

# CHAPTER 3



## CHAPTER 3 Housing Strategy

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### 3.1 Introduction

Westmeath County Council has statutory obligations to ensure that sufficient land is zoned for all types of housing to meet the projected housing requirements of the county over the Plan period. The Core Strategy (refer to Chapter 2) of this Plan has outlined the County Settlement Strategy, the population targets and the amount of land required for residential purposes over the period 2021–2027. The Council’s Housing Strategy in Appendix 1 correlates with the Core Strategy and is underpinned by a Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA), as required under the National Planning Framework (NPF).

### 3.2 Housing Strategy / HNDA – Guiding Principles

An evidence-based methodological approach has been adopted to ensure that the County Westmeath Housing Strategy meets the housing needs of the county and its residents while remaining in keeping with local, regional and national guidelines. The Strategy is underpinned by a HNDA which provides a robust baseline to inform and guide policies and objectives under the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

Declines in the construction sector and wider economic activity in the previous decade, coupled with Ireland’s emerging economic recovery have led to ongoing challenges around fluctuations in the supply, demand and price of housing. It has also led to opportunities, with a greater mix of house types and tenures diversifying Ireland’s housing market. Aside from the traditional home-ownership model, rental accommodation will play a greater role in the provision of housing in Westmeath. And increasing levels of activity in the construction sector will provide new homes to meet current and projected demand and contribute to County Westmeath’s social housing stock by way of Part V obligations. The HNDA incorporates a range of socio-economic and demographic data to analyse current levels of demand and supply within Westmeath’s housing sector, and project for future need over the lifetime of the Development Plan and beyond to 2031. It incorporates demand across different tenures, including owner-occupied, the rental sector and social housing and provides estimates of future housing needs based on employment growth, income levels and affordability in the housing market. This is elaborated in Appendix 1.

Section 3.3 of this report sets out relevant legislation and policy at the national, regional and local levels to provide a strategic context for the Housing Strategy and the development of a Housing Need Demand Assessment for the county. Section 3.4 provides an overview of the HNDA process and the methodological approach which guides its development. Section 3.5 sets out Westmeath County Council’s core policies with regards housing over the period 2021-2027.

### 3.3 Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA)

Under Section 94 (1) (a) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), each planning authority “shall include in any development plan a strategy for the purpose of ensuring that proper planning and sustainable development of the area of the development plan provides for the housing of the existing and future population of the area in the manner set out in the strategy”.

This must take into account;

- the existing need and the likely **future need for housing**;
- the need to ensure that housing is available for persons who have **different levels of income**;
- the need to ensure that a **mixture of house types and sizes** is developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households, as may be determined by the planning authority, and including the special requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities, and;
- the need to **counteract undue segregation** in housing between persons of different social backgrounds.

In order to ensure that the plan-making system is supported by a robust methodology to inform policies and funding initiatives around housing and associated land requirements, the NPF has introduced a new requirement for each Local Authority to develop a Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA). The HNDA will support the preparation of housing strategies and all related housing policy outputs, e.g. city and county development plans, local area plans, traveller accommodation plans etc.

The NPF, indicates the purpose of the HNDA tool to:

- Assist local authorities to develop long-term strategic views of housing need across all tenures.
- Provide a robust evidence base to support decisions about new housing supply, wider investment and housing related services that inform an overall national housing profile.
- Inform policies about the proportion of social and affordable housing required, including the need for different types and sizes of provision.
- Provide evidence to inform policies related to the provision of specialist housing and housing related services.

The NPF notes that HNDAs are designed to give broad, long run estimates of what future housing need might be, rather than precision estimates. The Framework must be logical, sequential and allow for updating, monitoring and evaluation.

The HNDA undertaken as part of this Development Plan spans two key stages – current and future outlook; and assesses three core areas: Population, Housing and Economy. These are set out in figure 3.1.

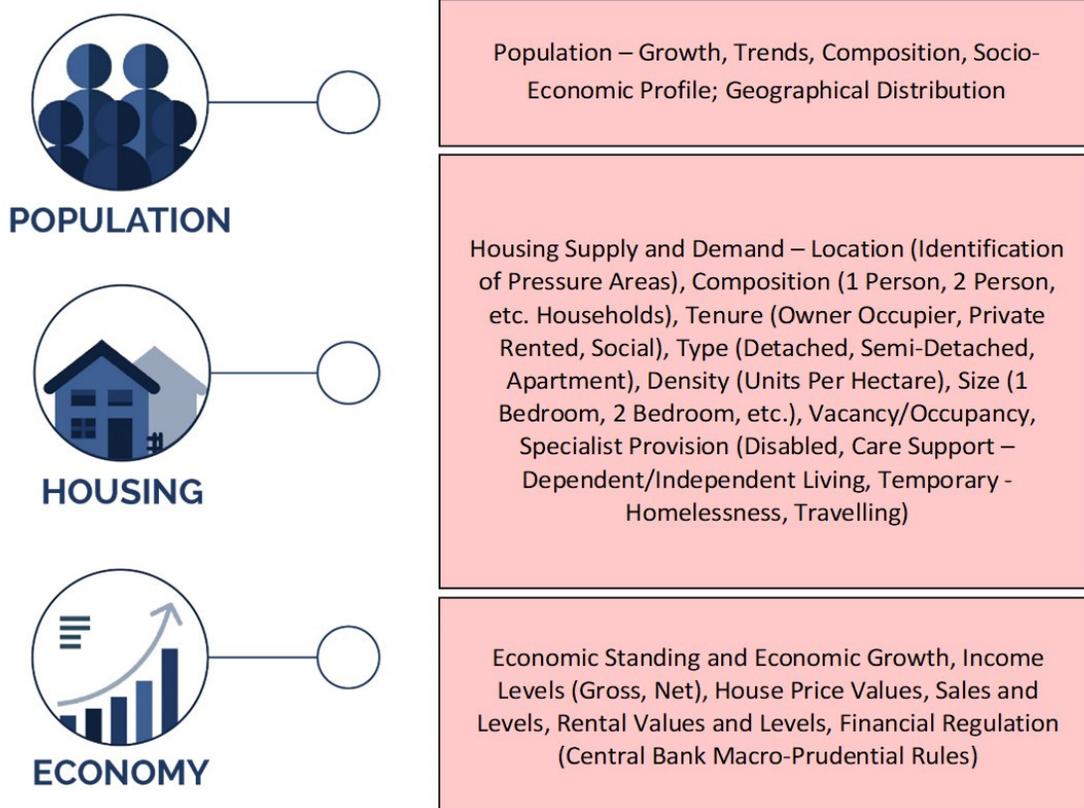


Figure 3.1: HNDA Assessment Areas. Future Analytics Consulting

The methodological approach to the HNDA undertaken as part of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 is summarised in figure 3.2 below. The process will enhance how acute and unmet demand for housing is identified before it arises. It provides a robust assessment of regional and localised influences, such as population and migration, in quantifying needs and demands. The key evidence inputs which drive the model are:

1. **Demographic trends, affordability trends and wider economic trends.** The use of **economic forecasting or econometric** work underpins this section. Data requirements include **household composition/projections, house prices, rents, number of first-time buyers (FTBs) and loan to value (LTV) mortgage rates, economic activity and employment rates**, etc.
2. **Housing Stock Profile Pressures (and existing need) and management issues.** This involves undertaking a detailed profile of local **housing stock and stock pressures**, including **local authority housing**, to identify the main pressures relating to supply and demand, ineffective stock and overall condition as well as priorities for future stock management. Information is required on **dwelling size, dwelling type, dwelling condition and stock pressures (occupancy/under occupancy stock turnover**, etc.).
3. **Estimating Future Housing Need and Demand.** This is broken down into: **owner occupation, private sector, below market rent and social rent.**

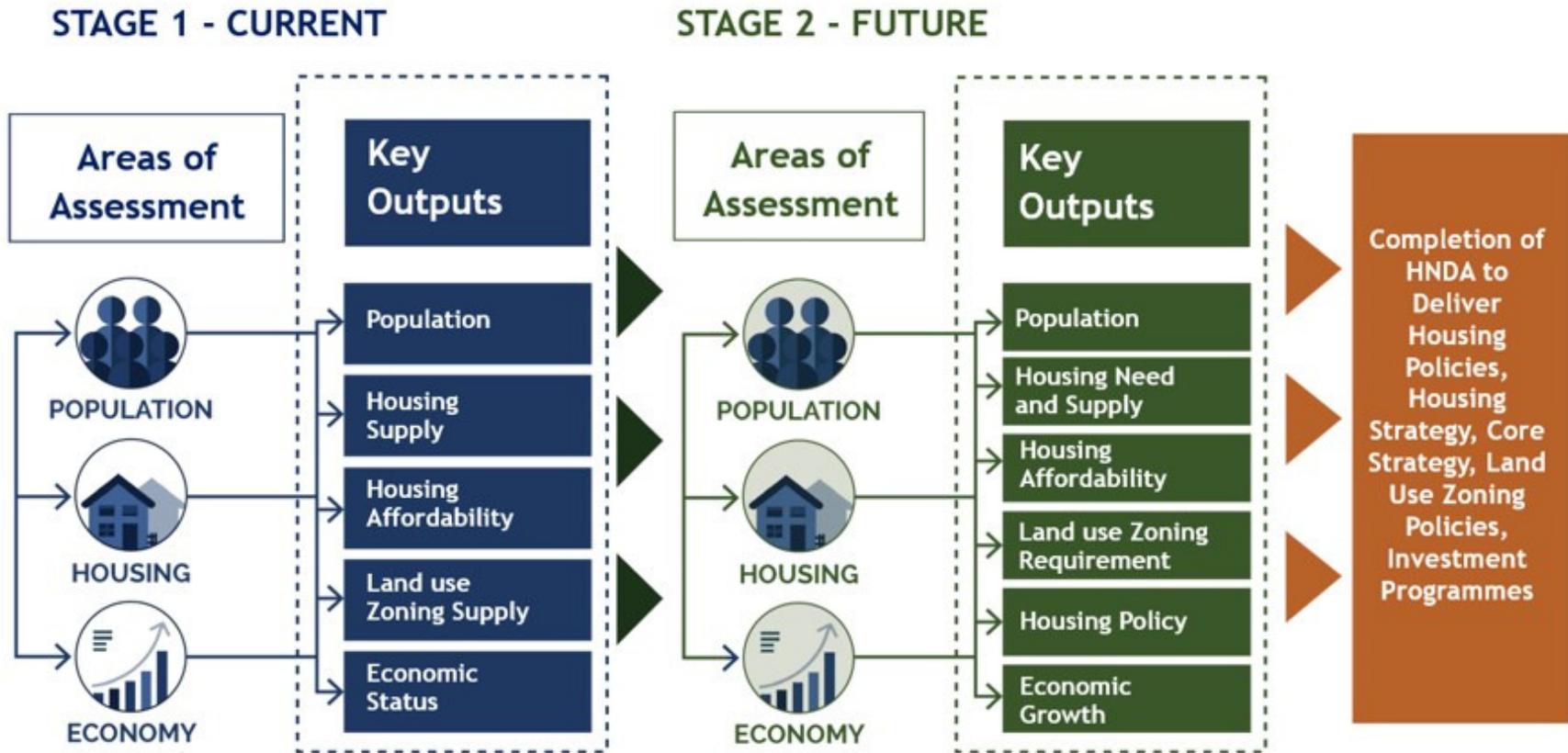


Figure 3.2: Schematic of HND A Approach

### 3.4 Housing Legislation and Policy

This section identifies and reviews the key legislative and policy instruments relevant to the delivery of Westmeath's Housing Strategy 2021-2027. The NPF, Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework and the RSES for the Eastern and Midland region are reviewed in detail in the Core Strategy (see Chapter 2) and are summarised briefly hereafter.

#### 3.4.1 National Legislation and Policy

##### ***Planning and Development Act 2000***

Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) contains requirements for all Planning Authorities to ensure that their Development Plans are consistent with high-level strategic policies and population projections for the country. Planning Authorities are required to prepare and incorporate a Core Strategy that shows that the Development Plan is consistent with national and regional objectives under the National Planning Framework and the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. Planning Authorities are also required to prepare and incorporate a Housing Strategy into their Development Plan.

The purpose of the Housing Strategy is to ensure that development provides for the housing needs of the existing and future population of the county/Development Plan area. It is stated that:

1. *"...each housing strategy should have regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of an area and should be concerned with the overall supply of housing within the planning authority."*

In particular, the Act specifies that the Housing Strategy shall take into account:

- The existing and likely future need for social housing.
- The need to ensure that housing is available for people of different incomes.
- The need to ensure the availability of a mixture of house types and sizes to cater for the requirements of different categories of households, including the special requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities.
- the need to counteract segregation in housing between persons of different social backgrounds.

It is required that each Housing Strategy be consistent with high level strategic plans such as the National Planning Framework and the Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. Planning Authorities are also required to demonstrate how the Housing Strategy aligns with the population projects contained in the Core Strategy and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Region.

***Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2018***

A relevant recent legislative update with respect to housing is the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2018. The Amendment provides that the temporary change of use of certain vacant commercial premises to residential use is exempt from the need to obtain planning permission.

***Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015***

The statutory context for the provision of social and affordable housing has changed under the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 which amended the Planning and Development Act 2000. The amendments include that there will be a requirement for up to 10% social housing in developments in excess of 9 units. Further consideration is given to available social housing delivery mechanisms in Appendix 1.

***National Planning Framework (NPF) 2018***

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is a high-level strategy that will shape growth and development in Ireland out to the year 2040. The NPF draws upon lessons learned from the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2022 and provides a framework for the sustainable development of Ireland's existing settlements, as an alternative to an uncoordinated "business as usual" approach to development.

The NPF contains a number of National Policy Objectives that support the delivery of residential development at a suitable location and scale to achieve an overall target of 550,000 additional households nationwide by 2040.

The achievement of National Policy Objectives at a County level will be underpinned by the development of a Housing Need Demand Assessment (HDNA) by each Local Authority. A HDNA is defined as a "database which allows local authorities to run a number of different scenarios to inform key decisions on housing need and supply." They will provide long-term estimates of future housing needs to support the preparation of Housing Strategies and inform housing policy outputs. The NPF lists a number of key evidence inputs that will inform and drive the HDNA model, based around:

- Demographic trends, affordability trends and wider economic trends.
- Housing Stock Profile Pressures, existing need and management issues.
- Estimate future housing need and demand.

The data requirements for these key evidence inputs are covered in greater detail in Section 3.4.

***Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework (July 2018)***

The Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework (July 2018) highlights the Government's focus on achieving alignment between national, regional and local planning policy and practice. It addresses issues around the legal status of the NPF and provides transitional population projections for the period up to 2031 (as set out in Chapter 2 Core Strategy). It also sets out mechanisms to ensure that Development Plans will broadly align with the NPF and RSES's to address the six-year period up to 2026/2027.

***Project Ireland 2040 - National Development Plan 2018-2027***

The National Development Plan proposes the creation of a new land-management agency. This ‘National Regeneration and Development Agency’ will be established to work with local authorities, public bodies and the business community, harnessing public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment.

In terms of social housing, the National Development Plan will, through a planned capital investment of over €4.2 billion, support the delivery of some 40,000 new social housing homes by 2021. Direct Local Authority build, acquisitions, rejuvenation of formerly empty homes and provision by housing bodies are identified as the chief delivery mechanisms. By 2021, 12,000 social housing homes will be made available annually by Local Authorities and approved housing bodies for social housing. This level of provision is to be maintained over the remainder of the period of the National Development Plan, resulting in 112,000 households having their housing needs met in a social housing home by 2027. The NPF warns against the intensification of social housing properties in areas that are already dense with social housing and advocates the development of diverse neighbourhoods with a healthy balance of public and private housing.

***Rebuilding Ireland – An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (2016)***

Rebuilding Ireland specifically provides a multi-stranded approach to achieving key housing objectives, including to significantly increase the supply of social housing, to increase the housing build numbers by 2020, to service all tenure types, and to tackle homelessness. The Plan is designed to put in place the necessary financing, regulatory, governance and resource mechanisms and initiatives to accelerate the delivery of all types of housing supply - private, social and rental sector in places of high demand and acute shortage. The plan sets out five pillars for which a series of actions are planned to address the challenges presented by Ireland’s disjointed housing sector as follows; 1. Address homelessness, 2. accelerate social housing, 3. build more homes, 4. improve the rental sector, and 5. utilise existing housing.

The Plan places focuses on the rental sector and the implications this might have for the tenure choices offered in bringing new schemes to the market. A declining rate of home ownership, decreasing household size, a growing population influenced by high inward migration rates, and increasing rates of new household formation are all identified as factors pointing to the growth of the rental sector and the increased role it is likely to play into the future. Importantly, there is also a notable change in terms of the public’s attitude to the rental sector with it becoming increasingly recognised as a long-term tenure option. The Action Plan notes that a strong rental sector supports a mobile labour market “*better able to adapt to new job opportunities and changing household circumstances*” and is suited to accommodating a range of households - including mobile professionals, students and indeed lower-income households.

Under the Action Plan, targeted social housing supply was increased to 47,000 units from the provision set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020 (which set a commitment for 35,600 new units between 2015-202) over the period 2016 to 2021 (at which stage some 10,000 units will be delivered on an annual basis).

Furthermore, the Action Plan pledged to support the enhanced role of existing initiatives for Social Housing delivery and also introduced a number of new initiatives and schemes, as follows:

*Local Authority Construction & Acquisition (also known as the Social Housing Investment Programme (SHIP))*

To provide funding to local authorities for the provision of social housing by means of construction and acquisition. It also covers expenditure under the RapidBuild Housing Programme, Part V acquisitions, Land Aggregation Scheme and the Special Resolution Fund for unfinished housing developments.

*Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS)*

To provide essential funding to AHBs for the provision of accommodation for persons with specific categories of housing need such as Homeless and Older Persons, People with Disabilities, Returning Emigrants and Victims of Domestic Violence.

*Vacant Housing Repair and Leasing Initiative:*

This scheme enables local authorities, having identified appropriate vacant privately-owned properties in their functional areas, to provide upfront financial assistance to meet reasonable renovation works and to enter into long term lease arrangements with property owners. Renovation costs will be recouped from rent over an agreed period.

*Part V Delivery:*

The Action Plan sets out a commitment to ensure adequate resources are made available to both local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies, to allow them to purchase or lease newly built private dwellings to the fullest extent envisaged by Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. In addition, where appropriate, the leasing of additional privately developed dwellings beyond the extent envisaged by Part V is supported. Furthermore, the up-front purchase of the Part V social housing requirement will be facilitated, subject to the introduction of strict controls.

***Social Housing Strategy 2020: Support, Supply and Reform***

The Social Housing Strategy 2020: Support, Supply and Reform was adopted in November 2014 and sets out the framework for the delivery of new social housing and for social housing assessment, delivery and financing. The vision set out Strategy that “*every household in Ireland will have access to secure, good quality housing suited to their needs at affordable prices in a sustainable community*” applied to County Westmeath is an overarching ambition of the Housing Strategy.

The national Social Housing Strategy is based on three pillars:

**Pillar 1:** Provide for 35,000 new social housing units, over a six-year period, to meet the additional social housing supply requirements as determined by the Housing Agency<sup>1</sup>;

**Pillar 2:** Support up to 75,000 households through an enhanced private rental sector; and

**Pillar 3:** Reform social housing supports to create a more flexible and responsive system.

Phase 1 sets a target of 18,000 additional housing units and 32,000 HAP/RAS units by the end of 2017. Phase 2 sets a target of 17,000 additional housing units and 43,000 HAP/RAS units by end 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Increased to 47,000 units in *Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, 2016*

The Strategy states that significant exchequer funding will be allocated to ensure that the early phases of the Strategy will deliver on the targets. An enhanced role for the Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) is also a key component to deliver the vision.

The Strategy also states that a new tenant purchase scheme for existing local authority houses will be put in place. The development of an individual housing 'passport' that would facilitate tenant mobility between local authorities will be examined.

Exchequer funding commitment of €5.7bn over the lifetime of the Strategy has been made by Government.

#### ***National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy 2018-2021***

Published in 2018 the National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy supports Pillar 5 of the Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, drawing together relevant policy initiatives and actions to reduce vacancy in Ireland's housing stock and bring as many habitable homes back into use as possible. To support this overall Strategic Objective the Strategy sets out five key objectives and relevant Key Actions to support their accomplishment:

- **Objective 1:** Establish robust, accurate, consistent and up-to-date data sets on vacancy.
- **Objective 2:** Bring forward measures to ensure, to the greatest degree possible, that vacant and underused privately owned properties are brought back to use.
- **Objective 3:** Bring forward measures to minimise vacancy arising in Social Housing Stock.
- **Objective 4:** Continued engagement with and provision of support to key stakeholders to ensure suitable vacant properties held by banks, financial institutions and investors are acquired for social housing use.
- **Objective 5:** Foster and develop cross-sector relationships, collaborating in partnership to tackle vacant housing matters.

#### ***The National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016***

The National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016 sets out a framework of initiatives to provide for the housing needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged households. The strategy has nine strategic aims:

- To promote and mainstream equality of access for people with a disability to the full range of housing options available suited to individual and household need.
- To develop national protocols and frameworks for effective interagency cooperation which will facilitate person-centred delivery of housing and relevant support services.
- To support people with a disability to live independently in their own homes and communities, where appropriate.
- To address the specific housing needs of people with an intellectual and/or physical disability, moving from congregated settings in line with good practice, including through the development of frameworks to facilitate housing in the community.
- To address the specific housing needs of people with a mental health disability, including through the development of frameworks to facilitate housing in the community, for people

with low and medium support needs moving from mental health facilities, in line with good practice.

- To consider good practice in the design, coordination and delivery of housing and related supports.
- To facilitate people with a disability to access appropriate advice and information in respect of their housing needs.
- To improve the collection and use of data/information regarding the nature and extent of the housing needs of people with a disability.
- To provide a framework to support the delivery, monitoring and review of agreed actions.

### **3.4.2 Regional Policy**

#### ***The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031***

Regional Policy Objectives for the region aim to support Local Authorities in completing Housing Need Demand Assessments as required under the NPF and provide for a diverse range of housing types and tenures. The strategy also set out to “*Support local authorities, approved housing bodies and other sectoral agencies in the provision of a greater diversity of housing type and tenure, including social and affordable housing and exploring new models of low-cost rental and affordable homeownership*”.

In relation to Westmeath, the Settlement Strategy for the region designates Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre and Mullingar as a Key Town. The designation of these settlements under the Settlement Strategy for the region and relevant Regional Policy Objectives has informed the Housing Strategy for Westmeath.

### **3.4.3 Local Policy**

#### ***Westmeath County Housing Strategy 2014-2020***

The Westmeath County Housing Strategy 2014-2020 provided a comprehensive review of demographics and housing demand within County Westmeath to inform the Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020. It projected need for the planning provision of housing, as well as the demand for social and affordable housing within the County based on data from the 2011 census and regional population targets. This analysis identified a requirement for 4,955 households during the lifetime of the County Development Plan.

Given the difficult economic situation at the time the Housing Strategy did not envision Westmeath County Council building a substantial number of social or affordable housing units during the Plan’s lifetime. However, it was acknowledged that there would be a need for social housing irrespective of overall social housing output. In order to meet this need the Housing Strategy advocated for the implementation of Part V requirements of 15% in all new private housing schemes, as well as the continued implementation of the Rental Accommodation Scheme in order to leverage available stock in the private rented sector.

***Westmeath Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021***

The Westmeath Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 was completed to meet provisions under the Local Government Reform Act 2014. It is an action-focused plan whose purpose is to identify and implement actions to achieve sustainable economic growth and improved social outcomes within the County.

The consultation process conducted as part of the Plan highlighted the level of housing need in the County, particularly the provision of suitable accommodation for the elderly and travellers, and the need to address homelessness. It states that as of April 2015 there were 2,948 approved households seeking social housing in Westmeath, with 60% of this demand related to the towns of Athlone and Mullingar.

Under **Objective 3.4 Provision of accommodation and infrastructure to meet the needs of the community** the plan includes a number of actions aimed at addressing housing need within the County, including the zoning of sufficient lands for residential development and the provision of 850 social and affordable housing units by 2020.

***Westmeath County Council Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024***

Westmeath County Council is currently preparing a Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2019-2024. This Programme is yet to be finalised, with the period for public submissions having concluded on the 22nd July 2019.

It provides a review of the previous Traveller Accommodation Programme which housed 40 Traveller households during the period 2014-2018, exceeding targets. The Draft Programme also provides an overview of Traveller Household Accommodation Types within the County, and according to an Assessment of Need determines that 95 units should be provided over the period up to 2024.

***Westmeath Disability Strategy 2016***

The core goal of the Westmeath Disability Strategy is to meet the local housing needs of people with disabilities. It acknowledges the challenge particular challenges faced by persons with a disability in sourcing appropriate accommodation through private home ownership, the private rental market or through social housing support.

The Strategy identifies significant disability housing need in Westmeath, comprising; 190 persons requiring purpose built/design accommodation, 299 persons requiring their existing accommodation to be adapted and 106 persons that require standard accommodation with dedicated supports. It sets realistic targets for meeting need for the period 2015-2019 through a combination of council housing stock, leased units, the Capital Assistance Scheme and Housing Assistance Payment Model and support for privately owned homes through the Housing Disability Grants Scheme.

### 3.5 Future Housing Requirements

The Housing Strategy (Appendix 1) projects a likely need for 4,983 additional residential units in Westmeath over the period from 2021 – 2027, as set out in table 1. Consolidation and sustainable intensification in established urban areas and existing towns, through infill development and brownfield redevelopment, is a priority.

The Housing Strategy (Appendix 1) shows that with regards to private rental affordability, households which are identified as not being able to meet the 'Affordability Criteria' over the plan period are therefore considered to require social (and affordable) housing. As such, the total households, the social (and affordable) housing requirement, and social (and affordable) housing requirements as a percentage of total households has been set out in Table 1.

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
No. of Additional Anticipated Households	695	700	706	712	717	724	729
No. of Additional Households That Do Not Qualify for a Mortgage	214	216	218	220	221	223	225
No. of Additional Anticipated Households That Do Not Qualify for a Mortgage and Cannot Afford Private Rental	206	208	209	220	221	223	225
Social Requirement as a % of Total Additional Anticipated Households	29.6%	29.6%	29.6%	30.9%	30.9%	30.9%	30.9%

*Table 1: Overview of Social and Affordable Housing Need Requirement during Plan Period 2021-2027. Source: Future Analytics Consulting*

It has been determined that 1,538 of the 4,983 additional anticipated households will not qualify for a mortgage during the plan period and that 1,512 of these households do not meet the affordability criteria for private rental. With regards to private rental affordability, households which are identified as not being able to meet the 'Affordability Criteria' over the plan period are therefore considered to require social (and affordable) housing which equates to between 29.6% and 30.9% of the additional anticipated households.

However, it should be noted that while some of these households could afford to sustainably repay a loan of a certain size, their inability to qualify for a mortgage precludes them and effectively results in them being considered as having either a social or affordable need (after their assessment under private rental conditions).

#### 3.5.1 Existing Social Requirement and Targets

There are currently 1,255 households on the Westmeath Social Housing List (December 2019). With respect to unit type, there is a greater demand for 1 and 2 bed units across the county which account

for 77% of the requirement. However, demand overall is concentrated in Athlone and Mullingar, with Athlone accounting for 39.7% and Mullingar accounting for 37.4% of total demand respectively.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, Westmeath is targeted to deliver 801 social housing units within the 'building, acquisition and leasing' category specifically between 2018-2021. To date (Q3 2019), 315 units have been delivered through these mechanisms (between 2018-2019). Thus, over the course of 2020-2021 (and also Q4 2019), approximately 486 additional units are to be delivered.

The overarching 2019 target is 626 additional units across all social housing delivery streams. As of Q3 2019, the county has achieved 69% of this target, with the delivery of 429 units. This is further elaborated in Appendix 1.

It is also a key priority of the Council to ensure that groups with special housing needs, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, the homeless, those in need of emergency accommodation and Travellers are accommodated in a way suitable to their specific needs.

### 3.5.2 Rural Single Housing

It is recognised that there is a continuing need for housing provision for people to live and work in rural Westmeath. The NPF states that it will continue to be necessary to demonstrate a functional economic or social requirement for housing need in areas under urban influence, i.e. the commuter catchment of cities and large towns and centres of employment. Elsewhere, single housing in the countryside will be facilitated based on siting and design criteria and having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements. These requirements are reflected in the Core Strategy of this Development Plan which includes a differentiation between 'Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence' and 'Structurally Weak Rural Areas'.

The NPF also requires that Development Plans quantify for the demand for single housing in the countryside. This is related to the local authority's Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA), and is encompassed in National Policy Objective 20, as follows:

*"Project the need for single housing in the countryside through the local authority's overall Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) tool and county development plan core strategy processes"* (NPF; pp74)

The HNDA model (see Appendix 1) has accounted for this demand. A linear extrapolation of the number of granted planning applications for single rural dwellings between 2006 - Q2 2019 has been undertaken. This identifies that approximately 22.1% of all granted residential applications within any given year have been for single rural dwellings and illustrates a consistent quantum of demand for single rural dwellings for which there is an established trend. Addressing housing requirements within the rural context can therefore be robustly informed using this demand-driver (22.1%), construction costs and the affordability thresholds set out in Appendix 1. The output of this assessment is indicative numbers of potential applications for single rural dwellings over the plan period, disaggregated by the size of dwelling to be constructed (linked with associated affordability thresholds).

### 3.5.3 Average Household Size

The Census 2016 results indicate that Westmeath has a population to household ratio of 2.76, marginally higher than the state average of 2.75. However, the NPF states that this is expected to decline to around 2.5 by 2040, while also acknowledging that household sizes in urban areas tend to be smaller than in the suburbs or rural parts of the country. In line with this projected trend, a graduated average household size is utilised within this plan to 2040. As shown in Appendix 1, in 2027, the average household size is thus projected to be 2.64. By applying the relevant household size to projected population increases, it is possible to forecast required household numbers to 2027 and beyond. This is set out in Appendix 1.

### 3.5.4 Household Size Cohort

Appendix 1 provides further detail on projected household composition over the plan period, based on analysis of trends between 2002-2016. This analysis demonstrates a trend towards 1 and 2 person households over the plan period, which are projected to form a combined total of 55.1% of all households by 2027. In contrast, the number of households comprising of 4 people or more will continue to decline between 2021-2027. Households with four or more people will amount to approximately 27% of total households by 2027.

### 3.5.5 Tenure

Tenure is an important consideration for the delivery of housing and Section 6.6 of the NPF identifies the need to estimate the demand for different tenure types. Analysis of the historic tenure split has therefore been undertaken in Appendix 1 to help discern and forecast how the household tenure may change during the plan period. This analysis indicates a gradual decrease in the proportion of households categorised as 'owner occupiers' in Westmeath, with considerable growth in the rental sector.

## 3.6 Apartment Development

The 2016 Census indicates that 1-2 person households now comprise a majority of households and this trend is set continue, yet Ireland has only one-quarter the EU average of apartments as a proportion of housing stock. (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2018). In Westmeath, 8.5% of households lived in apartments in 2016, slightly lower than the national rate of 12%. 23.5% of all households in the county were 1-person households.

As with housing generally, the scale and extent of apartment development should increase in relation to proximity to core urban centres and other relevant factors. Existing public transport nodes or locations where high frequency public transport can be provided, that are close to locations of employment and a range of urban amenities including parks/waterfronts, shopping and other services, are also particularly suited to apartments.

### 3.7 Residential Densities

Higher densities will be applied to the higher order settlements of Athlone and Mullingar to align with their roles as Regional Growth Centre and Key Town, subject to good design and development management standards being met.

It is important that the density of new development in towns and villages is reflective of the existing character and that growth is linked to infrastructural capacity. As such, there will be a graded reduction in residential density for Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns, towns and villages that are commensurate to the existing built environment.

### 3.8 Layout and Design

A good development creates a 'sense of place' and community belonging to the residents. This is created by providing a mixture of house types and tenure, an individual design, the use of a variety of materials for the context of the site and area and connectivity of the site to other places. In considering proposals for development, the Council will have regard to the DEHLG Guidelines on 'Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities – Best Practice Guidelines for Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities' (2007), 'Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities – Statement on Housing Policy' (2007), 'Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2018) and 'Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas' and the accompanying 'Urban Design Manual: A Best Practice Guide' (2009).

### 3.9 Housing Strategy Objectives/Recommendations

<b>Housing Strategy Policy Objectives</b>	
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 3.1	Reserve sufficient lands to facilitate and implement the Housing Strategy and its policies, as informed by the HNDA undertaken as part of this Development Plan
CPO 3.2	Ensure that settlements grow in a manner that is self-sustaining with sufficient social and economic infrastructure, and to a scale which aligns with the Settlement Hierarchy prescribed in the Core Strategy.
CPO 3.3	Secure the provision of social and affordable housing accommodation, to meet the needs of all households and the disadvantaged sectors in the county, including the elderly, first time buyers, single person households on modest incomes, people with disabilities, and special needs etc.
CPO 3.4	Ensure in accordance with Part V of the Planning & Development Act 2000 as amended that arrangements for the provision of Social and Affordable Housing are made in accordance with the current Housing Strategy.

CPO 3.5	Ensure that a suitable variety and mix of dwelling types and sizes is provided in developments to meet different needs, having regard to demographic and social changes.
CPO 3.6	Support independent living for people with disabilities and the elderly and where possible, to ensure that housing is integrated within proposed or existing residential developments and located close to existing community facilities.
CPO 3.7	Apply higher densities to the higher order settlements of Athlone and Mullingar to align with their roles as Regional Growth Centre and Key Town, subject to good design and development management standards being met.
CPO 3.8	Apply graded densities in towns and villages having regard to their role in Settlement Hierarchy and that are commensurate to the existing built environment.
CPO 3.9	Secure the implementation of the Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 and to review this programme if required and/or deemed to be necessary, during the Plan period.
CPO 3.10	Continue to reflect household size and composition, including the accommodation needs of single parent families, single homeless persons, persons with disabilities and the elderly, etc. in accommodation provisions.
CPO 3.11	Co-operate with Voluntary Housing Associations and other providers of social housing.
CPO 3.12	Monitor and maintain a record of residential development permitted in settlements designated under the Settlement Hierarchy in accordance with forthcoming Departmental guidance around the establishment of a HNDA coordination and monitoring unit and related implementation of a centralised spatial database for Local Authority Housing.
CPO 3.13	Support the ongoing monitoring and review of the HNDA in conjunction the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.



**WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL**  
Comhairle Chontae na hIarmhí

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A Westmeath County Council Publication

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