Longford County Development Plan 2015 – 2021

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Location and Physical Characteristics
Human Influence
Settlement pattern
Transport and Communications
Agriculture
Industry and services
History, Archaeology and Culture
Recreation and Amenity
Landscape Sensitivity
Threats
Opportunities
Policy Responses

Location and Characteristics
Landcover
Topography
Geology and Soils
Drainage patterns

Landscape Sensitivity
Threats
Opportunities
Policy Responses

Landscape Unit 3 - Shannon Basin/Lough Ree
Location and Physical Characteristics
Landcover
Topography
Geology
Drainage patterns

Landscape Unit 4 - Central Corridor
Location and Characteristics
Landcover
Topography
Geology
Drainage patterns

Landscape Unit 5 - Inny Basin
Location and Characteristics
Landcover
Topography
Geology
Drainage patterns
Human Influence
- Settlement pattern
- Transport and Communications
- Agriculture
- Industry and Services
- History, Archaeology and Culture
- Recreation and Amenity

Landscape Sensitivity
- Threats
- Opportunities

Policy Responses

Location and Characteristics
- Landcover
- Topography
- Drainage patterns

Human Influence
- Settlement pattern
- Transport and Communications
- Agriculture
- Industry and Services
- History, Archaeology and Culture
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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 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 2,235 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 2.58 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 underpin 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.

— 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 to medium term issues in the housing market. While reaffirming the Government’s current stated position with respect to Part V, it also outlined that a decision is not being taken to end Part V fully, as necessary. This strategy is framed in the context of the ongoing review of Part V of the Act. The Government has agreed with the Midland Regional Authority, and this target provides the basis for housing modelling carried out in this strategy.

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 39,382 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 Bailynahoon 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 between 2006-2011.
- The average household size in County Longford fell from 3.24 in 1996 to 2.64 in 2011.

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.

Table 2.1 Longford and Midland Region Population Analysis 1996-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>52,945</td>
<td>58,774</td>
<td>67,059</td>
<td>80,559</td>
<td>11.01</td>
<td>14.10</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>20.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>59,117</td>
<td>63,663</td>
<td>70,868</td>
<td>76,687</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>11.32</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>29.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>63,314</td>
<td>71,158</td>
<td>79,346</td>
<td>86,164</td>
<td>12.49</td>
<td>11.51</td>
<td>8.59</td>
<td>36.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>205,452</td>
<td>225,363</td>
<td>251,664</td>
<td>282,410</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>11.67</td>
<td>12.22</td>
<td>37.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentages</td>
<td>6% 4% 4% 4% 2% 6% 4% 4% 2% 6% 4% 4% 4% 2% 6% 4% 4% 2% 6% 4% 4% 4% 2% 6% 4% 4% 4% 2% 6% 4% 4% 4% 2% 6% 4% 4% 4% 2% 6% 4% 4% 4% 2% 6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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 population growth performance 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 Midland Regions 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.

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 intricately 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.

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.
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 €352,0004, 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%5, 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 €48,000 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 rate6 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. Housing Demand

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.
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.

### 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Annual Population Increase from 2011 to 2024</th>
<th>Longford Town Population</th>
<th>Remainder of County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>8,002</td>
<td>30,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>39,497</td>
<td>8,497</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>8,997</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>40,509</td>
<td>9,497</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>41,025</td>
<td>9,996</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>41,547</td>
<td>10,495</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>42,042</td>
<td>10,992</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>42,544</td>
<td>11,492</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>43,051</td>
<td>11,992</td>
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<td>2020</td>
<td>43,564</td>
<td>12,492</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>44,084</td>
<td>12,992</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>2022</td>
<td>44,603</td>
<td>13,492</td>
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<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>45,135</td>
<td>13,992</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>45,670</td>
<td>14,492</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average Household Size</th>
<th>Additional Houses Required Per Annum</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>15,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>15,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>15,438</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>15,452</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>2017</td>
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<td>15,484</td>
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<td>2018</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>15,501</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>15,518</td>
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<td>2020</td>
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<td>15,552</td>
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<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>15,570</td>
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<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>15,587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>15,604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
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 in an area i.e. the ability of a household to purchase their own home. Current estimates of household disposable 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 of 0.88 has been extracted from the CSO report on County Incomes and Regional GDP 2010 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 of the households in Longford have an average annual disposable income of €283.63 per week.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent-</th>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Adjusted</th>
<th>Longford</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Number of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1st Decile</td>
<td>312.79</td>
<td>302.41</td>
<td>302.41</td>
<td>272.03</td>
<td>23,767.96</td>
<td>29,270.75</td>
<td>16,371.68</td>
<td>14,519.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2nd Decile</td>
<td>349.38</td>
<td>363.54</td>
<td>363.54</td>
<td>343.30</td>
<td>21,651.48</td>
<td>26,895.03</td>
<td>15,060.92</td>
<td>13,743.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3rd Decile</td>
<td>386.00</td>
<td>398.00</td>
<td>398.00</td>
<td>376.80</td>
<td>19,536.90</td>
<td>24,038.92</td>
<td>13,321.98</td>
<td>12,199.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4th Decile</td>
<td>423.00</td>
<td>432.81</td>
<td>432.81</td>
<td>417.28</td>
<td>17,421.44</td>
<td>21,938.21</td>
<td>11,580.53</td>
<td>10,555.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5th Decile</td>
<td>459.33</td>
<td>468.00</td>
<td>468.00</td>
<td>452.08</td>
<td>15,306.90</td>
<td>19,807.52</td>
<td>9,939.98</td>
<td>8,905.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6th Decile</td>
<td>495.33</td>
<td>504.00</td>
<td>504.00</td>
<td>486.90</td>
<td>13,192.40</td>
<td>17,366.30</td>
<td>8,409.46</td>
<td>7,475.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7th Decile</td>
<td>530.67</td>
<td>539.33</td>
<td>539.33</td>
<td>521.70</td>
<td>11,077.90</td>
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<td>6,888.05</td>
<td>5,953.79</td>
</tr>
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<td>16%</td>
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<td>565.67</td>
<td>574.33</td>
<td>574.33</td>
<td>546.50</td>
<td>9,963.40</td>
<td>12,883.33</td>
<td>5,366.69</td>
<td>4,433.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9th Decile</td>
<td>600.67</td>
<td>609.33</td>
<td>609.33</td>
<td>571.30</td>
<td>8,849.90</td>
<td>11,341.33</td>
<td>4,845.33</td>
<td>3,901.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
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<td>635.67</td>
<td>644.33</td>
<td>644.33</td>
<td>596.10</td>
<td>7,736.40</td>
<td>10,799.33</td>
<td>4,324.97</td>
<td>3,368.23</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Growth</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Decile</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
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<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Decile</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
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<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Decile</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
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<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Decile</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Decile</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
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<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Decile</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>14,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Decile</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
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<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>9,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Decile</td>
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<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
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<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
<td>54,748</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 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.
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 price 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Band 1</th>
<th>Band 2</th>
<th>Band 3</th>
<th>Band 4</th>
<th>Band 5</th>
<th>Band 6</th>
<th>Band 7</th>
<th>Band 8</th>
<th>Band 9</th>
<th>Band 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>112,376</td>
<td>114,600</td>
<td>116,823</td>
<td>119,046</td>
<td>121,269</td>
<td>123,492</td>
<td>125,715</td>
<td>127,938</td>
<td>130,160</td>
<td>132,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>114,200</td>
<td>116,403</td>
<td>118,606</td>
<td>120,809</td>
<td>123,012</td>
<td>125,215</td>
<td>127,418</td>
<td>129,621</td>
<td>131,824</td>
<td>134,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>115,927</td>
<td>118,129</td>
<td>120,331</td>
<td>122,533</td>
<td>124,735</td>
<td>126,937</td>
<td>129,139</td>
<td>131,341</td>
<td>133,543</td>
<td>135,746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>119,148</td>
<td>121,350</td>
<td>123,552</td>
<td>125,754</td>
<td>127,956</td>
<td>130,158</td>
<td>132,360</td>
<td>134,562</td>
<td>136,764</td>
<td>138,966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>117,114</td>
<td>119,316</td>
<td>121,518</td>
<td>123,720</td>
<td>125,922</td>
<td>128,124</td>
<td>130,326</td>
<td>132,528</td>
<td>134,730</td>
<td>136,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>116,336</td>
<td>118,538</td>
<td>120,740</td>
<td>122,942</td>
<td>125,144</td>
<td>127,346</td>
<td>129,548</td>
<td>131,750</td>
<td>133,952</td>
<td>136,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>116,171</td>
<td>118,373</td>
<td>120,575</td>
<td>122,777</td>
<td>124,979</td>
<td>127,181</td>
<td>129,383</td>
<td>131,585</td>
<td>133,787</td>
<td>135,989</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The projections for household income to 2021 are applied to the DoCLG Model Housing Strategy annuity formula to determine the maximum affordable house price for each of the ten disposable income deciles ranges. The key variables used in the annuity formula include 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 3.7
Average Monthly Disposable Income in County Longford, 2012-2024

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decile</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>1,294</td>
<td>1,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5th</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>1,294</td>
<td>1,384</td>
<td>1,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>1,294</td>
<td>1,384</td>
<td>1,474</td>
<td>1,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>1,384</td>
<td>1,474</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>1,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>1,474</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>1,654</td>
<td>1,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5th</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>1,654</td>
<td>1,744</td>
<td>1,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>1,654</td>
<td>1,744</td>
<td>1,834</td>
<td>1,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5th</td>
<td>1,744</td>
<td>1,834</td>
<td>1,924</td>
<td>2,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>1,834</td>
<td>1,924</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>2,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5th</td>
<td>1,924</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>2,104</td>
<td>2,194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Approximate Affordable Housing Price - Longford County - 2012-2024 (€)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>45,428 41,079 36,775 32,468 28,159 23,849 20,175 15,786 11,397 7,008 2,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>40,820 37,471 34,122 30,773 27,424 24,075 20,726 17,377 13,028 8,679 4,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>36,220 32,871 29,522 26,173 22,824 19,475 16,126 12,777 9,428 6,079 2,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>31,620 28,271 24,922 21,573 18,224 14,875 11,526 8,177 4,828 1,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>27,020 23,671 20,322 16,973 13,624 10,275 6,926 3,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>22,420 19,071 15,722 12,373 8,924</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

| 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 RPP targets for County Longford up to year 2022. | | | |

### 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, 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 DoCLG 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>No. of Households Required</th>
<th>Running Total</th>
<th>Affordability by Decile</th>
<th>Household Band Position</th>
<th>House Price Bands - Upper Value</th>
<th>No. of Households Required within each Band</th>
<th>% of Housing Units Projected to be Provided by 6th Decile</th>
<th>% of Housing Units Projected to be Provided by 7th Decile</th>
<th>Housing Shortfall as a % of Total Housing Units Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1st Decile</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39,399</td>
<td>1st Band</td>
<td>64,765</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Decile</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>154,138</td>
<td>2nd Band</td>
<td>159,536</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>191,406</td>
<td>4th Band</td>
<td>292,400</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>207,442</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>234,200</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>251,900</td>
<td>7th Band</td>
<td>296,400</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>297,400</td>
<td>9th Band</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>354,600</td>
<td>7th Band</td>
<td>296,400</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>453,600</td>
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<td>None</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1st Decile</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>79,391</td>
<td>1st Band</td>
<td>85,322</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Decile</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>126,318</td>
<td>2nd Band</td>
<td>195,016</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>175,400</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>258,400</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>215,117</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>296,400</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>271,400</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>296,400</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>347,400</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1st Decile</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>118,508</td>
<td>1st Band</td>
<td>124,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Decile</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>174,000</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>296,400</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>214,400</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>296,400</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>261,000</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>296,400</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>307,400</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>296,400</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>383,400</td>
<td>5th Band</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>No. of Households Required</td>
<td>Running Total</td>
<td>Affordability by household Band</td>
<td>Household Band Position</td>
<td>Mean Price Bands - Vip</td>
<td>No. of Householders - Vip per Band</td>
<td>% of Housing units - Vip to be Provided within each Band</td>
<td>No. Housing units - Vip to be Provided within each Band</td>
<td>Housing Shortfall by Band - Meeting Affordability Criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>1st Decile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>209,182</td>
<td>1st Band</td>
<td>15,016</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Decile</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>212,584</td>
<td>2nd &amp; 3rd Bands</td>
<td>212,584</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>218,842</td>
<td>4th &amp; 5th Bands</td>
<td>218,842</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32.00%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>230,884</td>
<td>6th Band</td>
<td>230,884</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.50%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th Decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>238,884</td>
<td>7th Band</td>
<td>238,884</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th Decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>245,150</td>
<td>8th Band</td>
<td>245,150</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.50%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7th Decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>292,804</td>
<td>10th Band</td>
<td>292,804</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8th Decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>331,131</td>
<td>12th Band</td>
<td>331,131</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.50%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9th Decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>337,131</td>
<td>14th Band</td>
<td>337,131</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10th Decile</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>329,804</td>
<td>16th Band</td>
<td>329,804</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Year | Range | No. of Households Required | Running Total | Affordability by household Band | Household Band Position | Mean Price Bands - Vip | No. of Householders - Vip per Band | % of Housing units - Vip to be Provided within each Band | No. Housing units - Vip to be Provided within each Band | Housing Shortfall by Band - Meeting Affordability Criteria | Housing Shortfall by Band - Meeting Affordability Criteria |
|------|-------|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------|
| 2019 | 1st Decile | 21 | 18 | 213,632 | 1st Band | 15,016 | 20 | 3.00% | 5 | 30 | 13.00% |
|      | 2nd Decile | 22 | 18 | 216,041 | 2nd & 3rd Bands | 216,041 | 22 | 20.00% | 61 | 39 | 35.00% |
|      | 3rd Decile | 20 | 18 | 220,041 | 4th & 5th Bands | 220,041 | 25 | 32.00% | 67 | 32 | 32.00% |
|      | 4th Decile | 20 | 18 | 224,041 | 6th Band | 224,041 | 14 | 16.50% | 22 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 5th Decile | 20 | 18 | 230,041 | 7th Band | 230,041 | 18 | 10.50% | 24 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 6th Decile | 20 | 18 | 236,041 | 8th Band | 236,041 | 14 | 16.50% | 22 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 7th Decile | 21 | 18 | 286,041 | 10th Band | 286,041 | 14 | 16.50% | 22 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 8th Decile | 20 | 18 | 334,041 | 12th Band | 334,041 | 14 | 16.50% | 22 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 9th Decile | 20 | 18 | 340,041 | 14th Band | 340,041 | 20 | 10.50% | 20 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 10th Decile | 22 | 17 | 347,041 | 16th Band | 347,041 | 20 | 10.50% | 20 | 9 | 4.50% |

| Year | Range | No. of Households Required | Running Total | Affordability by household Band | Household Band Position | Mean Price Bands - Vip | No. of Householders - Vip per Band | % of Housing units - Vip to be Provided within each Band | No. Housing units - Vip to be Provided within each Band | Housing Shortfall by Band - Meeting Affordability Criteria | Housing Shortfall by Band - Meeting Affordability Criteria |
|------|-------|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------|
| 2020 | 1st Decile | 25 | 20 | 91,691 | 1st Band | 15,016 | 20 | 3.00% | 5 | 30 | 13.00% |
|      | 2nd Decile | 25 | 20 | 91,691 | 2nd & 3rd Bands | 91,691 | 20 | 20.00% | 62 | 30 | 30.00% |
|      | 3rd Decile | 20 | 18 | 92,094 | 4th & 5th Bands | 92,094 | 25 | 32.00% | 60 | 30 | 30.00% |
|      | 4th Decile | 20 | 18 | 92,394 | 6th Band | 92,394 | 14 | 16.50% | 22 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 5th Decile | 20 | 18 | 92,694 | 7th Band | 92,694 | 18 | 10.50% | 24 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 6th Decile | 20 | 18 | 92,994 | 8th Band | 92,994 | 14 | 16.50% | 22 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 7th Decile | 20 | 18 | 93,294 | 10th Band | 93,294 | 20 | 10.50% | 20 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 8th Decile | 20 | 18 | 93,594 | 12th Band | 93,594 | 14 | 16.50% | 22 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 9th Decile | 20 | 18 | 93,894 | 14th Band | 93,894 | 20 | 10.50% | 20 | 9 | 4.50% |
|      | 10th Decile | 22 | 17 | 94,194 | 16th Band | 94,194 | 20 | 10.50% | 20 | 9 | 4.50% |
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 completions, 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.

#### Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Predicted Housing Demand</th>
<th>Actual Units Completed</th>
<th>% Over/ Under Delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>+122%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>+109%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>+150.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>+161%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>1132</td>
<td>+220%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>1579</td>
<td>+349%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>+129%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>-80.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Social and Affordable Housing Requirements</th>
<th>Social and Affordable Housing Requirements as % of Total Housing Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Households Required</th>
<th>Running Total</th>
<th>Housing Permitted</th>
<th>Housing Completed</th>
<th>Housing Shortfall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2026</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2027</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>1010</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2028</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>1263</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2029</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>1514</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>1767</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2031</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2032</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>2273</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>2082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2033</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>2526</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>2335</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on previous Housing Strategies: Longford County Development Plan 2009-2015 and Longford County Development Plan 2003-2009
### Table 4.2

#### Housing Completions by type, 2005-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual House</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheme House</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>1328</td>
<td>1579</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Granted (PPs)</td>
<td>No. Units</td>
<td>Granted (PPs)</td>
<td>No. Units</td>
<td>Granted (PPs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses (incl. Multi-Develop &amp; One-off)</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>936</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flats/Apts.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>967</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 4.4

#### Summary of Longford Housing Land Requirements by 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Longford County Total</th>
<th>Longford Town</th>
<th>County Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applicable Densities Per Hectare (ha)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing units required (by 2021)</td>
<td>2,120</td>
<td>1,844</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Land Requirement (by 2021(ha))</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing units required (Period to 2022)</td>
<td>2,335</td>
<td>2,031</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Land Requirement Period to 2022 (ha)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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 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.

### 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. 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. 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.

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, this strategy concludes that there is sufficient zoned land in the county to address identified future housing requirements.

---

10 Bungalows and detached housing
11 Semi-detached and terraced housing
12 2,335 units divided by 11 years.
13 Excludes 50% headroom requirement for 2015-2021.
14 This excludes lands in the County’s Strategic Reserve, as identified in the County Development Plan Core Strategy.
15 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).
16 As per the RPG target by 2016.
17 As per the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region 2010-2022.
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\(^2\) determined that there was a net housing need for 903 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.

### 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 County for vacant houses per 1000 households\(^3\).

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.

---

\(^2\) Leitrim had the highest vacancy rate at 44 units per 1000 households.

\(^3\) Carried out by Longford County Council as of the 31st May 2013.

### Table 4.6: Social and Affordable Housing Provision 2007-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Authority</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>(1) Completions and Acquisitions</th>
<th>(2) Voluntary and Cooperative Housing</th>
<th>(3) Rental Accommodation Scheme</th>
<th>(4) Houses Available for Rent from Existing Stock</th>
<th>(5) Total Social Rented Accommodation</th>
<th>(6) Affordable Housing</th>
<th>Total Social and Affordable Housing Provision (i.e. 5+6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longford County Council</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford Town Council</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total - LCC/LTC</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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).
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Voluntary and Co-operative Housing Output</th>
<th>Capital Assistance Scheme</th>
<th>Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Of Houses</td>
<td>No. Of Houses</td>
<td>Completed or Acquired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

### 4.6.4 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.

### Table 4.8
Tenant Purchase Sales 2009-2012

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

### 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.

### 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:

1. 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 Council’s 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.
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.

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.

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:

- 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 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 between 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 analyses exercises on each of the main settlements within County Longford indicate 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 built1;
- 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 quantity, 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 11: Graph illustrating the cumulative annual reduction in retail floorspace over the lifetime of the Longford County Retail Strategy 2015-2021.
1.3 DEFINTION OF RETAIL TYPOLOGIES

Annex I 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 recreational equipment and accessories, books, newspapers and magazines, goods for personal care, goods not elsewhere classified and 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 39,192 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/Castletubber, 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 level incorporates the designated urban growth centres of the Gateways, Hub 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Hierarchy Level</th>
<th>Settlement Designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tier I</td>
<td>Principal Town</td>
<td>Longford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier II</td>
<td>Key Service Town</td>
<td>Granard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier III</td>
<td>Service Town</td>
<td>Edgeworthstown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier IV</td>
<td>Local Service Towns</td>
<td>Ballymahon, Lanesboro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier V</td>
<td>Villages, Rural Serviced Settlements and Hinterlands</td>
<td>Villages, small settlements and the Open County side of County Longford</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 has been set as 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.

Assessment of the most recent Retail Sales Index, published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) 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 91.04, 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 98.7 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. 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, 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).

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’ access to more 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. With an average expenditure in excess of €1,000, 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

44

Longford County
Development Plan 2015 – 2021

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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.

### Table 2.1: Multiple share of the Irish convenience market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retailer</th>
<th>Market Share (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunnes Stores</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super Valu</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lidl</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldi</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superquinn</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

### 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 34 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.

#### Table 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athlone Town Centre</td>
<td>46km</td>
<td>43 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>54km</td>
<td>48 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granard</td>
<td>41km</td>
<td>37 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgeworthstown</td>
<td>102km</td>
<td>1 hour 3 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballymahon</td>
<td>106km</td>
<td>1 hour 2 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanchardstown Centre</td>
<td>116km</td>
<td>1 hour 16 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin City Centre</td>
<td>119km</td>
<td>1 hour 14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan Town Centre</td>
<td>56km</td>
<td>28 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>29km</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>42km</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dundrum Town Centre</td>
<td>127km</td>
<td>1 hour 24 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>127km</td>
<td>1 hour 22 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>314km</td>
<td>1 hour 11 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullingar</td>
<td>43km</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>43km</td>
<td>24 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>43km</td>
<td>26 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo Town Centre</td>
<td>90km</td>
<td>1 hour 14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>109km</td>
<td>1 hour 2 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>301km</td>
<td>1 hour 12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullingar</td>
<td>37 minutes</td>
<td>1 hour 11 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>24 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>26 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo Town Centre</td>
<td>90km</td>
<td>1 hour 14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>109km</td>
<td>1 hour 2 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>301km</td>
<td>1 hour 12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullingar</td>
<td>37 minutes</td>
<td>1 hour 11 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>24 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>26 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>1 hour 50 minutes</td>
<td>1 hour 35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheery</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>18 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>1 hour 25 minutes</td>
<td>1 hour 35 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Time table and distances taken from Google Maps.

11 Travel times and distances taken from Google Maps.
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 Carraige Donn, Dunnes, Eason and Lifestyle Sports, as well as large international comparison multiples such as Coast, H&M, H&MV, 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 bulk 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, 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.

category retailers, including Atlantic Homeware, 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” 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.

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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 bulk 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 basis34. 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 Barrett’s, Clark’s, 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 bulk goods retailers, with most of the main convenience multiples also having a presence in the town.

Fig 3.1: Illustration of the main settlements within County Longford.
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 traffic from the town to the North West of the town. This has seen the removal of a substantial amount of traffic congestion, and has eased both vehicle 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 parking system. There is a good amount of car 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 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 2000, 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 more immediately beneficial 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 potential 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 €207.20 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 €33.71 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;
- 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;
- 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.

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.
17 Information taken from analysis of published retail property prices available on Daft.ie on 04/10/2013.
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 fulfill 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 role as a small service town, allowing 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 convenience 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 complemented 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;
- 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 Inn 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 perpendicularly 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.
Laneborough 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. Laneborough offers its community a limited mix of retail services such as convenience retail, pubs, specialist shops and service retail, which are often not clustered together and distributed intermittently along Main Street.

### Accessibility

Laneborough, 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 townscapes possess 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 Laneborough 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;
- Ensure a good provision of convenience and local service retail floorspace is currently vacant across the County (17.73% of total vancancy by retail category). 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Granted and Commenced Retail Developments since 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Convenence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Bulky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Vancancy by Retail Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Floorspace Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vacant Convenence Floorspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vacant Comparison Floorspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vacant Bulky Floorspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vacant Floorspace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Granted and Commenced Retail Developments since 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007 Baseline (m2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

### 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.

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 16,670 sqm 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.
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.

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.

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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Per Capita Spend - Nationally</th>
<th>Per Capita Spend - Adjusted for Longford County</th>
<th>Per Capita Spend - Longford County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3474</td>
<td>3799</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3,095 3,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3039</td>
<td>3324</td>
<td>1.80 1.80 3039 3324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>3052</td>
<td>3337</td>
<td>0.40 0.40 3052 3337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>3070</td>
<td>3357</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3070 3357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3101</td>
<td>3391</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3101 3391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>3132</td>
<td>3424</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3132 3424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3163</td>
<td>3459</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3163 3459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>3194</td>
<td>3493</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3194 3493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>3226</td>
<td>3528</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3226 3528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>3259</td>
<td>3564</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3259 3564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>3291</td>
<td>3599</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3291 3599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>3324</td>
<td>3635</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3324 3635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>3357</td>
<td>3672</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3357 3672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>3391</td>
<td>3708</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3391 3708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>3425</td>
<td>3745</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 3425 3745</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 below27.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007 (Original Projection)</th>
<th>2008 (Updated Projection)</th>
<th>2009 (Updated Projection)</th>
<th>2010 (Updated Projection)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34,391</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>48,547</td>
<td>44,084</td>
<td>45,670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 CSO, ‘Retail Sales Index’, July 2013, 29/08/2013.

28 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.

29 CSO, ‘County Incomes and Regional GDP’, 13/02/2013.

This growth rate is in line with the latest term economic outlook, and has been detailed in Table 4.2 below.

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 GDP29 and the Retail Sales Index28.
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 report24 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Convenience Per Capita Spend (€)</th>
<th>Comparison Per Capita Spend (€)</th>
<th>Convenience Total Available Spend (€)</th>
<th>Comparison Total Available Spend – Excluding Bulky Goods (€)</th>
<th>Convenience Total Available Spend – Bulky Goods Only (€)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>39000</td>
<td>3139</td>
<td>3212</td>
<td>118538813</td>
<td>129627138</td>
<td>101701711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>39497</td>
<td>3102</td>
<td>3191</td>
<td>120528375</td>
<td>131802807</td>
<td>104542246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>40000</td>
<td>3070</td>
<td>3157</td>
<td>122792538</td>
<td>134278763</td>
<td>107423011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>40509</td>
<td>3051</td>
<td>3121</td>
<td>125599630</td>
<td>137348436</td>
<td>10987849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>41025</td>
<td>3032</td>
<td>3084</td>
<td>128470894</td>
<td>140438042</td>
<td>11333965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>41547</td>
<td>3013</td>
<td>3047</td>
<td>131407797</td>
<td>143699909</td>
<td>11687816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>42062</td>
<td>2994</td>
<td>3010</td>
<td>134304382</td>
<td>14686745</td>
<td>11943050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>42544</td>
<td>2976</td>
<td>2972</td>
<td>137264815</td>
<td>14983892</td>
<td>12209184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>43051</td>
<td>2959</td>
<td>2944</td>
<td>137264815</td>
<td>14983892</td>
<td>12209184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>43564</td>
<td>2940</td>
<td>2912</td>
<td>137264815</td>
<td>14983892</td>
<td>12209184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>44084</td>
<td>2921</td>
<td>2880</td>
<td>137264815</td>
<td>14983892</td>
<td>12209184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>44603</td>
<td>2902</td>
<td>2848</td>
<td>137264815</td>
<td>14983892</td>
<td>12209184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>45135</td>
<td>2884</td>
<td>2815</td>
<td>137264815</td>
<td>14983892</td>
<td>12209184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>45670</td>
<td>2866</td>
<td>2782</td>
<td>137264815</td>
<td>14983892</td>
<td>12209184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Available Total Convenience Spend (€)</th>
<th>Inflow (%)</th>
<th>Outflow (%)</th>
<th>Adjusted Total Convenience Spend (€)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>118538813</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>106684932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>120528375</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>108475531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>122792538</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>110533284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>125599630</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>113039667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>128470894</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>115623805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>131407797</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>118267017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>134304382</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>120873944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>137264815</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>123538334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>140290505</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>126261455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>143382889</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>129044600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>146543438</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>131889094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>149732395</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>134777155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>153053944</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>137748550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>156416825</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>14075142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 CSO, “County Incomes and Regional GDP”, 13/02/2013.
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%.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Comparison Total Available Spend – Excluding Bulky Goods (€)</th>
<th>Comparison Total Available Spend Outflow (%)</th>
<th>Comparison Total Available Spend Inflow (%)</th>
<th>Adjusted Convenience Total Available Spend (€)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>95485574</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>95485574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>97063866</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>97063866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>98829170</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>98829170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>10108449</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>10108449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>103399376</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>103399376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>105763133</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>105763133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>108094440</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>108094440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>110477135</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>110477135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

#### Retail Floorspace Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retail Category</th>
<th>Gross Floor Area (m²)</th>
<th>Net Floor Area (m²)</th>
<th>Net Area as a % of Gross Area</th>
<th>Net Area as a % of Overall Total Net Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>16,549</td>
<td>13,239</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>21.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison – Non-Bulky</td>
<td>11,247</td>
<td>9,109</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>18.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison – Bulky</td>
<td>36,150</td>
<td>36,150</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>59.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>71,752</td>
<td>60,616</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>45.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Retail Category Turnover

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Adjusted Total Available Spend (€)</th>
<th>Net Floor Area (m²)</th>
<th>Turnover Per M² (€)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>231,229,992</td>
<td>36,150</td>
<td>6,347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Cumulative Floorspace Requirement (m²)</th>
<th>Additional Annual Floorspace Requirement (m²)</th>
<th>Vacant Floorspace (m²)</th>
<th>Available Floorspace (m²)</th>
<th>Total Cumulative Floorspace Requirement (m²)</th>
<th>Additional Annual Floorspace Requirement (m²)</th>
<th>Vacant Floorspace (m²)</th>
<th>Available Floorspace (m²)</th>
<th>Total Cumulative Floorspace Requirement (m²)</th>
<th>Additional Annual Floorspace Requirement (m²)</th>
<th>Vacant Floorspace (m²)</th>
<th>Available Floorspace (m²)</th>
<th>Total Cumulative Floorspace Requirement (m²)</th>
<th>Additional Annual Floorspace Requirement (m²)</th>
<th>Vacant Floorspace (m²)</th>
<th>Available Floorspace (m²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>15,635</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15,644</td>
<td>1,377</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15,606</td>
<td>1,373</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15,596</td>
<td>1,372</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>16,021</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,026</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15,993</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15,993</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>16,485</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,486</td>
<td>1,657</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,391</td>
<td>1,657</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,391</td>
<td>1,657</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16,961</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,964</td>
<td>1,863</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,874</td>
<td>1,863</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,874</td>
<td>1,863</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>17,487</td>
<td>1,076</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17,503</td>
<td>2,052</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17,409</td>
<td>2,052</td>
<td>916</td>
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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 rate) is deducted from the additional annual floorspace requirement to define the additional floorspace development requirement, which is the final output of the exercise.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Floorspace Requirements 2015-2021</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Additional Convenience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional Comparison</td>
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<td>Additional Bulky</td>
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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.
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 in a sustainable manner. Therefore, these policies have a negative impact on retail competition within the County.

Policy 11: 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 to develop the 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 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 500sq.m 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 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.

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 (100sq.m), 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 serving 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 quantitative 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 casual 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.

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 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 ADAPTABLE

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**

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.

**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 FRONTAGUE**

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 degree 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.

**NEW ACCESSES/FRONTAGES**

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).

**LEDGERS AND DITCHES**

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

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

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

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 viewpoints.

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.).

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 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.

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.

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.

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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°.

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 fulfill 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.

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 20001 (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.
11 SCOPE

11.1 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 linked 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.

12 METHODOLOGY

12.1 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.

12.2 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 natural 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 values.
- Harnessing the central geographical location of the region at the “heart” of Ireland 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 specialties, e.g. viable 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.
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 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 W50 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 that the 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 environmental and amenity 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 most relevant 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.

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 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 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 past. The distinctive topography, landscape 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 landscape, 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.
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 gley 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 dwellings 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 CO2 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 overall 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.

**2.13 Human Influence**

(a) Settlement Pattern

The County Development Plan identifies forty-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.

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. Diarmuds, Inchcleraun Island
- **Medieval:** Chancel Church and Augustinian monastery, Inchcleraun, Abbeyshrule, Abbeyshrule, All Saints Priory, Saints Island, Clondra Abbey, Rathcline castle, Castletown, Elfeet, Mornin.

**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). 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).

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 are 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.

(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 drainage, encourage 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 aid schemes for the construction of farm buildings and effluent storage, have the potential to create a significant visual impact throughout the County. The number of livestock applications for slatted sheds increase significantly during this period. These regulations also place limits on livestock numbers on land which 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.

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.

(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.

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.
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, promote, and perhaps develop this aspect of heritage. The DoECLG have proposed the designation of archaeological landscapes, which will cover areas of intense archaeological deposits. It is suggested that 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.

Annagh Lough

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

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

Lough Sallagh in the North-West fringe of the County

- 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.

Lough Nabolswy

- 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.

- 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, 1987) 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.

Ballinamuck Village from the North

- Transport and Communications
  The road network 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/antenna support structures, these preferring the higher ground of the adjacent areas, while retaining strong intervisibility from this area.
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, Edendmore 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.

- 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.

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 tory Rivers and their tributaries.

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.
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 Leebane 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.

- 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 Keanon Feed factory dominates the landscape for a substantial distance on the approach from Ballinalie. 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.

- 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.

Aughnacliffe.

- Recreation and Amenity
  Mainly confined to sports grounds and GAA pitches.

Landscape Sensitivity

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 Granardville 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.

Policy Responses
• Encroachment on protected views by dwelling units.
• Further loss of population in Granard creating settlement pressure in surrounding rural area and historic landscape
• Potential future development of large-scale utility infrastructure including identification and permitted and restricted areas.
• Potential for further tourism related development, particularly in Granard.

- 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.

- 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.

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.

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.

Agriculture

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 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.

- 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.
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 Rathline 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.

#### 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, Ibleenaveher 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
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.

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 Kilntruanan on the R194, Enybegs and Coolarly.

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 Clonbat/Coonlahagh/Creenagh area. This pattern is repeated at Kihasheer and Clonaght 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/Castlbar, 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 Lonamucki-Templemichael, Townspark, 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.

The 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 Sik na Slainte (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

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 Derrovaragh. The River re-enters County Longford east of Lagan 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 Logan 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 laneeways.

- 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.

Derraghans 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/Olmono and Tullyvarane/Lehery outside Lanesboro.

- Transport and Communications
  The road network, particularly in the southern sector, 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 remnants 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 landscape; 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 Corkea 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 opportunities
  - 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 Ardagl (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 tony, 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. It 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.

Carriaboy 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.

Carriaboy is located approximately 1km further south along the R397 at its junction with the N5. 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 Gleece, 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 Ardagl and Castlerea Mountain. The N5 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 botany, 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.

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

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

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, 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boglands</td>
<td>Begnagh, Clonard, Killashue, Commons North, Curry Bog</td>
<td>Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivers</td>
<td>Shannon, Inny, Camlin and associated banks and callows</td>
<td>Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakes</td>
<td>Lough Ree, Lough Gowna, Lough Forbes, and other lakes in the County and associated shores and islands</td>
<td>Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uplands</td>
<td>Ardagh mountain, Cane hill</td>
<td>Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archaeological sites, artefacts, structures and objects</td>
<td>Morrin and Castileana castles, Abbeylara, Abbeyshrule, Saints Island, Inchcletaraun, Granard Moat, Granardkille</td>
<td>Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodlands</td>
<td>Newtownforbes, Newcastle, Derrycassan, Carnglass, Pontare, Legan</td>
<td>Aesthetic, ecological, historical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>Mill buildings, the Royal Canal and its associated structures, built fabric of towns and villages, churches, courthouses</td>
<td>Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 Wild Birds)(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 7: Open Agricultural

Annex 5:
Corlea Archaeological Settlement and Biodiversity Project

September 2013
Prepared by Planning Section,
Longford County Council, September 2013.
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, interpretative 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 1488 BC 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.

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 2014-2015. 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.

Table 1

Timeframe for projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Corlea Visitor Centre existing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>Corlea Archaeological &amp; Biodiversity Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>Link with Royal Canal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/2022</td>
<td>Project Link across bog to Corlea Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/2022</td>
<td>Royal Canal walking/Cycling route to Mullingar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025/2030</td>
<td>Mid Shannon Wilderness Park</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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 BPCA Animal Refuge at Derrynogher 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, Roskoy 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

Pic 1: Rehabilitated and re-colonised bog.

Pic 2: Corlea Centre, Kenagh, Longford.

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-721576242406806/)

ANNEX

| 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 |

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Note: Contents may vary based on the specific requirements and context.
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.

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.

2.3 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 trackways.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Pic 5: Bog platform and Path.
Pic 6: Example of Iron Age life.
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 bogs. 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.

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.

Rehabilitation allows for the expansion of biodiversity back onto the bogs and the creation of diverse and valuable wildlife reserves. It is envisaged that, over time, 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.

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.

It is envisaged that over time as the cutaway bogs are worked out one of the options under consideration by Bord na Móna 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 Móna 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 ISPRA 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.

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**Map 5:**
Potential Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.

**Map 6:**
Potential Walking Cycling Routes in Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.
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.

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.’
2.2 BORD NA MÓNA BOGS

Longford contains a large portion of bogs many of which are owned by Bord Na Móna.

It is envisaged that overtime as the cutaway bogs are worked out one of the options under consideration by Bord na Móna 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 Rivers 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 Móna 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.

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.

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 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. 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.

As the National Peatland Strategy 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 Móna are in place to allow such partnership to develop.

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.
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, Roscoy and on to Westport and Sligo.

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.
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.

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.

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

Pic. 14: Forest Walks
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.

Rehabilitation allows for the expansion of biodiversity back onto the bogs and the creation of diverse and valuable wildlife reserves. It is envisaged that, over time, as the cutaway bogs are worked out they will be properly managed to return to a natural type environment and may form part of a proposed Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Corlea Visitor Centre existing. Lough Ree and Royal Canal existing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>Corlea Archaeological &amp; Biodiversity Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>Corlea link with Royal Canal</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015/20</td>
<td>Project Link across bog to Corlea Centre.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015/20</td>
<td>Local communities take responsibility for local area of Bog in association with Longford County Council.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015/2018</td>
<td>Royal Canal walking/Cycling route Dublin to Clondra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/2030</td>
<td>Mid Shannon Wilderness Park</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘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.