

# CHAPTER 4



CHAPTER 4

Sustainable Communities

## Table of Contents

4.1	Aim .....	74
4.2	Introduction .....	74
4.3	The National Planning Framework - Project Ireland 2040 (NPF) .....	74
4.4	National Policies and Strategies.....	75
4.5	Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).....	75
4.6	Characteristics of an Effective and Successful Sustainable Community.....	76
4.7	Creating Sustainable Neighbourhoods .....	78
4.8	Sustainable Economy .....	79
4.9	Sustainable Housing.....	79
4.10	Lifetime Housing/Housing for Older People .....	81
4.11	Social Infrastructure.....	82

## 4.1 Aim

To develop and support vibrant sustainable communities in Westmeath where people can live, work and enjoy access to a wide range of community, health and educational facilities and amenities, suitable for all ages and needs, in both urban and rural areas, thereby supporting a high quality of life for all to enjoy.

## 4.2 Introduction

A priority of this plan is the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods which support thriving communities and provide for a wide range of household types, age groups and tenures with community facilities close by. Sustainable Communities and place making are key entities in creating attractive places for people to invest, live, work and visit.

Sustainable economic, social and community development is essential to support the emergence of sustainable neighbourhoods and communities throughout the County, especially in newly emerging or developing areas.

Sustainable development has three mutually interdependent elements:

- 1. Environment:** This includes protection and enhancement of the natural, built and historic resources of the County, including making effective use of land, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- 2. Economic:** This includes building a strong and resilient economy by ensuring sufficient land is available in the right place and supporting growth and innovation and coordinating the provision of infrastructure.
- 3. Social:** This includes providing social infrastructure such as jobs, housing, education, medical care, open space areas and cultural opportunities to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities and promoting well designed and safe environments.

Sustainable development requires all of the above elements to work in a coordinated manner to ensure the County is a place where people want to live, work and visit, now and into the future.

## 4.3 The National Planning Framework - Project Ireland 2040 (NPF)

There is now significant alignment between the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the National Planning Framework's National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) in areas such as climate action, clean energy, sustainable cities and communities, economic growth, reduced inequalities and innovation and infrastructure, as well as education and health with a focus on compact, smart and sustainable development that have accessible services to all.

## 4.4 National Policies and Strategies

National publications also provide excellent guidance on how to deliver quality neighbourhoods, urban areas and sustainable communities. These include *Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities* (2007), *Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities* (2007), *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments* (2018), *The Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future - A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020* (Department of Transport, 2009) *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas* (2009), *Urban Design Manual A Best Practice Guide* (2009), *Government Policy on Architecture* (2009) and *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects – Guidance for Planning Authorities* (2009).

Actions plans including *Rebuilding Ireland - an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness 2016* which supports the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods and maximising the contribution of the built environment to addressing climate change and *Realising our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development* (DAHRRGA, 2017) sets out the Government’s policy for the economic and social development of rural Ireland. The Action Plan sets targets for job creation, connectivity, culture, tourism, town and village improvements and identifies over 270 specific actions. Local Authorities are identified as key partners in the development and delivery of the Action Plan.

## 4.5 Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The RSES seeks to promote healthy placemaking and promote people’s quality of life through the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, visit and study in. It highlights the importance of the physical and social environment and place in which we live or work, and its impact on the health of people. The strategy aims to create a sustainable and competitive region that supports the health and well-being of our people and places, from urban to rural, and ensures access to affordable housing, travel and employment opportunities for all.

The following RPO’s contained in the RSES are of relevance:

### Regional Planning Objective 9.14

Local authorities shall seek to support the planned provision of easily accessible social, community, cultural and recreational facilities and ensure that all communities have access to a range of facilities that meet the needs of the communities they serve.

### Regional Planning Objective 9.15

Local authorities shall support the vision and objectives of the National Sports Policy, including working with local sports partnerships, clubs, communities and partnerships within and beyond sport, to increase sport and physical activity participation levels locally.

**Regional Planning Objective 9.16**

Local authorities shall support the objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland and the National Physical Activity Plan, through integrating such policies, where appropriate and at the applicable scale, with planning policies contained in development plans.

**Regional Policy Objective 9.18**

Support the implementation of Local Authority Local Economic and Community Plans, in collaboration with Local and Economic Development Committees (LDCs) and through the use of spatial planning policies, to seek to reduce the number of people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the Region.

**Regional Policy Objective 9.20**

Support investment in the sustainable development of the Region's childcare services as an integral part of regional infrastructure to include:

Support the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

Quality and supply of sufficient childcare places.

Support initiatives under a cross Government Early Years Strategy.

Youth services that support and target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability.

## 4.6 Characteristics of an Effective and Successful Sustainable Community

Throughout the NPF and the RSES, there is a strong emphasis placed on achieving and maintaining sustainable communities that will contribute to a high quality of life and meet the diverse needs of the people within existing and future communities. Effective sustainable communities are interlinked with improving the quality of life for everyone within the community providing a vibrant economy, while preserving the environment. Figure 4.1 indicates the factors involved in providing sustainable communities and factors influencing quality of life.



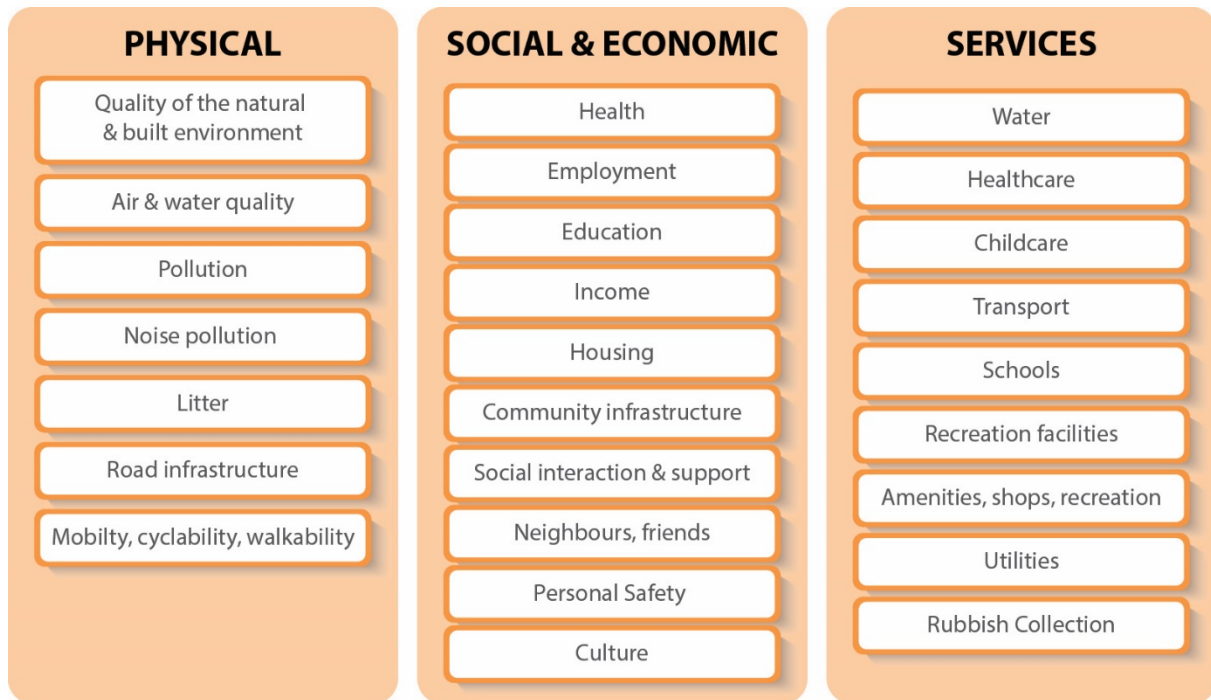
**Figure 4.1:** Elements of sustainability and quality of life. Source: Adapted from Egan's wheel on sustainability and quality of life (2004)

#### 4.6.1 Quality of Life

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), quality of life is defined as 'the individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals.' There are many factors that can influence quality of life, some of which are difficult to measure and dependent on the individual concerned and include factors such as social well-being, health, family, housing, education, income, employment, recreation, safety and the environment.

Quality of life factors and 'place-making' are increasingly recognised as key to developing attractive places in which to invest, live, study, visit and work including access to amenities, facilities, arts, culture and heritage. This is linked to 'Functionality' in terms of provision of suitable sites and property solutions to meet enterprises and labour force expectations.

For the purpose of this Plan quality of life falls into the following 3 dimensions:



**Figure 4.2:** Elements of quality of life

## 4.7 Creating Sustainable Neighbourhoods

The creation of sustainable neighbourhoods play an important role in quality of life factors and foster a wider sense of community. Creating successful urban neighbourhoods to support sustainable communities requires the efficient use of land and sustainable densities to enable viable provision of the necessary range of facilities, services and good public transport connections – all of which should be within walking distance of residents and workers and of a high-quality urban design to create places where people will want to live.

This development plan must ensure that all significant developments can only take place where sufficient schools, public transport, employment opportunities, parks, community facilities and resources (gardai, fire services and ambulance provision etc.) are either in place or proposed. A good urban neighbourhood must also incorporate quality living spaces, amenity areas and green infrastructure, as well as fostering a distinctive sense of place and a safe environment. The creation of sustainable communities is based on the development of the following three pillars:

- Sustainable economy
- Sustainable housing
- Social Infrastructure

### Sustainable Communities Policy Objectives

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 4.1	Support sustainable transport infrastructure, by developing mixed use schemes, higher densities close to public transport hubs, safe walking routes in developments, promoting alternative modes of transport and reduce the need to travel.
CPO 4.2	Support and promote the development of socially inclusive, sustainable communities in the County and seek to ensure that all citizens enjoy optimal health and well-being along with associated mental health supports and youth services.
CPO 4.3	Encourage inclusive and active sustainable communities based around a strong network of community facilities.

## 4.8 Sustainable Economy

Social and economic opportunity is identified as a central determinant of health and well-being, with employment opportunities being closely related to education and skills. Building sustainable communities is difficult with the increase in mobility, with people leaving an area for employment creating a transient population in an area which makes it difficult to sustain a community. The provision of employment within the County and a robust social infrastructure is important in creating a 'sense of place' and belonging to an area. Furthermore, access to employment in a community provides an opportunity to access housing, education and culture and promotes staying within a community.

### Sustainable Communities - Sustainable Economy Policy Objectives

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 4.4	Enhance the well-being and quality of life of the people of Westmeath through sustainable economic and community development.
CPO 4.5	Support the implementation of Local Authority Local Economic and Community Plans, in collaboration with Local and Economic Development Committees (LDCs) and through the use of spatial planning policies and seek to reduce the number of people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the County.

## 4.9 Sustainable Housing

One of the challenges facing Westmeath is to successfully accommodate people at different stages in their lifecycle, having regard to emerging demographic trends. Sustainable future housing should be located where people have the best opportunities to access a high standard quality of life, close to



jobs, important services such as education and healthcare, close to transport networks and sustainable physical infrastructure.

It is Council policy to prioritise the development of housing in existing towns and villages in the Settlement Hierarchy to help reduce the need to travel and reduce transport carbon emissions. Higher densities will be encouraged to make more efficient use of land and energy resources, creating a consolidated urban form that supports the development of compact neighbourhoods which contribute to the viability of economic, social, and transport infrastructure. The Council will encourage and support varied housing typologies within neighbourhoods in order to encourage a diverse choice of housing options in terms of tenure, unit size, and building design in residential communities.

The promotion of quality design and energy efficient design will result in more attractive places to live, provide for greater connectivity and integration of new housing within the existing urban fabric, provide positive spaces and assist in developing community spirit. The NPF provides that 30% of future residential development should be accommodated within the built footprint of existing urban areas.

The (NPF) and the (RSES) identify 'Compact Growth' as the means to deliver sustainable growth in our urban settlements through consolidation, rather than the continued sprawl of urban development into the countryside, at the expense of town centres and smaller villages.

The Council is committed to delivering compact growth through active land management together with the positive regeneration of urban areas. To facilitate population growth, a significant proportion of urban development will be accommodated on infill/brownfield sites through the redevelopment and regeneration of underused, vacant or derelict town centre lands. It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the continuous regeneration and redevelopment of existing built up areas, to create more desirable places in which people can live and work. Further, it is a priority of the Council to enable infill and appropriate brownfield redevelopment in order to maximise the efficient use of existing infrastructure and services and promote a positive modal shift towards sustainable transport use.

Proposals for residential schemes shall have regard to the following statutory guidelines:

- Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines (2005).
- Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities, Best Practice Guidelines for Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities, DEHLG 2007.
- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments DEHLG (2018),
- Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, DEHLG, 2009.
- Urban Design Manual, A Best Practice Guide, A Companion Document to the Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, DEHLG 2009. Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, DECLG & DTTS 2013.

<b>Sustainable Communities – Sustainable Housing Policy Objectives</b>	
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 4.6	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 4.7	Achieve densities for new housing that respect the local character of surrounding areas, whilst making efficient use of land.
CPO 4.8	Provide for housing that is accessible for older people, the very young and people with disabilities and that residential buildings together with non-residential buildings are accessible and usable by people with disabilities.

#### **4.10 Lifetime Housing/Housing for Older People**

One of the challenges facing the County is to successfully accommodate people at different stages in their lifecycle, having regard to emerging demographic trends. The Census 2016 identified a decline in the average household size of 2.7 persons per household and saw an increase in the elderly, dependent and single parent household population. The number of people living alone increased by 354 to 7,482, i.e. 8.5% of all those living in private households. Of these, 2,785 were aged 65 and over.

With an increasingly older population within the County, it is likely that more people will spend more time in the area where they live, so local area aspects are likely to increase in importance for quality of life. A wide range of measures can contribute to facilitate longer and healthier lives in the community. A focus on building sustainable communities ensures better social integration which in turn enhances the vibrancy of communities.

Furthermore, the Plan encourages a model of inter-generational step-down residence incorporated into family homes. Any new homes will have to accommodate changing needs over its lifetime. A liveable and adaptable housing development or house is one that is able to respond effectively to these needs without requiring costly and energy intensive alterations. It also requires active management of land and sites in urban areas where consolidation of residential areas will be encouraged and supported close to community services and amenities.

Westmeath Age Friendly Programme were awarded affiliation to the World Health Organisation (WHO) for their work with Older People in December 2018. Westmeath Age Friendly Programme hosted meetings of the Age Friendly Council, Age Friendly Service Providers Forum and the Age Friendly Alliance in 2018. Their programme of recent work included an Age Friendly Village piloted in Collinstown and participation in the consultation for the Westmeath Age Friendly Strategy 2018 – 2022 with the Age Friendly Programme obtaining awards in the Community Well-being category.

### Sustainable Communities – Lifetime Housing/Housing for Older People Policy Objectives

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 4.9	Support the Westmeath Age Friendly Programme and the Westmeath Age Friendly Strategy 2018-2022 aimed at improving the quality of life of older people throughout the County.
CPO 4.10	Deliver a sufficient supply of housing over the period of the Plan that is reflective of current and future demographic trends.
CPO 4.11	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 4.12	Ensure that suitable dwellings are provided in all housing developments to cater for people with disabilities and the elderly.
CPO 4.13	Ensure that all new housing developments represent ‘Sustainable Neighbourhoods’ which are inclusive and responsive to the physical or cultural needs of those who use them, are well located relative to the social, community, commercial and administrative services which sustain them and are integrated with the community within which it will be located.
CPO 4.14	Ensure all new residential schemes are designed so that units are easily adaptable in the future to accommodate housing for life.
CPO 4.15	Identify and encourage development of age friendly accommodation, including independent living accommodation within walking distance to existing towns and villages, and close to primary health care facilities.

#### 4.11 Social Infrastructure

A significant contributor to sustainable communities is the provision and delivery of social infrastructure to support and achieve balanced communities. Facilities need to be inclusive so that communities in Westmeath can integrate and socialise across different age, socio-economic and ethnic groups.

Westmeath County Council will pursue an integrated, cohesive and socially inclusive approach to community facilities which will help re-connect people with their neighbourhoods and achieve a wider sense of community. The Council will also encourage the maximum use of existing local assets through shared use and cost to ensure high-quality facilities are available to all. Proposals for large-scale residential and/or mixed-use schemes must demonstrate how the proposal will contribute to the range of supporting community infrastructure necessary for a sustainable community.

### 4.11.1 Healthcare and Well-being

The Census 2016 revealed 87% of the County's population in 2016 considered their general health to be very good/or good, which is equivalent to almost 9 out of 10 of the County's population and is consistent with national trends. Many of the factors which influence people's health, well-being and quality of life such as access to education, employment, housing, social infrastructure, safety, attractive open spaces are dependent on the location and development of land and buildings. Census figures indicate there has been a 5% increase in the number of 70 plus years in the County compared to 2011.

#### Sustainable Communities Policy Objectives - Healthcare and Well-being Policy Objectives

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 4.16	Support the provision of new health care facilities which are well located in terms of their accessibility in settlement centres serving a sufficient catchment population and are appropriately well served by public transport and accessible on foot/cycle and are consistent with the size, scale and character of the area.
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### 4.11.2 Community Facilities

Sustainable neighbourhoods require a range of community facilities as stated in the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009).

The Council will encourage the provision of community, commercial and local employment facilities such as schools, childcare facilities, community centres, primary health care centres and local commercial service of a scale appropriate to serve the local community through land use and zoning objectives. This grouping of services can facilitate viability where they are within walking distance of residents and can create a focal point for the neighbourhood. An amenity or service may be present (possibly at close distance) but make little contribution to quality of life if access is poor or perceived quality is low. Where possible accessibility for all abilities should be facilitated to ensure all levels of access and mobility are accommodated

<b>Sustainable Communities - Community Facilities Policy Objectives</b>	
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 4.17	Maintain and, where possible, improve the provision of community facilities in the County to ensure that facilities are adequate to meet the needs of the communities they serve, are physically integrated with residential and employment areas and are provided concurrently with new residential development.
CPO 4.18	Consider development proposals for new social and community infrastructure/service related development at; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Locations within the settlement boundaries which are within walking distance of local services whereby social inclusion is promoted. An alternative location may be considered where it is clearly demonstrated that there are no suitable sites available within the settlement and strong justification is given to the development of such a particular site.</li> <li>b. In rural locations in close proximity to existing rural infrastructure (schools, sports facilities, churches etc.) where it is demonstrated that the development is intended to serve an exclusive rural need or where there is no site available which meet the locational criteria set out in (a) above.</li> </ol>
CPO 4.19	Consider cultural diversity and ethnic minorities in planning for the needs of communities and ensure community facilities and social services provided are accessible for all individuals, communities and sectors of society, including people with disabilities, people with special needs, elderly, youth, marginalised and disadvantaged groups.
CPO 4.20	Consider proposals for primary Healthcare Facilities in association with the HSE's Programme for Delivery. The siting of these facilities in existing town centres and neighbourhood centres will be encouraged.
CPO 4.21	Ensure that proposals for the change of use of residential accommodation for use by doctors, dentists and other medical practitioners does not negatively impact on residential amenity and is in keeping with the character of the area.
CPO 4.22	Support and encourage the provision by voluntary and state agencies, of a wide range of appropriate community facilities and premises to meet the needs and demands of new and existing communities, especially in areas where there are deficiencies.

### 4.11.3 Childcare and Youth Facilities

Access to affordable and high-quality childcare is an essential requirement for an equitable society, a thriving economy and sustainable communities and is a critical part of the County's infrastructure.

Childcare is essential to enable parents to participate in the workforce and to obtain an income that provides an acceptable standard of living for both them and their children.

Westmeath County Childcare Committee supports 91 early childcare services, throughout the County catering for full day care, after school and preschool care, which employs 428 staff. The 0-4-year preschool population within the County in 2016 represents 7.3% of the population of Westmeath. Whilst the Council is not directly involved in the provision of childcare services, the Plan will seek to ensure sufficient facilities are provided in the areas required.

#### 4.11.4 Schools and Educational Facilities

The provision of investment in education and training are central to reinforcing the delivery of sustainable communities, promoting inclusion and offering choice and accessibility to a high standard of education and employment. Education, training and life-long learning are key enablers, around which personal fulfilment, a fair society and a successful population revolve. All are central to sustaining economic success and building strong communities.

The planning system can facilitate the provision of schools through land use zoning and designation of particular sites. The provision of school facilities in tandem with new development is also critical to supporting sustainable communities and reducing the need to travel.

<b>Sustainable Communities - Childcare and Educational Policy Objectives</b>	
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 4.23	Encourage and support the provision of childcare facilities, with consideration given to proper siting and design, in appropriate locations including residential areas, town and local centres, areas of employment and close to public transport throughout the County and in accordance with the needs identified by Westmeath County Childcare Committee (WCC). All planning applications for childcare facilities shall be assessed in consultation with Westmeath County Childcare Committee.
CPO 4.24	Support the provision of childcare facilities and new and refurbished schools on well located sites within or close to existing built-up areas, that meet the diverse needs of local populations.
CPO 4.25	Support play policies to address the play and recreation needs of children and young people and ensure the integration of play provision and child-friendly neighbourhoods.
CPO 4.26	Reserve sites for educational use in those areas where the younger population has increased and there is a demographic demand for further school places.

CPO 4.27	Ensure the needs of communities including education facilities are appropriately provided for in newly developed areas.
CPO 4.28	Encourage the use of existing educational facilities and school playing fields for other community purposes. In new schools, it will be a requirement in the design of the school to provide dual use facilities and take account of community requirements.
CPO 4.29	Reduce the need to travel by car to schools. Applications for extensions to an existing school or a new school must be accompanied by a sustainable travel plan. The plan should indicate how pupils will access the school and provide for sustainable modes of travel to school and encourage alternatives to the car and have regard to road safety, good design and efficiency in accordance with the Department of Environment's code of Practice on the Provision of Schools and the Planning System July 2008.
CPO 4.30	Support in conjunction with the relevant agencies, the provision of Third Level facilities, Youth Outreach, Adult and Further Education facilities within the County.
CPO 4.31	Support the provision of community infrastructure and require that development proposals involving the loss or change of use of land or buildings for community purposes to demonstrate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) There are adequate facilities in the vicinity to cater for the needs of the area.</li> <li>b) The use is no longer viable.</li> <li>c) Alternative community uses are being provided elsewhere, or as part of the development, in association with the proposal.</li> </ul>
CPO 4.32	Promote links with Athlone Institute of Technology (A.I.T.) and the National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUI Maynooth) in the educational, research and enterprise sector.
CPO 4.33	Provide for the development of dedicated youth spaces in key urban areas such as Athlone and Mullingar and the development of multifunction spaces in smaller communities/rural areas.

#### 4.11.5 Recreation, Amenity and Open Space

The Council recognises the role recreation, amenity and open space facilities can play in creating healthy environments and facilitating more active lifestyles to ensure the well-being and improved quality of life for communities. In this regard, high quality open spaces, green linkages, such as walks, cycle ways, access to the lakes, sports and recreational facilities that are usable and accessible to all should be provided in tandem with development and changing community needs. The connectivity of open spaces between urban areas, urban fringe and rural areas allows for the interaction of people and wildlife and connects people with places of work and community facilities.

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

Parks and open spaces are important contributors to local distinctiveness, offering opportunities to reflect elements of the local landscape, culture and heritage through design concepts, materials, topography and planting. To achieve optimum accessibility and effective provision of open space and recreational facilities, they should be located and designed on a hierarchical basis according to the needs of a defined population. A number of established walking and cycling routes have been developed which allow urban dwellers to access and enjoy the natural environmental assets nearby and beyond, such as the Royal Canal, Westmeath Way, Old Rail Trail, Fore Trail and Slí na Sláinte. Such routes can open up valuable amenity assets for local communities and visitors to enjoy and appreciate as well as providing opportunities for enhancement of quality of life and health together with providing important tourism assets and consequential benefits to the local economy. Many opportunities exist for creating new and improved linkages and facilities for walking and cycling so that the enjoyment of the wealth of natural heritage and amenity may be maximised and the potential to exploit these assets for the purposes of tourism can be realised.

The Council recognises the importance of play in the development of children and continues to promote participation in sport and recreation through a range of measures including the operation of Athlone Regional Sports Centre, the operation of Mullingar Swimming pool, the development of 23 Playgrounds across the County together with support for an additional 15 community playgrounds. Furthermore, the Council also support sports development programmes through the Leinster Council GAA, FAI and Leinster Rugby and Westmeath Sports Partnership programmes.

The Council will support future initiatives, which raise awareness of the importance of play for the health, well-being and development of children, people with disabilities, travellers and ethnic minorities. The Westmeath Recreation and Sport Strategy will guide our future plans for programs and funding.

<b>Sustainable Communities - Recreation, Amenity and Open Space Policy Objectives</b>	
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 4.34	Ensure sufficient land is allocated to provide a variety of open spaces on a hierarchical basis throughout the County in order to achieve a choice of open space, recreational and amenity facilities.
CPO 4.35	Develop public open spaces that have good connectivity and are accessible by safe, secure walking and cycling routes.



CPO 4.36	Increase the use and potential of existing public open space, parks and recreational areas, both passive and active, by integrating existing facilities with proposals for new development and by seeking to upgrade existing facilities where appropriate.
CPO 4.37	Support the development of appropriately located allotments, in areas which have good access to and are proximate to built-up and residential areas.
CPO 4.38	Facilitate and encourage open space to be planned for on a multi-functional basis incorporating ecosystem services, climate change measures, green infrastructure and key landscape features in their design.
CPO 4.39	Promote the value of the County's recreational and amenity resources as a key asset to the local economy and to the health and well-being of the community and continue to support the expansion of existing amenities.
CPO 4.40	Seek a greater variety of provision of recreation and amenity facilities to reflect the demands of an increasingly diverse population.
CPO 4.41	Support the implementation of actions contained in the " <i>Westmeath Recreation &amp; Sports Strategy</i> ", subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives.
CPO 4.42	Support the development of regional scale Recreational facility in Mullingar to complement the Regional Sports Centre in Athlone.

#### 4.11.6 Libraries, Arts and Culture

Westmeath libraries has a network of 7 libraries providing a wide range of services in the areas of information, culture, heritage, literature and learning. Westmeath has a rich and living cultural heritage and a strong cultural identity, based on a wide range of activities and interests, including music, theatre, TV and film, visual arts, crafts, dance, literature, architecture and sport. The Council supports major cultural events and will be involved in the hosting of a number of national cultural and music events. The Fleadh Cheoil will be held in Mullingar in 2020. The event is the world's largest annual celebration of Irish music, language, song and dance.

The Council recognises the importance of these events, activities and facilities which contribute towards the intellectual, artistic and social quality of life for people in the County and attracting other people from both within and outside the country to Westmeath. The Council through its Art office seeks to promote the cultural life of the County and increase accessibility to arts and culture facilities for all members of the community.

Westmeath hosts major cultural facilities such as the Luan Gallery, Athlone Castle, Dean Crowe Theatre, Abbey Road artists' studios, Belvedere House, Park and Gardens, Mullingar Arts Centre and Tuar Ard Arts Centre. Áras an Mhuilinn is the Regional Resource Centre for the Counties of Westmeath, Longford, Offaly, and Laois for traditional music, dance and Irish language classes. The Council will

support the commercial development of theatres, cinemas and other cultural and entertainment uses, including facilities of national and regional importance in the County's designated settlements of Athlone and Mullingar. The incorporation of public art in public spaces, civic buildings and town centre locations is also encouraged.

<b>Sustainable Communities - Libraries, Arts &amp; Culture Policy Objectives</b>	
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 4.43	Support the development of the library service in County Westmeath and the implementation of the actions set out in the Library Development Plan which includes expanded services and the delivery of a new library to serve the community of Kinnegad.
CPO 4.44	Promote the provision of Art Galleries, Museums and Exhibition Halls in the County and ensure where possible such facilities are accessible by public as well as private transport.
CPO 4.45	Facilitate and encourage the use of Public Spaces in Towns for Art events, performances and festivals.
CPO 4.46	Encourage the provision of new or improved arts, cultural and entertainment facilities, particularly in the parts of the County where there is a deficiency in such provision.

#### 4.11.7 Burial Grounds

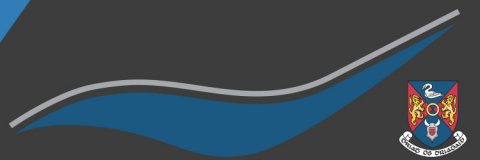
Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide for burial facilities. The Council will support the development of additional burial grounds and extensions to existing facilities where appropriate.

<b>Sustainable Communities – Burial Ground Policy Objectives</b>	
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 4.47	Support the provision of burial grounds together with necessary extensions to existing burial grounds.
CPO 4.48	Protect and maintain historic graveyards within the County.

### 4.11.8 Social Inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the manner in which all members of the community are integrated in an equal manner. It seeks to reduce barriers to participation in areas such as education, recreation, employment and health. It incorporates the need to ensure that minority groups, people of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, the travelling community, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, the elderly, children and young people are recognised as valuable members of the community.

<b>Sustainable Communities - Social Inclusion Policy Objectives</b>	
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 4.49	Support social inclusion measures including the revitalisation of areas by physical regeneration, planning, investment and community development and measures to improve educational attainment levels, upskilling in key competencies and skills acquisition.
CPO 4.50	Continue to provide accommodation for all households whose financial circumstances dictate that they cannot provide for their own housing needs, such as the elderly, lone parents, travellers, persons with disabilities.
CPO 4.51	Cooperate with Voluntary Housing Bodies and other providers of social housing in the provision of housing.
CPO 4.52	Promote Universal Design and Lifetime Housing in accordance with best practice and the policies and principles contained in <i>Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach (National Disability Authority, 2012)</i> and <i>Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i> and its companion document <i>Urban Design Manual (DEHLG, 2008)</i> .
CPO 4.53	Secure the implementation of the Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme and to review this programme if required and/or deemed to be necessary, during the Plan period
CPO 4.54	Support a socially inclusive society, by providing for appropriate community infrastructure, located in local centres or where easily accessible to communities and that are designed appropriately for accessibility and ease of use for all.
CPO 4.55	Use phasing arrangements to ensure that community facilities are provided in line with development.
CPO 4.56	Encourage and facilitate for places of worship/places of assembly in appropriate locations close to residential communities.



**WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL**  
Comhairle Chontae na hIarmhí

[www.westmeathcoco.ie](http://www.westmeathcoco.ie)

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