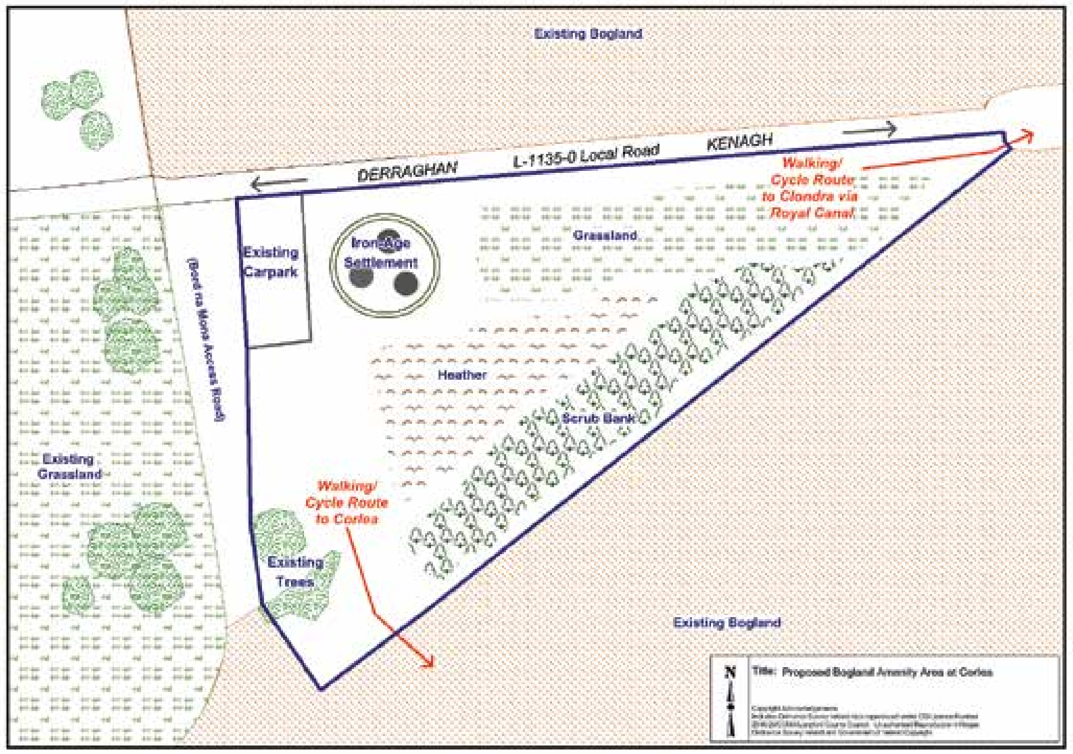
Pic 4: Typical simple recreated Iron Age homes to be built at Corlea.

Over time these various constructions can be added too, to present in very simple forms the various eras of human settlement in Ireland from the Mesolithic Period, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age through to early medieval times. The aim of the presentations shall be to present the development from simple hunter gathers through to a more sophisticated farming society.

Pic 5: Bog platform and Path.
Pic 6: Example of Iron Age life.

As the Iron Age people were also farmers a small area for growing appropriate crops shall be provided. Samples of the type of food eaten shall be presented. This will be accomplished in accordance with general scientific methods for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment of its visitors.

Extensive exhibitions and replica dwellings from various periods in Irish history ranging from Neolithic village, Irish mythology and folklore, early Christian times, can be added to the existing Corlea Centre for presentation purposes. History will truly come to life with the reconstructed homes, utensils, lifelike figures and informative displays.

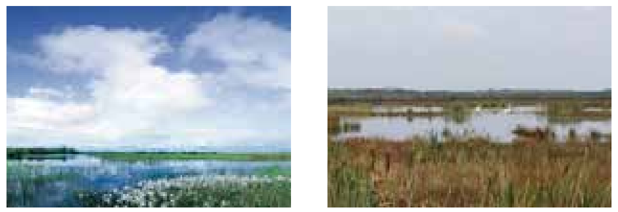


Map 2:
Layout of Corlea Archaeological and Biodiversity Project.

2.2
BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity specifically relates to the diversity of habitats, species and genetic diversity of species in the world around us from insects in the soil, to extensive woodlands, to the animals that inhabit them. Since the 1990s, Bord na Móna has adopted a programme of enhancement of biodiversity which has become closely linked to the after-use and rehabilitation of cutaway bogs.

The Corlea proposal follows the Bord na Móna programme in utilizing this proposed portion of cutaway bog to allow for the rehabilitation and re-colonisation of the bog. Re-colonisation of the bogs following peat production leads to establishment of a mosaic of habitats and species, some of which are considered rare and restricted in distribution in Ireland. The Corlea Project shall present the history of the development of the bogs, the rehabilitation programme and the developing biodiversity resource as educational tours to the visiting public.



Pic 7: Typical Bord na Móna rehabilitated and re-colonised Bogs (Photo, left, sourced from http://www.heartland.ie/exhibition/environment, photo, right, sourced from http://www.bordnamona.ie/our-company/biodiversity/projects/)

The proposed biodiversity trail will tell the story of Irish peatland's past, present and future possibilities. The cutaway bogs around Corlea which have been harvested by Bord na Móna for energy since the 1940s can be established as unique and welcoming habitats for a wide range of flora. The trail will also go through rejuvenating peat land and woodland areas of the Park and cover topics such as peat land formation, woodland ecology, native plants and animals, renewable energy and animal and plant identification.

Vital to enhancing our national biodiversity resource is the wise use and management of cutaway bogs and related lands, and creating awareness of the local, national and regional value of biodiversity of peatlands.

Pic 8: Typical rehabilitated bogs with scrub and rushes (photos sourced from Bord na Móna)

2.2.1
NATURE CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY CORRIDORS

In recent years Bord na Móna has been attempting to give due care to nature conservation and to retaining biodiversity corridors within their national bog network to sustain important refuges for peatland flora and fauna. This is a key requirement of Article 10 of the Habitats Directive. Rehabilitation of the cutaway bogs generally involves measures to accelerate re-vegetation, through activities such as drain blocking to create wetlands, and other targeted practices such as tree planting.

Rehabilitation allows for the expansion of biodiversity back onto the bogs and the creation of diverse and valuable wildlife reserves. It is envisaged that, overtime, as the cutaway bogs are worked out that they will be properly managed to return to a natural type environment and may form part of a proposed Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.

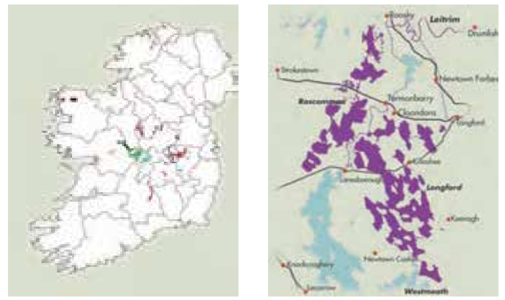
Pic 9: Re-watered cut away bog by Bord na Móna (photo sourced from http://www.bordnamona.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/BAP_review2012/BNM_BAP_2012_CF_lowres.pdf)

3.
Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

The Corlea Project represents a first step in the development of a future Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. Much of the land involved is in State ownership. Existing natural amenity areas such as Lough Ree, the Shannon, the Royal Canal and the future rehabilitated bogs, all of which are in very close proximity to each other in Longford/Roscommon, can be combined to create the Wilderness Park.

Pic 10: Mid Shannon Wilderness Park from Lough Ree at Athlone looking North.

As Bord na Móna completes its rehabilitation work on the bogs it may be possible for existing local communities, and Longford County Council to take responsibility for the cutaway bogs. This will not conflict with any future intention of Bord na Móna and it's potential future use of the bogs. The amenity use of the Rehabilitated bogs can be compatible with any future use for the bogs such as renewable energy projects.



Map 3 Bord na Móna Bogs.
Map 4: Longford/Roscommon Bogs and Shannon

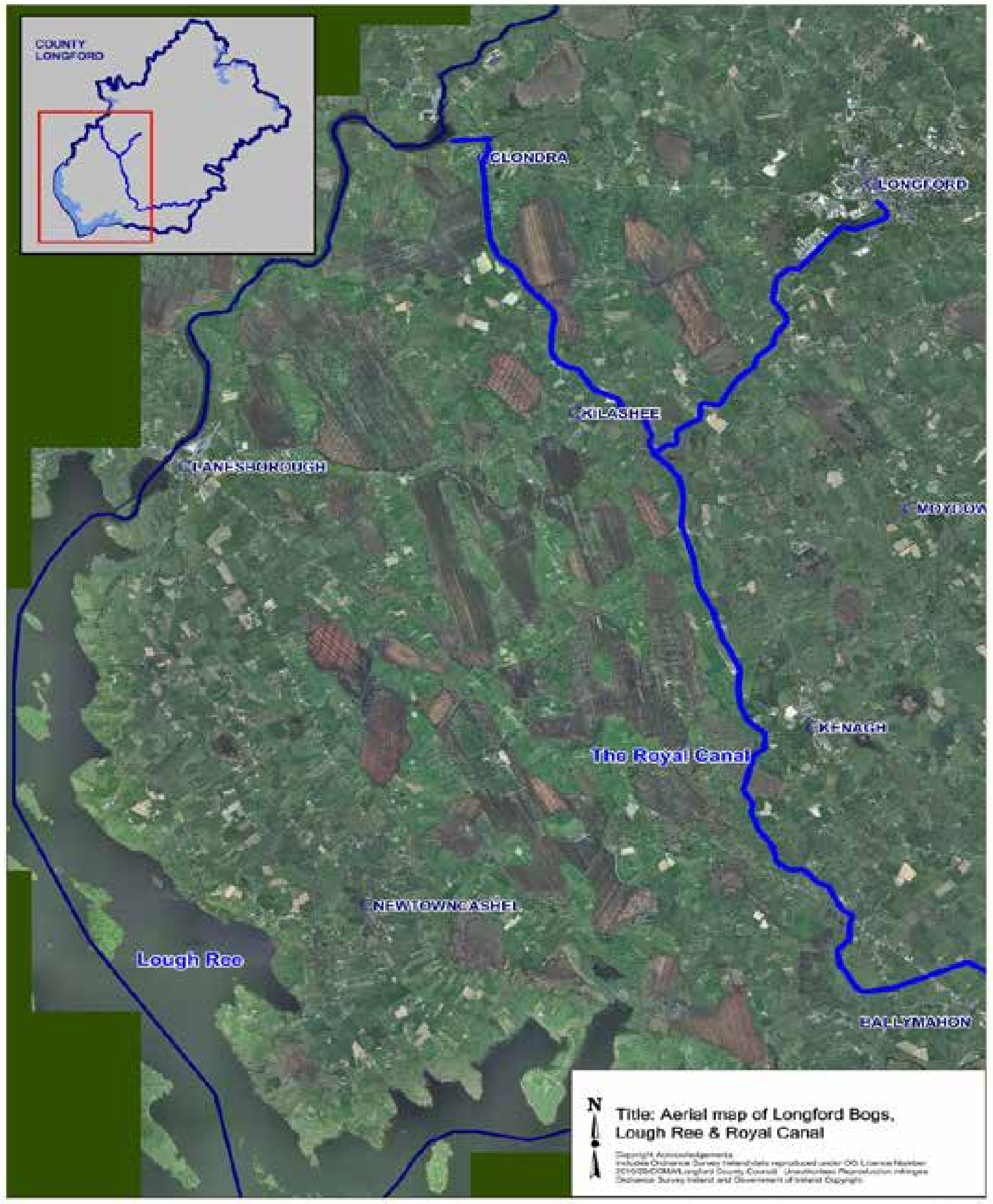
It is envisaged that over time as the cutaway bogs are worked out one of the options under consideration by Bord na Mona is that certain bog areas would return to a natural type environment. These natural environment areas could then, in association with Lough Ree and the Shannon, the Royal Canal, and River Inny etc, form part of a proposed Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. The use of the bogs for other purposes such as renewable energy can be achieved in a compatible manner. The large national resource that the Bord na Mona Bogs are can continue to be developed to provide employment and wealth creation opportunities in the national and local interest including for tourism and amenity purposes.

As well as the rehabilitated bogs, rivers and lakes, existing facilities and attractions can be utilized to enhance the attractiveness of the Mid Midlands Park. Facilities such as the Corlea Visitors Centre, the ISPCA Animal Refuge, Commons Mid Park at Lanesboro, Clondra Harbour and Strokestown House etc. already exist and only require a minor amount of refocusing to fit into the broader picture of presenting the Park.

The proposed Corlea Archaeological and Biodiversity Project when added to in time with the Royal Canal Walking/Cycling Route and the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park will provide the various communities and villages of South Longford with a wonderful amenity facilities and infrastructure. It will also encourage visitors to the area especially of the walking and cycling variety. This will help the area to build a more sustainable ecotourism base which will in turn provide economic benefits to the area

MID SHANNON WILDERNESS PARK

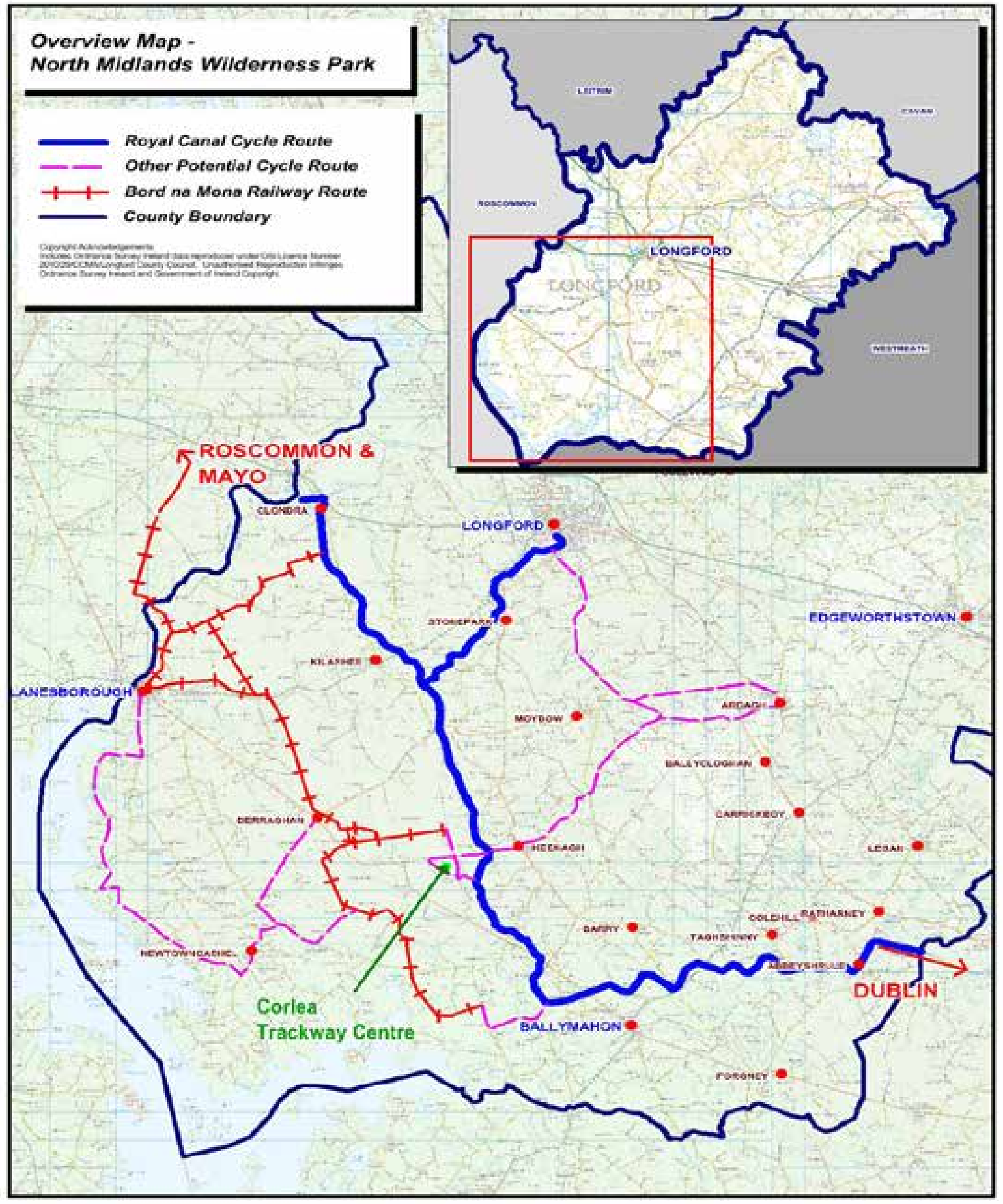
Mid Shannon Wilderness Park including Lough Ree, the Shannon, the Bogs and the Royal Canal.



Map 5:
Potential Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.

Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

Walking/cycling network within the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.



Map 6:
Potential Walking Cycling Routes in Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.

ANNEX →

Annex 6: Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

Donall Mac An Bheatha, Senior Planner.
Sean Savage, GIS Officer,
Sylvia Smith, Technician.

Prepared by Planning Section,
Longford County Council, September, 2013.

1. Introduction

1.1 MID SHANNON WILDERNESS PARK

The Mid Shannon area of Longford in the Republic of Ireland is a little known lake, river, forest and bog area that supports a rich and diverse range of flora and fauna, archaeological monuments and traditional cultural practices. This report sets out a proposal to develop a Mid Shannon Wilderness Park in County Longford. The Park will be located between the Royal Canal and Lough Ree on the River Shannon. Much of the land involved is in State ownership. The development of such a large amenity park in Longford would provide the Midlands and Ireland with a major tourism attraction of international importance.

The development of a Mid Shannon Wilderness Park in Longford will combine existing natural amenity areas. These areas include Lough Ree, the Rivers Shannon, Inny and Camlin, the Royal Canal, Newcastle Wood and other forests and the future rehabilitated Bord na Móna bogs. All of these amenity areas are in very close proximity to each other and can be developed and combined to create the Wilderness Park. The Park would be developed in partnership between the various owners particularly Bord na Móna, local communities and Longford County Council.

Pic 1:
Mid Shannon Wilderness Park, Lough Ree from Athlone looking North.

1.2 BORD NA MÓNA AND CUT AWAY BOGS.

Over the next 15 years Bord na Móna will complete its peat extraction work on the Longford bogs and begin to plan for their future use. This will include carrying out rehabilitation work to create semi natural landscapes which will produce potentially valuable amenity lands. It is now proposed for existing local communities and Longford County Council to partner with Bord na Móna and collaborate in developing new amenity uses for the cutaway bogs. This will not conflict with any future intention of Bord na Móna and it's potential future use of the bogs. The amenity use of the rehabilitated bogs can be compatible with any future use for the bogs such as renewable energy projects.

1.3 TOURISM AND BIODIVERSITY

The Mid Shannon Wilderness project aims to strengthen the integration of tourism and natural heritage, and to reconcile tourism development with conservation of biodiversity. It aims to secure environmental protection and sustainable visitor management through the creation of an innovative methodology that is of value to local communities. In European terms, the objective is to improve the environmental performance of the area and promote strategic integrated planning approaches for improving the use of land.

The aim of the project is to contribute to Ireland's and EU biodiversity objectives through the integration of tourism and biodiversity. The project will support the EU's promotion of sustainable, responsible and high-quality tourism. The project will also stimulate a heritage community within its local partnership and enrich the heritage of the area. Finally, it will support the European landscape convention through the tourism conservation actions carried out on the fragile landscape of the area.

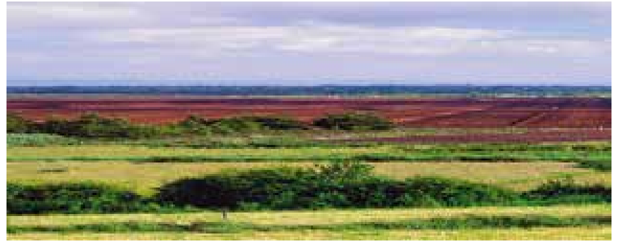
Pic. No. 2 Typical Longford Mixed Bogland.

2. Future of the Longford Bogs.

2.1 DRAFT NATIONAL PEATLANDS STRATEGY 2014

The recently published Draft National Peatlands Strategy 2014, produced by the National Parks and Wildlife Service advocates the following partnership approach:

'NPS V 16 Responsible management of peatlands will require collaboration and partnership between land-owners, communities, public authorities, commercial organizations and non-governmental organizations. This Strategy aims to ensure that appropriate supports, structures, funding mechanisms and regulatory frameworks are in place to allow such partnership to develop.'



Pic. 3 Bord na Móna Bog

The following after use principles for cut away bogs are set down by the Draft Strategy:

- NPS P 13 Bord na Móna will continue to assess and evaluate the potential of the company's land bank, using a land use review system. The assessment will help prepare a set of evidence based management plans for the various areas of peatland. These plans will also inform its cutaway bog rehabilitation programme.
- NPS P 14 The policy of Bord na Móna is not to open up any undrained new bogs for peat production.
- NPS P 15 Lands identified by Bord na Móna as having high biodiversity value and/or priority habitats will be reserved for these purposes as the principal future land use.
- NPS P 16 Generally, Bord na Móna cutaway bogs that flood naturally will be permitted to flood unless there is a clear environmental and/or economic case to maintain pumped drainage.
- NPS P 17 An examination of all publicly owned lands and privately owned cutaway will be undertaken with a view to identifying appropriate uses, which will aim to harness their potential to contribute to Ireland's environmental, ecological and economic wealth, with particular emphasis on mitigating carbon losses.
- NPS P 18 In deciding on the most appropriate afteruse of cutaway peatlands, consideration shall be given to encouraging, where possible, the return to a natural functioning peatland ecosystem. This will require re-wetting of the cutaway peatlands which may lead in time to the restoration of the peatland ecosystem.
- NPS P 19 Environmentally, socially and economically viable options should be analysed to plan the future use of industrial cutaway peatlands, in conjunction with limiting factors as outlined in Bord na Móna's *Strategic Framework for the Future Use of Peatland*s.
- NPS P 22 The work of Bord na Móna, Coillte and the Irish Peatlands Conservation Council in developing ecologically rich futures for cutaway and formerly forested bogs will be developed. Such areas can bring new tourism and recreation attractions to the midlands and the west.
- The use of the Longford Bogs for amenity purposes as part of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park among other potential uses clearly ties in with the above principles.

2.2 BORD NA MONA BOGS

Longford contains a large portion of bogs many of which are owned by Bord Na Mona.

Map 1 Bord na Móna Bogs.
Map 2: Longford/Roscommon Bogs and Shannon

It is envisaged that overtime as the cutaway bogs are worked out one of the options under consideration by Bord na Mona is that certain bog areas would return to a natural type environment. These natural environment areas could then, in association with Lough Ree and the Shannon, the Royal Canal, and River Inny etc, form part of a proposed Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. The use of the bogs for other purposes such as renewable energy can be achieved in a compatible manner. The large national resource that the Bord na Mona Bogs are can continue to be developed to provide employment and wealth creation opportunities in the national and local interest including for tourism and amenity purposes.

Pic 4: Rehabilitated and re-colonised bog.

As well as the rehabilitated bogs, rivers and lakes, existing facilities and attractions can be utilized to enhance the attractiveness of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. Facilities such as the Corlea Visitors Centre, the ISPCA Animal Refuge, Commons North Park at Lanesboro, Barley Harbour, Newcastle House and wood, Clondra Harbour and Strokestown House etc. already exist and only require a minor amount of refocusing to fit into the broader picture of presenting and creating the Park.

As the National Peatland Startegy has recommended the future responsible management of peatlands will require collaboration and partnership between land-owners, communities, public authorities, commercial organisations and non-governmental organisations. The Mid Shannon Wilderness Park aims to ensure that the involvement and co-operation of local communities, Longford County Council and Bord na Mona are in place to allow such partnership to develop.

2.3 CORLEA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

There is now a proposal to develop a new Corlea Archaeological and Biodiversity Project. This can be added to in time with the Royal Canal Walking/Cycling Route and the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park to provide the various communities and villages of South Longford with wonderful amenity facilities and tourism infrastructure. It will also encourage visitors to the area especially of the walking and cycling variety. This will help the area to build a more sustainable ecotourism base which will in turn provide economic benefits to the area.

Pic. 5 Corlea Visitor Centre.

Keenagh Community Group now has the agreement of Bord na Móna to develop approximately 12 acres of cutaway bog near Corlea Centre for a recreated Archaeological Iron age type settlement and to present the developing Biodiversity of a rehabilitated cutaway bog. This area has its own existing car park and shall be initially linked back to the centre and Keenagh by a dedicated walking route along the public road. This project will be developed in 2014/5. An important aspect of the proposal is that it be delivered in a very cost effective manner requiring minimal resources in input from the various bodies involved.

The above proposed walking trails and the Corlea Centre have the potential to be linked with the adjoining Royal Canal in the period 2014/15. This will facilitate boating, walking and cycling visitors coming from Dublin and the East and travelling to the West via Longford and the Shannon to visit both Longford and the Corlea Centre.

Pic. 6+ 7: Boating, Walking and Cycling on the Royal Canal.

As the portion of bog immediately adjoining the Corlea Project site is worked out and re-habilitated by Bord na Móna it is hoped to develop an additional area of bog with a direct link back to the Corlea Centre. This would provide dedicated walking trails through the bog presenting the developing biodiversity. It is expected that a portion of the low lying bog shall be re-watered and colonized with appropriate native plants, birds and fish. The timetable for this portion of the project to be achieved is expected to be between 2020-2025.

Pic. 8: Biodiversity of a Bog.

3.0 Mid Shannon Wilderness Park – Major Tourism Initiative

The project has a wide ranging scope, benefiting visitors to the area, local communities, schools as well as improving the wider tourism attractions of Longford and the Midlands. The Corlea proposal is a stand alone project that represents a first step in a broader development proposal for the gradual conversion of parts of the cutaway bogs in Longford to Biodiversity Parks. These emerging Biodiversity Parks could then be linked with the Shannon, Lough Ree and the Royal Canal to create a Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.

Pic. 9: Lough Ree wilderness.

When the bogs have been worked out by Bord na Móna over the next 10/20 years one of the options under consideration is that they be used as Nature and Biodiversity locations. The existing bog rail tracks could then be utilized as additional walking/cycling tracks to increase the network through the emerging Mid Shannon Wilderness Park (See below) linking with the ISPCA Animal Refuge at Derryglogher and on to Lough Ree at Lanesboro and Newtowncashel. Indeed it may also be possible to link a walking/cycling route from Dublin through Longford and across the Shannon to Strokestown, Roosky and on to Westport and Sligo.

Pic. 10: Bord Na Móna bridge at Lanesboro.

3.1 AMENITY POTENTIAL OF MID SHANNON WILDERNESS PARK

The development of the Royal Canal as a primary Walking/Cycling route from Dublin through Longford to the West can connect in with routes across the cutaway bogs and the Shannon to the Mayo and Sligo roads. The crossing of the Shannon could use the existing Bord Na Móna rail bridge at Lanesboro which would provide a traffic free crossing point. Indeed it is possible to Link Dublin through to Roscommon via the Royal Canal in a completely vehicular traffic free environment. This would create a major piece of amenity infrastructure across the Midlands of international importance.

Pic. 11: Boating on the Royal Canal.

Pic. 12: Fishing and Horse riding.

Pic. 13: Walking on the bogs and boating on Lough Ree.

The opening up and development of the Mid Shannon area as proposed above would facilitate the promotion of Tourism and Recreation activities in the area. The usage of the beautiful natural amenities of the area such as lake, river, wood and bog would increase. The level of activity and visitors to the area would increase and this in turn would create local enterprises and additional employment in South Longford.

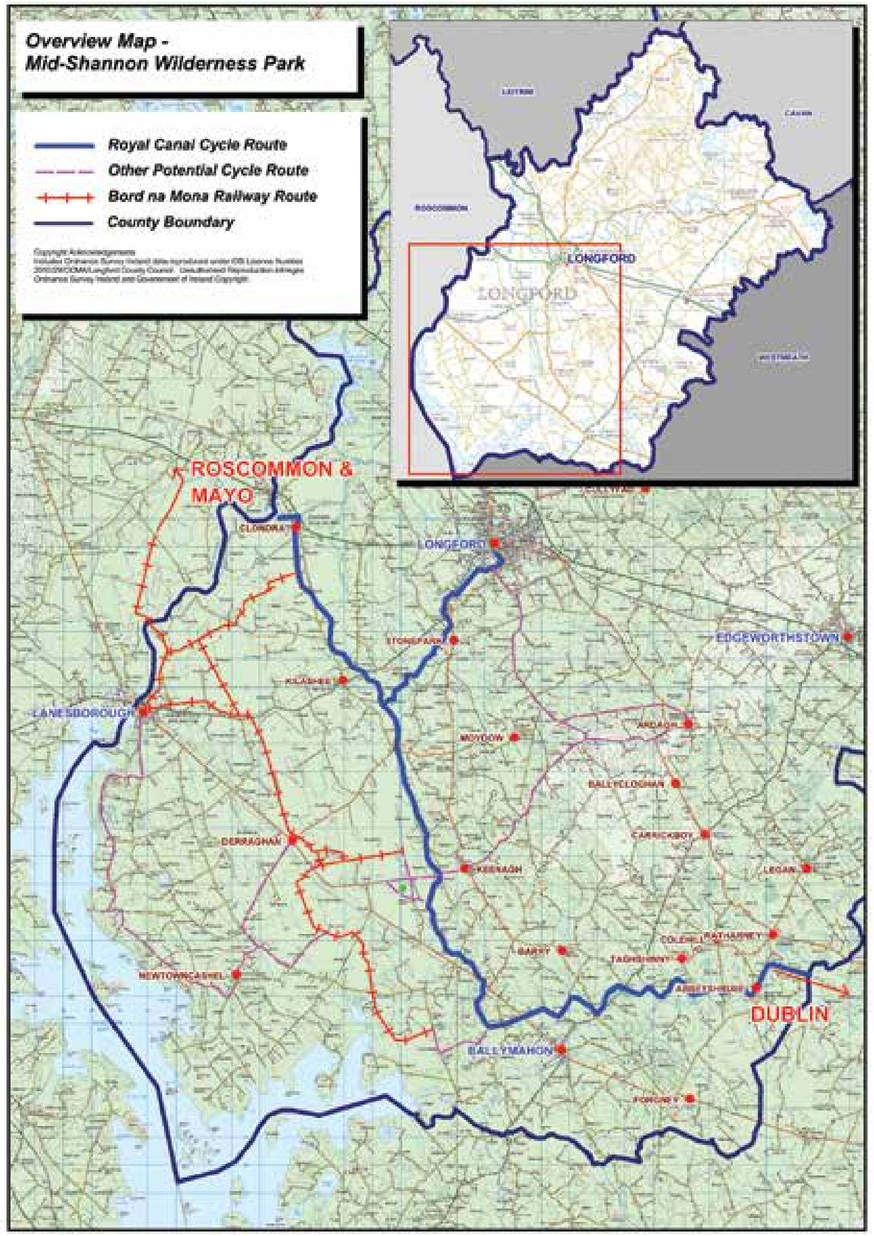
MID SHANNON WILDERNESS PARK

Mid Shannon Wilderness Park including Lough Ree, the Shannon, the Bogs and the Royal Canal.

Map 3:
Potential Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

MID SHANNON WILDERNESS PARK

Walking/cycling network within the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.



Map 4:
Potential Walking Cycling Routes in Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.

The development of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park in Longford would provide a major amenity and tourism facilities for the Midlands. The plans for the Park and the Corlea project will be sympathetic with any future uses and the conservation and biodiversity action plan of Bord na Móna. It is also intended to develop these projects in a sustainable manner bearing in mind the rich cultural and natural heritage resources of the area. The principles of Ecotourism providing for a destination with a set of standards based on sound environmental practices highlighting all that the region and its people has to offer will guide the development of the project.

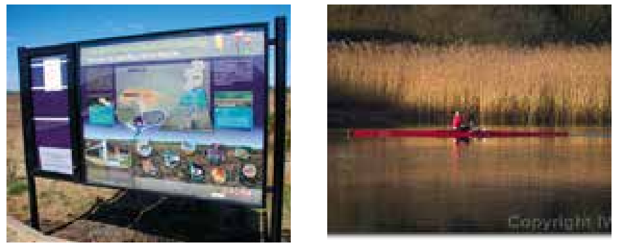
Pic. 14: Forest Walks

4.0
An Ecotourism Project

It is intended to use the principles of Ecotourism in the development of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park and the Corlea Project. There is an established criterion which must be met in order to qualify for the ecotourism label. These cover a wide range of practices in eight key components of ecotourism as follows:

- Environmentally sustainable practices
- Natural area focus
- Interpretation and Education
- Contributing to Conservation
- Benefiting local Communities
- Visitor Satisfaction
- Responsible Marketing and Communication
- Cultural Awareness and Respect

The Mid Shannon Wilderness Park and the Corlea Project will incorporate these principles. By meeting and possibly exceeding the above, the project will indicate its dedication to educating the visitor and tourist about the native natural world and local culture. This environmentally innovative and socially responsible project will have a very positive impact on the environment and local communities.



Pic. 15: Amenity Sign Boards for Wilderness Park

4.1 BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity specifically relates to the diversity of habitats, species and genetic diversity of species in the world around us from insects in the soil, to extensive woodlands, to the animals that inhabit them. Since the 1990s, Bord na Móna has adopted a programme of enhancement of biodiversity which has become closely linked to the after-use and rehabilitation of cutaway bogs.

The Corlea proposal follows the Bord na Móna programme in utilizing this proposed portion of cutaway bog to allow for the rehabilitation and re-colonisation of the bog.

Re-colonisation of the bogs following peat production leads to establishment of a mosaic of habitats and species, some of which are considered rare and restricted in distribution in Ireland. The Corlea Project shall present the history of the development of the bogs, the rehabilitation programme and the developing biodiversity resource as educational tours to the visiting public.

Pic 16: Typical Bord na Móna rehabilitated and re-colonised Bogs.

The proposed biodiversity trail will tell the story of Irish peatland's past, present and future possibilities. The cutaway bogs around Corlea which have been harvested by Bord na Móna for energy since the 1940s can be established as unique and welcoming habitats for a wide range of flora. The trail will also go through rejuvenating peat land and woodland areas of the Park and cover topics such as peat land formation, woodland ecology, native plants and animals, renewable energy and animal and plant identification.

Vital to enhancing our national biodiversity resource is the wise use and management of cutaway bogs and related lands, and creating awareness of the local, national and regional value of biodiversity of peatlands.

Pic 17: Typical rehabilitated bogs with scrub, heather and rushes.

4.2 NATURE CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY CORRIDORS

In recent years Bord na Móna has been attempting to give due care to nature conservation and to retaining biodiversity corridors within their national bog network to sustain important refuges for peatland flora and fauna. This is a key requirement of Article 10 of the Habitats Directive. Rehabilitation of the cutaway bogs generally involves measures to accelerate re-vegetation, through activities such as drain blocking to create wetlands, and other targeted practices such as tree planting.

Pic 18: Flora and Fauna

Rehabilitation allows for the expansion of biodiversity back onto the bogs and the creation of diverse and valuable wildlife reserves. It is envisaged that, overtime, as the cutaway bogs are worked out that they will be properly managed to return to a natural type environment and may form part of a proposed Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.

Pic 19: Re-watered cut away bog by Bord na Móna

5.0 Time Frame for Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

The following time frame is proposed to deliver the various projects related to the development of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. Over the next ten years it is hoped to deliver various elements of the project building up to the final achievement

Table 1.
Timeframe for projects.

2014	Corlea Visitor Centre existing. Lough Ree and Royal Canal existing.
2014/15	Corlea Archaeological & Biodiversity Project
2015/16	Corlea link with Royal Canal
2015/2020	Project Link across bog to Corlea Centre.
2015/2020	Local communities take responsibility for local area of Bog in association with Longford County Council.
2015/2018	Royal Canal walking/Cycling route Dublin to Clondra.
2015/2030	Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

'I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.'

Lake Isle of Innisfree, W. B. Yeats.

Designed by
Red&Grey Design

Photography by
Michael Croghan
& John Riddle,
Discovering Longford

N55
14
35
35
7
2,000m
1,000m
500m
N5
2
R198
16
19
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N4