

Chapter 4 Settlement Strategy

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to confirm the settlement hierarchy within the county, promote sustainable residential development within existing towns and villages and to make provision for sustainable housing in the rural areas of the county.



The policies as set out in this section of the Plan seek to build upon the provisions of the *County Development Plan 2003 - 2009* while having regard to national and regional policy and guidelines.

Over the period of the previous plan, there has been huge pressure for residential development in the towns and villages of County Louth, including demand for one-off houses in the countryside. The availability of more affordable housing in County Louth in comparison to other areas closer to Dublin city, together with enhanced transport infrastructure, has resulted in the generation of considerable commuter traffic to the capital.

The settlement strategy set out in the Plan acknowledges the primary positions of Dundalk and Drogheda at the top of the settlement hierarchy. The Plan seeks to prioritise sustainable residential development in these towns and their environs, so that they may achieve critical mass and enhance their capacity to attract new investment and employment, services and improved public transport.

The settlement strategy also seeks to guide the sympathetic development of Ardee, Dunleer and other rural towns, villages and settlements in a fashion that will promote sustainable forms of development, that is, consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the county and with the *National Spatial Strategy* and the *Regional Planning Guidelines*. In this regard, it is considered important that development permitted within the towns and villages of the county is commensurate with their existing populations and their position within the settlement hierarchy and does not result in an excessive or disproportionate level of development.

It is considered that the level of rural housing that continues to be permitted within the county, in addition to its impact on the countryside, has a potentially detrimental effect on the viability of existing settlements. This section sets out a settlement strategy based on sustaining a vibrant network of settlements across a range of urban and rural locations throughout the county that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

4.2 Population Distribution

County Louth is the most urbanised county in the country outside of Dublin. The 2006 census figures confirm that 65% of the population of the county is classified as urban and 35% classified as rural. The census definition of urban is, '*settlements of 1,500 persons or more*'. Therefore, the towns of Dundalk, Drogheda, Ardee and Dunleer are within the urban definition while all other towns and villages are deemed to be rural. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of the population in the county vis-à-vis the urban and rural divide as per the census classification. It also illustrates the dominance of Dundalk and Drogheda within the settlement hierarchy.

Table 4.1: Population Distribution in County Louth

Settlements	Population distribution within county
Dundalk and Drogheda	58%
Ardee and Dunleer	7%
Rural towns, villages and countryside	35%

4.3 Settlement Hierarchy

Louth County Development Plan 2003 - 2009, a clearly identifiable four tier settlement hierarchy was set out composed of both of urban and rural settlements. It is considered appropriate, where feasible, to make provision in the Plan for the upgrading of a number of Category II Settlements by the provision of public drainage facilities. The revised settlement hierarchy which contains an additional level is set out in table 4.2.

The settlement hierarchy is based on factors such as size of population, range of services, the extent and range of community and other facilities available.

Table 4.2: Settlement Hierarchy

Level	Settlements
1	Dundalk and Drogheda
2	Ardee and Dunleer
3	Annagassan, Castlebellingham/Kilsaran, Carlingford, Clogherhead, Collon, Dromiskin, Louth Village, Omeath, Knockbridge, Tallanstown, Termonfeckin/Baltray, Tullyallen.
4	Ballapousta, Darver, Grange, Gyles Quay, Kilcurry, Kilkerley, Lordship, Mountbagnal, Ravensdale 1, Sandpit, Stabannon.
5	Ballagan, Bellurgan, Benagh, Dillonstown, Dromin, Faughart Lower, Fieldstown/Brownstown 1, Fieldstown/ Brownstown 2, Grange Irish, Grangebellew, Glenmore, Greenore, Mansfieldstown, Muchgrange, Mucklagh, Philipstown (Collon), Rathcor, Ravensdale 2 Reaghstown, Sheelagh, Stabannon, Tinure*, Willeville.

**In the previous plan, Tinure was placed at Level 3. However due to constraints in piped services which restrict the degree to which it can develop, it is considered to be more aptly placed at Level 5 in the settlement hierarchy.*

Policy

SS 1 To maintain the settlement hierarchy within the county and to encourage residential development within each settlement that is commensurate with its position in the hierarchy and the availability of public services and facilities.

4.3.1 Level 1: Dundalk

The urban area of Dundalk and environs, with a population of 35,000, is designated as a gateway in the NSS and as such, it is anticipated that it will grow to a level where it can support a wide range of services and facilities that will provide higher levels of economic activity, growth and development. Occupying a strategic position approximately half way between Belfast and Dublin, Dundalk is also the administrative capital of County Louth. It contains not only the offices of the County Council, but also the regional offices of the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, FAS and the offices of the County Enterprise Board. The town contains a highly regarded third level educational institution, namely the Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKiT).



Ongoing infrastructure improvements including road, rail, telecommunications and broadband services provide excellent connectivity with Dublin, Drogheda, Newry, Navan and the NSS hub towns of Cavan and Monaghan. The council sees significant potential for the growth of Dundalk and its environs and will co-operate with Dundalk Town council to ensure that the town reaches its population target of 60,000 and fulfils its role as a designated gateway.

The council will also co-operate with northern authorities the interest of promoting development in Dundalk and the north-east sub region and to promote projects that are mutually beneficial to both areas, north and south.

In 2003, Louth County Council and Dundalk Town Council came together to prepare a single integrated development plan for Dundalk and its environs. This plan is currently under review and the council will work in partnership with the town council to implement the policies and objectives of the development plan when adopted.

4.3.2 Level 1: Drogheda

Drogheda has been identified as a primary development centre in the NSS. Its population, as recorded in the 2006 Census of Population is 30,500. Over the last decade, the town has experienced significant growth principally resulting from its location close to Dublin, the completion of the motorway and improvements to rail commuter services.

While acknowledging Drogheda's role as a commuter town, the council is keen to support the policies and objectives of the Drogheda Borough Council's development plan, particularly having regard to the objective of developing the town as a self-sustaining settlement providing employment opportunities for its inhabitants and delivering economic benefits to the surrounding hinterland. The council will work closely with Drogheda Borough Council to ensure that the expansion of the town into its northern environs, which are located within the functional area of Louth County Council, takes place in an orderly and sustainable fashion that will support the growth of Drogheda and not detract from the vitality and viability of its town centre.



In 2004, the council prepared a local area plan for the northern environs of Drogheda which provides for the phased development of three new neighbourhoods capable of accommodating an additional population of 20,000 inhabitants. A detailed master plan for the area was prepared in 2006 and adopted by the council as a variation of the local area plan. To date, planning permission has been granted for a total of 5051 new dwellings within the northern environs area.

The local area plan also provides for the construction of the northern cross port access route which will have the positive effect of removing port related heavy goods vehicular traffic from the town centre. Planning permission for this road has been secured from An Bord Pleanála and construction, which is being funded by the private sector, is due to commence during 2009.

Policy

- SS 2 To co-operate with Dundalk Town Council and Drogheda Borough Council in order to facilitate the development of Dundalk and Drogheda and to maintain their positions at the top of the settlement hierarchy.
- SS 3 To review, in partnership with Dundalk Town Council, the *Dundalk and Environs Development Plan 2003 – 2009* and to make a new plan for the period 2009 - 2015.
- SS 4 To investigate, together with Drogheda Borough Council and Meath County

Council, the feasibility of preparing a unitary development plan for Drogheda incorporating both its northern and southern environs when the current plan falls due for review.

4.3.3 Level 2: Ardee

The population of Ardee increased from 3,568 to 4,301 in the inter censal period 2002 to 2006, an increase of 20.7%. This was mainly as a result of commuter-based demand for residential development facilitated by the improved road infrastructure. This demand is likely to continue, albeit at a slower rate, given Ardee's proximity to the greater Dublin area.



The council considers that Ardee's function as a local service and employment centre within the mid Louth area should be protected and enhanced. Consequently, the growth of the town will be managed in a manner that provides for gradual expansion, in line with provisions of additional employment opportunities, community facilities and services.

The current local area plan for Ardee seeks to promote consolidation and achieve a more balanced growth towards the northern end of the town. This local area plan will be reviewed upon the adoption of the county plan.

4.3.4 Level 2: Dunleer

Dunleer is substantially smaller than Ardee. It had a population of 1,787 according to the 2002 census, rising to 2,340 in 2006. This represents an increase of over 30% in this four year period. Similar to Ardee, this increase was based on commuter generated demand and also facilitated by improved road infrastructure.

The Dunleer Local Area Plan aims to consolidate and strengthen Dunleer's role as an important economic, social, cultural, residential and service centre in the mid Louth area to cater for a population in the region of 3,500. The increased population of Dunleer will contribute to the critical mass within the catchments of both Dundalk and Drogheda and should reduce the demand for dispersed one-off housing in the countryside.



Policy

- SS 5** To promote the development of Ardee as a medium sized town for urban strengthening to serve the needs of the local community and drive development within the locality and to review the *Ardee Local Area Plan* following the adoption of the *County Development Plan*.
- SS 6** To facilitate the growth of Dunleer to a population of 3,500 with associated community, facilities, services and employment opportunities and to review the *Dunleer Local Area Plan* following the adoption of the *County Development Plan*.

4.3.5 Level 3: Category I Settlements

Level three contains Category I Settlements and represents villages and towns with populations of fewer than 1,500. These contain a good range of services such as schools, churches and shops and are serviced by public piped utilities. They have a high degree of self-sufficiency and the ability to cater for limited additional residential development subject to capacity within the foul drainage system and public water supply. All of these Category I Settlements are covered by local area plans which will be subject to review on the adoption of the *County Development Plan*.



Policy

- SS 7** To promote and facilitate limited development within Category I Settlements that is commensurate with the nature and extent of the existing settlement and to support their role as local service centres.
- SS 8** To review the local area plans for Category I Settlements following the adoption of the *County Development Plan*.

4.3.6 Level 4: Category II (a) Settlements

Category II (a) settlements are settlements that have the potential of being provided with public waste water treatment facilities. These settlements have identified core areas which are zoned for residential development subject to the provision of public foul drainage. These settlements also contain areas which are not capable of being economically serviced. Therefore permitted residential development in such areas will be on the basis of individual waste water treatment systems. It is also considered that, given the extent of the development boundaries of many of these settlements, it would not be in the interest of proper planning and sustainable development to permit

significant levels of residential development. The permitted density is as set out in table 4.3 below. Maps of the Category II (a) Settlements are illustrated in Appendix 6.



Table 4.3: Permitted Densities within Category II (a) Settlements

	Density per hectare	Density per acre
Core areas	20	8
Outside core areas but inside settlement boundary	Minimum site size of 0.2 hectare for each dwelling	Minimum site size of 0.5 acre for each dwelling

4.3.7 Level 5: Category II (b) Settlements

Category II (b) Settlements are generally very small settlements with few if any community facilities and none have public foul drainage. Given the lack of community facilities and the unlikelihood that these centres could be economically serviced by piped utilities, it is the view of the council they are not capable of absorbing significant amounts of additional residential development in a proper planning and sustainable manner.

The purpose of these settlements is to assist in satisfying rural generated housing needs within a structured but low density environment as an alternative to the development of scattered one – off housing. Also, by limiting development to county based local needs, these settlements are more likely to be affordable in a restricted local market and would also afford individuals an opportunity to design and build their own home in a rural area.



Permitted development within these settlements will be on the basis of individual wastewater treatment systems, on minimum site areas of 0.5 acres and maximum floor areas of 220square metres. This is considered necessary in order to protect the environment and preserve a degree of consistency in design and scale. Maps of the Category II (b) Settlements are illustrated in Appendix 7.

4.4 County Based Local Area Needs

A county based local need refers to, *the housing need of persons who are from County Louth or who work within County Louth*. In determining what constitutes a county

based local need for Category II(a) and II(b) Settlements, the council will take into consideration the applicant's family, work, school and other ties with the county as well as his or her accommodation needs.

Policy

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| SS 9 | To provide for the construction of one-off type houses within Category II(a) and (b) Settlements in order to assist in satisfying rural generated housing needs within a structured but low density environment as an alternative to the development of scattered one – off housing. |
| SS 10 | To zone land within Category II (a) Settlements in identified core areas, for small scale multi unit developments (not more than 12 units per application) in accordance with the permitted density set out in table 4.3 and pending the provision of public foul drainage. |
| SS 11 | To restrict residential development within Category II (a) and (b) Settlements to that required to satisfy county based local needs and to apply an occupancy condition of 7 years in respect of all dwellings permitted. |
| SS 12 | To allow a maximum of 6 units in any one planning application for one-off type houses where public foul drainage is not available. |
| SS 13 | Where multi unit developments are permitted within the same landholding, planning permission will not be granted for any additional units on the holding until the permitted development is fully completed and occupied. |
| SS 14 | To limit the floor area of one-off type houses, whether by way of extension or otherwise, to not more than 220 square metres. |
| SS 15 | To protect and enhance community and recreational facilities. Applications which would result in the loss of areas of amenity, important biodiversity areas, community facilities or playing fields will not be considered favourably. |
| SS 16 | To ensure that the design and arrangement of dwellings are complementary and reflect the existing character of the settlement. In this regard applicants will be required to demonstrate that the proposal is consistent with the document <i>Building Sensitively and Sustainably in County Louth</i> and paragraph 4.9 - Rural House Design and Siting Criteria. |

4.4.1 Development Management Assessment Criteria for Category II (a) and (b) Settlements

In addition to compliance with the above policies, the council will have regard, inter alia, to the following considerations:

- Retention of valuable man made and natural heritage features within their boundaries or environs
- The use of traditional and sustainable materials that are consistent with the character of the settlement
- Traffic safety implications
- Impact on natural resources and landscapes
- Siting of house - how house fits into the landscape and avails of shelter
- Site suitability in terms of drainage
- Suitable landscape proposal

- Orientation so as to maximise heat and light from the sun
- Sustainable energy uses
- Flood risk considerations

4.5 Rural Housing

The policy in relation to rural housing contained in the *2003–2009 plan* was based on local needs which required that applicants demonstrate that they were functionally or socially related to the rural community in which the proposed site was located. There continues to be a strong demand for one-off houses in the countryside as illustrated in table 4.4 below.



Table 4.4: Permitted One – Off Houses 2001 to 2008

Year	One-off houses
2001	404
2002	380
2003	313
2004	473
2005	504
2006	480
2007	422
2008	387

When the figures from 2001 through to 2008 are combined, planning permission for a total of 3,363 one-off houses was granted which is equivalent to a town with a population of 9,416 based on occupancy rate of 2.8 persons per dwelling.

Whilst the council acknowledges the role of rural housing in sustaining rural communities, it also recognises that uncontrolled and excessive one-off urban generated housing in the countryside is not sustainable in the long-term and accepts that measures need to be put in place to regulate this form of development. A concern arises that if one-off rural housing is permitted at the current levels, then irreparable damage will be done to the environment and the legitimate aspirations of those brought up in the countryside to continue to live within their own communities will be jeopardised.

4.5.1 National Spatial Strategy 2002 (NSS)

The *NSS* recognises the long tradition of people living in rural parts of Ireland and promotes sustainable rural settlement as a means of delivering more balanced regional growth. The *Sustainable Rural Policy Framework* in the *NSS* has four broad objectives:

- To sustain and renew established rural communities and the existing stock of investment in a way that responds to the various spatial, structural and economic

changes taking place, while protecting the important assets that rural areas possess.

- To strengthen the established structure of villages and smaller settlements both to support local economies and to accommodate additional population in a way that supports the viability of local transport, local infrastructure and services such as schools and water services.
- To ensure that key assets in rural areas such as water quality and the natural and cultural heritage are protected to support quality of life.
- To ensure that rural settlement policies take account of, and are appropriate to local circumstances.

Furthermore, the NSS makes a distinction between demands for:

- Rural generated housing – housing needed in rural areas within the established rural community by people working in rural areas or in nearby urban areas.
- Urban generated housing – housing in rural locations sought by people living and working in urban areas, including second homes.

The NSS emphasises that, in general, and subject to good planning practice, rural generated housing needs should be accommodated where they arise.

With regard to urban generated housing in the open countryside, the NSS identified four broad categories of rural areas that require more tailored settlement policies in the development plan. The four areas identified are as follows:

1. Rural areas under strong urban influence
2. Areas with a traditionally strong agricultural base
3. Structurally weak areas
4. Areas in which there are distinctive settlement patterns

4.5.2 Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines 2005

The *Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines 2005* were drafted in the context of the rural housing policy set out in the *National Spatial Strategy*. Expanding on the rural policy framework, these guidelines provide that:

- People who are part of the rural community should be facilitated by the planning system in all rural areas including those under strong urban based pressure subject to good planning practice in matters of location, siting, design and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and areas of high landscape value.
- Anyone wishing to build a house in rural areas suffering persistent and substantial population decline should be facilitated.
- The development of the rural environs of the major urban areas, including the gateways and hubs as identified in the NSS and other larger towns over 5000 in population need to be carefully managed in order to ensure their orderly development and their successful functioning in the future.

In a national context, all of County Louth falls within 'rural areas under strong urban influence' as defined by the NSS by reason of its proximity to Dublin and its strong urban structure.

The challenge therefore facing the council in terms of one-off or dispersed rural housing is to ensure that rural generated housing as defined in the *NSS* and the *Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines* is accommodated in rural areas while protecting such areas from the increasing demand for urban generated rural housing. This challenge is exacerbated by the pressures deriving from the county's close proximity to Dublin and the quality of both rail and road infrastructure.

4.6 One - Off Rural Housing Policy

One-off housing refers to individually designed, detached houses primarily located on large unserviced sites in the open countryside. The overriding aim of the council's approach to one-off houses in the countryside is guided by the *Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines*. This approach seeks to accommodate within rural areas, people who are functionally or socially part of the rural community and to resist demand for urban generated housing in the countryside.

4.6.1 Local Needs

In order to protect the rural areas of the county from excessive urban generated housing, the council considers it necessary to retain the local needs provision as recommended in the document *Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines*. In the interest of clarity and fairness it is proposed to extend the local needs provision across the entire rural area of the county irrespective of which development zone the proposed development is located.

4.6.2 Qualifying Criteria

Applicants for one off rural housing will be required to demonstrate compliance with at least one of the following criteria.

Qualifying Criteria

1. That they have lived for a minimum period of 10 years within the local area in which they propose to build, do not already own a house or have not owned a house within the rural area of the county for a minimum of 5 years prior to making an application,

or

2. That they are the son or daughter and nieces or nephew of childless couples or foster children of a qualifying land owner, where the land has been in the family ownership for a minimum period of 25 years,

or

3. That they own or operate a rural based enterprise and are proposing to build on a site immediately adjacent or within the boundaries of that enterprise or that they are employed in a rural based service that supports the local rural community and there is a specific functional need to live at the site of their work,

or

4. That they are required to live in a rural area for exceptional health reasons. Such applications must be accompanied by a medical consultant's report and recommendation outlining the reasons why it is necessary for the applicant to live in a rural area and also be supported by an appropriate disability organisation of which the applicant is a member,

or

5. That the applicant is providing care for an old person(s) or a person(s) with a disability who live in an isolated rural area and who does not have any able bodied person residing with them. One house only will be allowed on this basis and the site must be adjacent to the dwelling in which the older person(s) or person(s) with the disability resides.

4.6.3 Local Area

In addition to establishing criteria for local needs qualification, it is also considered necessary to have a clear definition of 'local area' in order to implement the rural housing policy. For the purposes of this plan, local area is defined as '*being a radius of four kilometres from the qualifying family residence. Where the qualifying area is reduced by reason of its location, for example, proximity the coast, county boundaries or development zone boundaries, the four kilometre radius may be extended to include an area equivalent to the area lost*'.

Policy	
SS 17	To permit rural generated housing in order to support and sustain existing rural communities and to restrict urban generated housing in order to protect the visual amenities and resources of the countryside
SS 18	To ensure that the proposed development is consistent with the strategic objective for the development zone in which it is located as outlined in table 3.3 of this Plan.
SS 19	To require that the design and siting of the proposed house is such that it does not detract from the rural character of the landscape or the visual amenities of the area. In this regard, applicants will be required to demonstrate that the proposal is consistent with the document <i>Building Sensitively and Sustainably in County Louth</i> and the guidelines contained in section 4.7 of this chapter.
SS 20	To require that applicants for one-off houses in the countryside demonstrate compliance with the qualifying criteria as detailed in paragraph 4.6.2.
SS 21	Applicants, who qualify to build within a rural area on the basis of residency within development zone 5, will not be deemed to qualify to build within any other development zone.
SS 22	To apply a presumption against granting planning permission within development zones 2, 3 and 4 where there is an alternative site available within zone 5.
SS 23	To attach an occupancy condition of 7 years in respect of all planning permissions for new dwellings in rural areas.

4.6.4 Development Management Assessment Criteria for One-Off Rural Housing

In addition to compliance with the above rural housing policy, the council will have regard, inter alia, to the following considerations in assessing all applications for one-off rural houses:

- The number of existing houses and permissions granted in the vicinity of the site
- The number of houses developed and granted permission on the landholding
- The quality and capacity of the road network serving the site
- Breaking the skyline and visual impact
- Existing hedgerows and trees which would be affected by the proposed development
- Use of materials which are traditional and indigenous to the area as far as practical
- Proximity to local services such as schools and shops
- Proximity to public transport and degree of car dependency
- Impact on farming practice and rural based activities
- Traffic safety
- Impact on natural resources and landscapes
- Siting of house, how house fits into the landscape and avails of existing natural shelter
- Site suitability in terms of drainage and compliance with EPA guidelines
- Suitable landscaping proposals

- Orientation so as to maximise heat and light from the sun
- Sustainable energy uses
- Flood risk considerations where apparent

4.6.5 Clustered Housing Developments

Clustered development of 2, 3 or 4 rural houses may be considered on appropriate sites. Cluster means to bunch or crowd together. In terms of rural housing, it should reflect a traditional 'clachan' type layout where the houses are positioned in an adhoc manner, not regimented or suburban in character, and are accessed by a 'rural type' lane where footpaths and public lighting will not normally be required.

An outline application for cluster development should be accompanied by a design brief, including sketches of proposed dwellings, details of size, footprint, form, arrangement and orientation and a photomontage of their setting. Proposed dwellings should illustrate conformity in design and materials but should not be identical. In order to facilitate a clustering effect, site areas should be 0.2 hectares (0.5 acres) and dwellings should have a maximum floor area, including any extensions, of 220 square metres.

Applications for permission and permission consequent must be made on an individual house basis by the intended occupier who shall be subject to the qualifying criteria for one-off houses as set out in paragraph 4.6.2.

Policy

- SS 24** To only permit clustered development of 2, 3 or 4 dwellings which reflect a traditional 'clachan' type layout, which can be incorporated into the landscape in an unobtrusive, discreet manner and be accessed by a rural style lane.
- SS 25** To require that any dwelling permitted within a clustered development has a site area of 0.2 hectares (0.5 acres) and a maximum floor area, including any extensions thereto, of 220 square metres.

4.6.6 Replacement Houses

There will be a presumption against the demolition of vernacular dwellings where restoration or adaptation is a feasible option.

Replacement dwellings will only be considered where the roof, external and internal walls are substantially intact and where the structure was last used as a habitable dwelling. Sites on which replacement dwellings are sought tend to be naturally secluded with mature landscaped settings. Hence, the replacement dwelling should incorporate the footprint of the replaced house in order to avail of existing landscape features and vegetation, thus enabling the new development to be accommodated and absorbed in the landscape in an unobtrusive manner.



Policy

- SS 26** To apply a presumption against the demolition of vernacular dwellings where restoration or adaptation is a feasible option.
- SS 27** To permit a replacement dwelling only where the existing development is deemed unsuitable for restoration but where the roof, external and internal walls of the existing dwelling is substantially intact and where the structure was last used as a habitable dwelling.
- SS 28** To restrict the floor area of the replacement dwelling to a maximum of 200 square metres or an additional 25% of the footprint of the existing house, whichever is the greater.
- SS 29** To require the replacement dwelling to incorporate the footprint of the replaced house in order to avail of existing landscape features and vegetation.

4.6.7 Refurbishment of Existing Dwellings in Rural Areas

The stock of traditional vernacular houses in County Louth, including thatched houses, has decreased alarmingly in recent years. Whilst not perhaps affording the standard of accommodation required by the current generation, these homes are an integral part of the heritage of the county and should be retained. They usually occupy mature, well secluded settings and as such, sit very comfortably within the landscape. With carefully designed extensions and sensitive restoration, these houses can be brought up to a standard capable of meeting modern day demands. Hence, the council will encourage applicants and owners along this path in the interests of preserving Louth's valuable vernacular heritage.



Policy

- SS 30** To encourage the sensitive refurbishment of existing vernacular dwellings in the interest of preserving the built heritage of County Louth.
- SS 31** To ensure that the design of the proposed refurbishment does not erode the siting and setting and the character of the existing building.
- SS 32** To ensure that the design, scale and materials used in the refurbishment are in keeping and sympathetic with the original dwelling and the size of any extension does not exceed 100% of the existing floor area.
- SS 33** To require that mature landscape features are retained and enhanced, as appropriate.

4.6.8 Accommodation for Dependent Relatives

The demand for accommodation to meet the needs of older people and dependent relatives will inevitably increase due to the rise in average life expectancy. This has led

to a demand for custom built extensions to family dwellings or the conversion of garages or other structures within the curtilage for this purpose. The council sees considerable merit in this form of accommodation for older and dependent people and will favourably consider any such proposal subject the following criteria.

Accommodation for dependant relatives by way of extension to the existing dwelling shall:

- Be attached to the existing dwelling
- Be linked internally with the existing dwelling
- Not exceed a gross floor areas of 50 square metres
- Not have a separate access provided to the front elevation of the dwelling

Where it is proposed to convert and/or extend an existing garage or outbuilding within the curtilage for this purpose, planning permission will depend on whether the development provides a modest scale of accommodation only and that the unit remains in the same ownership as that of the existing dwelling on the site. Where an extension to an existing garage or outbuilding is required in order to provide a satisfactory level of accommodation, the existing and proposed additional floor area shall not exceed 50 square metres.

Proposals must also accord with normal planning considerations such as the ability of the site to accommodate the unit, compliance with environmental standards, septic tank requirements, drainage, water and amenity.

Policy

SS 34 To facilitate the provision of accommodation for older people and dependant relatives within the curtilage of the existing family home subject to the compliance with the above criteria.

4.6.9 Site Size

It is not only the number of one-off dwellings in the countryside that has a negative impact on the character of rural areas but also their size and design. The favourable economic conditions and increased incomes over the past decade have resulted in a demand for much larger houses, many with floor areas exceeding 400 square metres. These larger houses, many of which are poorly designed and located on restricted sites, are very obtrusive and damaging to the rural landscape and environment.

In the *County Development Plan 2003 - 2009*, the council considered it necessary to relate the size of the house to the area of the site. However the restriction applied has not proved sufficient to lessen the impact of larger houses being built in rural areas. Therefore new site size requirements as set out in table 4.5 below have been introduced.

Table 4.5: House Size and Site Area Ratio

House size in square metres (m ²)	Minimum site size in hectares	Minimum site size in acres
200 or under	0.2	0.5
200 to 300	0.6	1.5
300 to 400	1.2	3.0
400 plus	3.0	7.4

Policy

SS 35 To require that the minimum site areas as set out in table 4.5 are provided for one-off rural houses relative to the total floor area of the house.

4.6.10 Ribbon Development

The visual amenity of many areas throughout the rural parts of the county, and especially in locations adjacent to settlements, has suffered greatly by the creation of ribbon development. In addition to damaging the appearance of rural areas, this type of development also detracts from the setting of towns and villages and can result in road safety issues.

Having regard to the *Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines 2005*, ribbon development is defined as 'four or more houses in a continuous row along a public road'.

Policy

SS 36 To prevent the creation of ribbon development by not permitting more than four houses in a row along any public road. A minimum gap of 400 metres shall be maintained between such developments.

SS 37 To preserve a clear break of a minimum of 400 metres between the boundary of existing settlements and any permitted development along adjoining roads.

4.7.11 Infill Development

Infill development is described as development that takes place within a small gap between existing developments. The *Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines 2005* require consideration to be given to the degree to which a proposal might be considered infill, the degree to which existing development would be extended or whether distinct areas of ribboning would coalesce as a result of infill development.

Policy

- SS 38** To permit infill development where a small gap sufficient to accommodate one house only, within an otherwise substantial and continuously built up frontage.
- SS 39** To apply a presumption against development that would exacerbate ribbon development by extension or leading to the joining up existing developed areas along public roads.

4.6.12 Extensions to Dwellings

Where additional accommodation is required, an extension to an existing dwelling often affords a more sustainable approach than the construction of a new dwelling. Proposed extensions should complement the original building, where applicable harmonise with adjoining properties and not have an undue adverse impact on the visual amenities of the area. While the council will have regard to special housing needs, such as the housing needs of extending families and people with disabilities, extensions which are out of character, proportion or not incidental to the main dwelling will not be considered favourably. The size of any extension should be proportional to and in keeping with the character of the existing structure.

Policy

- SS 40** To limit the size of extensions to not more than 100% of the floor area of the original dwelling subject to the compliance with the house size and site area requirements as set down in table 4.5.
- SS 41** To require that the size of any extension be in proportion to and in character with the existing structure in terms of design and use of materials.

4.6.13 Access

Safe access to any new housing development must be provided, not only in terms of the visibility from a proposed entrance but also in terms of the impact on existing road traffic, through generation of stopping and turning movements.

All applications will be required to show, at a minimum scale of 1:500, how the required visibility standards appropriate to the class of road as detailed in table 8.4 of the Plan, can be met. Where compliance with these standards can only be met by removing large stretches of roadside hedgerow, ditches or stone boundaries, consideration should be given to an alternative site in the interest of protecting the landscape character and visual amenity of the area.

Policy

- SS 42** To require applicants to demonstrate compliance with the appropriate visibility and traffic safety standards as set down in table 8.4 of the Plan.
- SS 43** To require that new accesses are located so as to minimise the impact on existing roadside boundaries.

4.6.14 Garages

There is an increasing demand for larger garages, often incorporating first floor accommodation. Some resemble industrial and commercial buildings complete with roller shutter doors while others resemble dwellings that are complete with curtains and blinds. In essence, this has resulted in structures which have a very significant visual impact in the rural landscape and add to the scale and bulk of the dwelling. In order to protect the landscape character of rural areas from the combined visual impact of houses and garages and to protect the residential amenities of adjoining dwellings, the council considers it necessary to limit the size and scale of domestic garages.

Garages or other domestic structures should normally be separate from the house and sited in such a manner as to reduce visual impact. Garages integral to the dwelling will be subject to the maximum floor area of 25 square metres. Detached garages shall not exceed 50 square metres in floor area, 4.5 metres to ridge height and external walls and roofing materials shall match those of the dwelling. Toilet facilities or floor space within roof areas shall not be provided. The use of garages shall be restricted to parking of private vehicles and storage incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling house within the curtilage in which it is sited.

Policy

- SS 44** To limit the size and scale of domestic garages to 50 square metres in order to reduce the combined visual impact of the house and garage on the character of the landscape and to protect the amenities of adjoining residential property.
- SS 45** To restrict commercial or other uses which are not compatible with residential amenity.

4.6.15 Roadside Boundaries

The protection of the rural landscape, wildlife and the dense network of hedgerow boundaries are very important to landscape protection, biodiversity conservation and environmental sustainability. It is recognised that the accumulated effect of the removal of hedgerows to facilitate one-off houses in rural areas can result in a very significant loss of habitats, flora and fauna and detract seriously from the aesthetic value of the landscape.

Normally, there is some alteration and removal of roadside hedgerows and ditches required as part of development, in order to provide an access. Such alterations are often essential in the interest of road safety and in achieving sightlines at entrances. While road safety is of paramount importance, it is also important to strike a balance between these two issues. Too often, however, it has been the practice to remove all roadside hedgerows and ditches just to enable the new dwelling to be seen and to facilitate the construction of inappropriate boundary walls and entrances.

Planning permission may not be considered favourably where excessive lengths of roadside hedgerow or trees need to be removed to facilitate the development. Any planting required shall be carried out concurrently with the development of the dwelling or in the first planting season following commencement of works on site.

Policy

- SS 46** To require that new accesses are located having regard to both road safety and the protection of existing roadside hedgerows, trees and boundaries.
- SS 47** To require, where it is necessary to modify or remove the existing roadside boundary in the interest of traffic safety, that the existing boundary is translocated behind the visibility sight line or that a new boundary consistent with the nature and character of the area is planted behind the visibility sight line.

4.6.16 Wastewater

Groundwater and surface water are vulnerable and can easily be contaminated from the disposal of effluent from wastewater treatment systems. Concentrations of treatment systems in areas add to this risk. Therefore, applicants shall satisfy the council that the method of disposing of wastewater whether by means of a convention septic tank and percolation area or other wastewater treatment system, is fully in compliance with the guidelines and requirements of the *Environmental Protection Agency Guidelines for Individual Wastewater Treatment Systems* and meets with the policies and criteria as set down in Chapter 10 Environment of the Plan.

Policy

- SS 48** To protect groundwater and surface water from contamination from domestic effluent by ensuring that all sites requiring individual waste water treatment systems are assessed by suitability qualified persons in accordance with the recommendation contained in the *Wastewater Treatment Manuals - Treatment Systems for Single Houses*, published by the by the Environmental Protection Agency, 2000.

4.7 Rural Housing Design and Siting Criteria

Landscapes in County Louth vary greatly from uplands areas in the northern and southern ends of the county, the rolling farmlands of mid Louth, Drumlin landscape towards the west of the county and exposed coastal landscapes. Variations in vernacular house design in the past were normally a direct response to the local environment.

In the past, buildings were orientated to make best use of shelter and sun, using natural features such as the lie of the land, combined with hedgerows and shelter belts to protect them from the elements. In more modern times, with the advent of excavation machinery and modern building materials and methods, there has been much less importance placed on the need for shelter from the weather and maximising sunlight for light and warmth. This has resulted in much exposed and prominent development which in addition to being unsustainable in terms of energy use, has also detracted from the visual attractiveness of many areas of rural Louth. Many modern houses are positioned on site 'to be seen' and appear to have been 'dropped' into rural landscapes from an urban setting.

A great deal can be learnt from examination of traditional methods of site layout which appear more integrated in the landscape. Less sensitive sites can take much more individualistic houses, whereas, more prominent or sensitive sites require greater skill and care.

Policy

SS 49 Applicants for one-off dwellings and houses in rural settlements shall demonstrate how the proposed design and siting of the dwelling complies with the document *Building Sensitive and Sustainably in County Louth* and the requirements detailed below.

1. All applications shall include full drawings, illustrations and details of all hard and soft landscaping associated with the proposed dwelling. These shall include all boundary specifications including those at the entrance to the site.
2. Where stone is proposed to be used for any element of the dwelling or its curtilage, the applicant must demonstrate to the council that it is from the locality or that there is a consistency in colour that links it successfully with other stone structures, ditches, rock outcrops in the immediate vicinity.
3. Where shelter landscaping, new boundary planting and any roadside planting form part of a development, these works must be carried out to the satisfaction of the planning authority in the first planting season (November to April) following commencement of development on site.

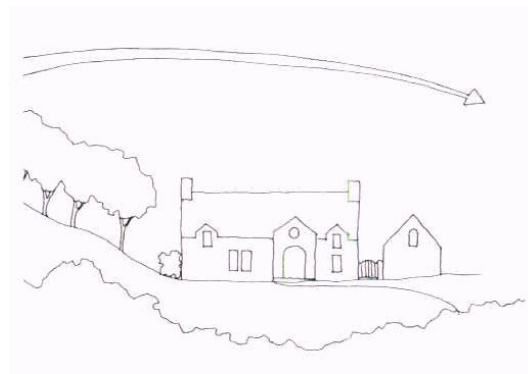
4.7.1 Site – Sensitive Design

Site sensitive design ensures that the new development appears visually integrated and sympathetic with its surrounding landscape.

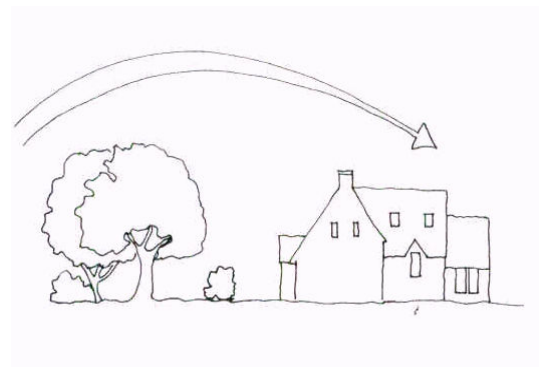
4.7.2 Build into the Landscape

Study the alignment and orientation of older houses in the area, such as the gable face westwards to the wind in order to maximise shelter and reduce exposure. Choose the most sheltered part of the site selected.

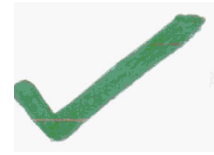
Figure 4.1 House Set into the Landscape



Shelter using the slope and tree planting



Shelter from prevailing wind



Shelter from winds using building forms

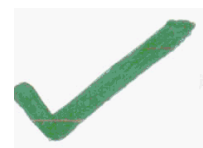
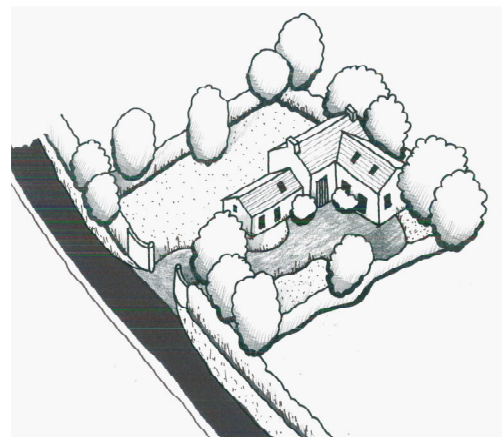
- Use areas already sheltered by trees, hedgerows, ditches and walls.
- Build below the skyline
- Look for a naturally occurring shelf and make use of natural folds on the landscape - set house into landscape.

Figure 4.2 Breaking the Skyline



Figure 4.3: Secluded Site

- Set back from the road, retain the frontage and other boundary hedgerows and treatments.
- Create secluded and private gardens. Avoid a 'sea' of lawn. Suburban layouts and garden treatments should be avoided. Rural gardens should provide enclosure, privacy and semi-wild habitats. Hedging to comprise of native and local species. Leylandii, conifers and pampas grass are unsuitable.



- Avoid parking and manoeuvring areas to the front and large platforms of tarmac. Place driveway to the side or rear.
- Planting zones between path and house softens appearance.

4.7.3 Build, Shape and Plant to create Further Shelter

- Use shelter planting which will also soften the form of the house in the landscape.
- Use enclosing walls together with outbuildings to create, define and shelter gardens and yards.

Figure 4.4: Dwelling set into the Landscape

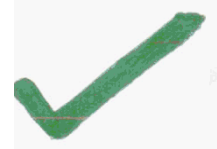
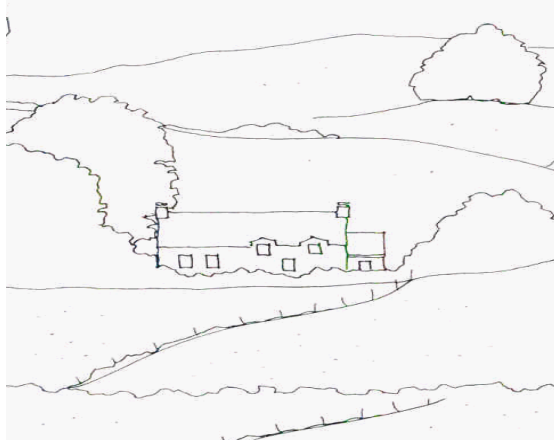
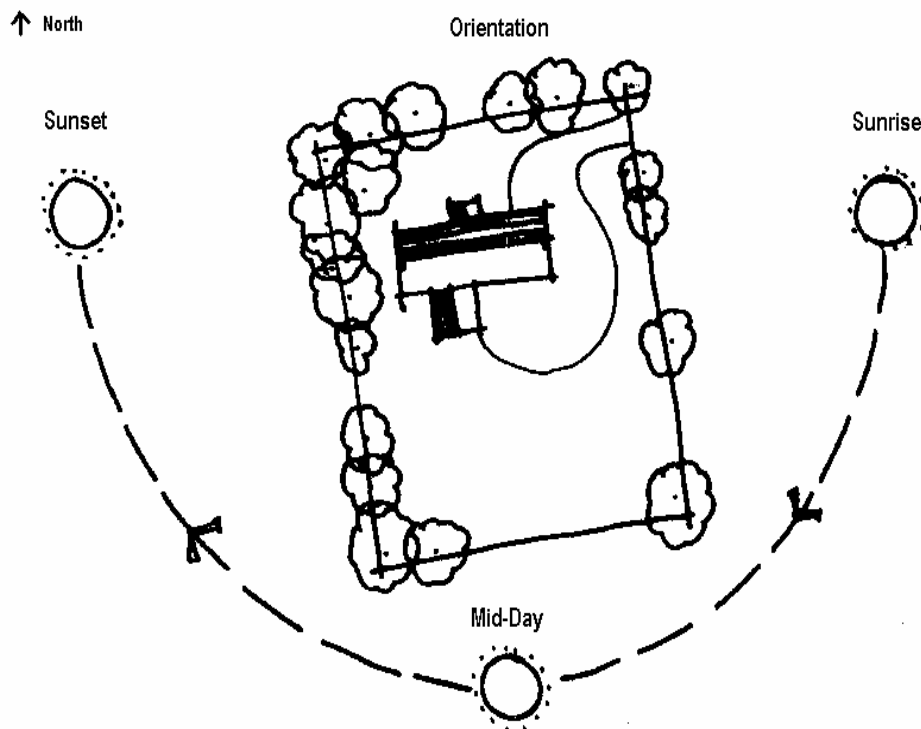


Figure 4.5: Exploit the Sun

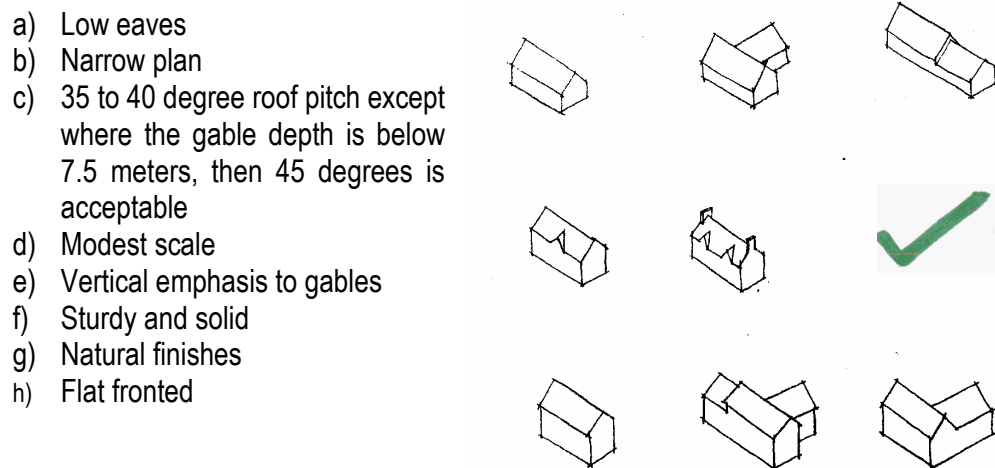


- Orientate the house to maximise daylight and solar gain in order to create a brighter home and reduce fuel costs. 30% energy savings can be achieved if a house is orientated within 15 degrees of south. Glazed south facing elevations capture the sun's energy and limiting glazing on north elevations aids heat conservation.

4.7.4 Presence in the Landscape - Scale and Form

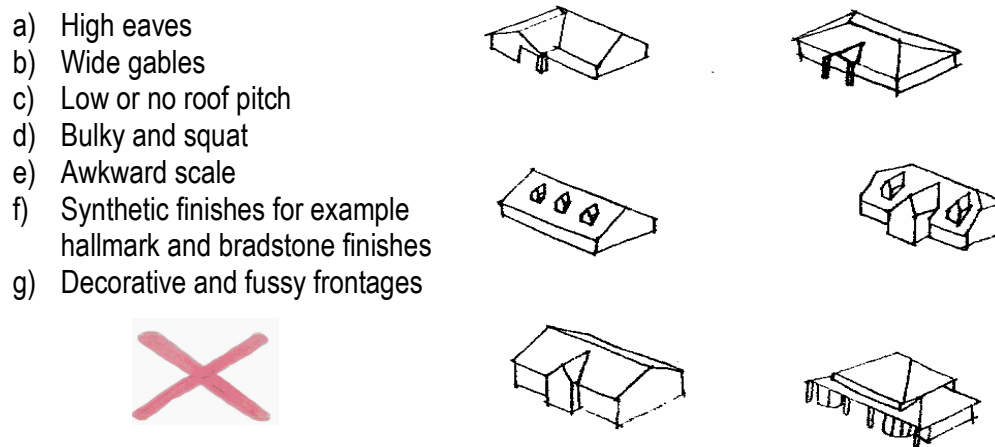
- The scale of buildings must be appropriate to its setting. Single storey houses in uplands and coastal areas are preferable where they are traditionally prevalent.
- The width of the dwelling frontage shall not exceed 14 metres for a two-storey, 18 metres for a single storey or 20 metres where the roofline is broken or frontage is set back.
- The external gable depth shall not exceed 9 metres.
- Front elevations should not have any projections or returns other than a simple pitch roof storm porch if desired. In the case of 2 storey dwellings, a porch projected to first floor if central may be considered.
- A large house requires a large site.
- Only use simple forms as illustrated:

Figure 4.6: Simple Form



- Complicated and alien forms as illustrated below should be avoided.

Figure 4.7: Complicated and Alien Forms

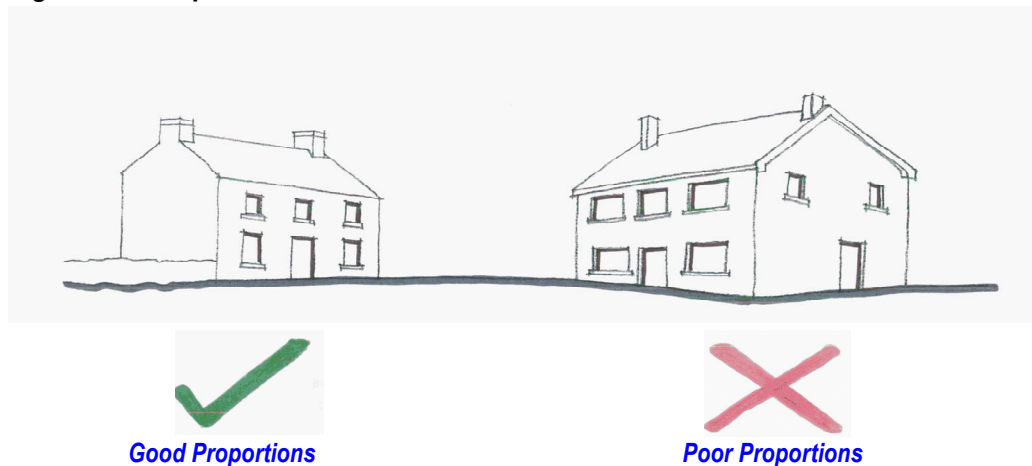


4.7.5 Proportions

There are three essential factors:

1. Height of the building relative to its openings. Openings should exhibit a vertical emphasis. Houses should be designed to minimise the distance between the top of the ground floor windows and the sill of the top floor window.
2. A high solid-to-void relationship, that is, greater wall surface area than the area of windows and door openings.
3. A simple, symmetrical arrangement of opening.

Figure 4.8: Proportions



4.7.6 Materials

- Use materials and finishes that are traditional to the area and in keeping with the character of the landscape.
- Stone used on ancillary 'wings' or on other elements such as garden or boundary walls can provide an attractive contrast and help reduce the apparent size of the dwelling. Where it is proposed to use stone on the dwelling or to construct boundaries, where possible it should be of the locality so that there is a consistency in colour that links it successfully with other stone structures, ditches, rock outcrops in the immediate vicinity. Stone alien in colour and type prevalent to the locality could appear incongruous and will not be permitted.
- Inappropriate use of stone including random bits for facing effects, two-dimensional facing panels and gable treatments and piers in stone walls is not considered appropriate.

4.7.7 Boundaries

Careful design can integrate new dwellings into the landscape, in-particularly where new vehicular openings in roadside boundaries are integrated with existing boundary treatments. Natural boundaries are also invaluable habitats for both plants and animals which contribute to the biodiversity of the county.

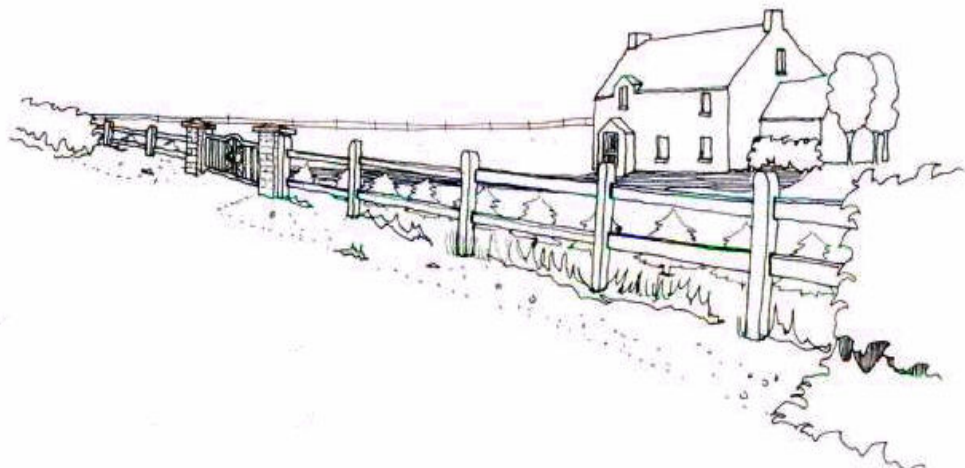
- Chose a site with at least two and preferably three existing boundaries, such as natural hedgerows or stone walls, to soften the impact of the dwelling.

- Preference must be given to the accessing off an existing laneway or sharing an existing access, as an alternative to providing a new access directly off the road.
- New frontage should be incorporated carefully into existing roadside treatments using materials and landscape treatments which are compatible with the location, such as banks, hedgerows and dry stone work.
- Rendered stone walls, piers cast into oil barrels and diverse planting can create an enchanting entrance.
- Leave existing roadside hedgerows and ditches intact as much as possible. Carefully locate and shape entrance to achieve required sight distances. Minimise damage by locating entrance, for example, where hedge is degraded and where sight lines can be achieved with minimal damage.
- Unsympathetic fencing, walls and planting should be avoided.
- Any sections of post and rail fencing and ranch style fencing will only be considered acceptable where it is back planted with a hedgerow of mixed native species matching those in the vicinity of the site.
- Within settlements, common roadside treatments should be provided.

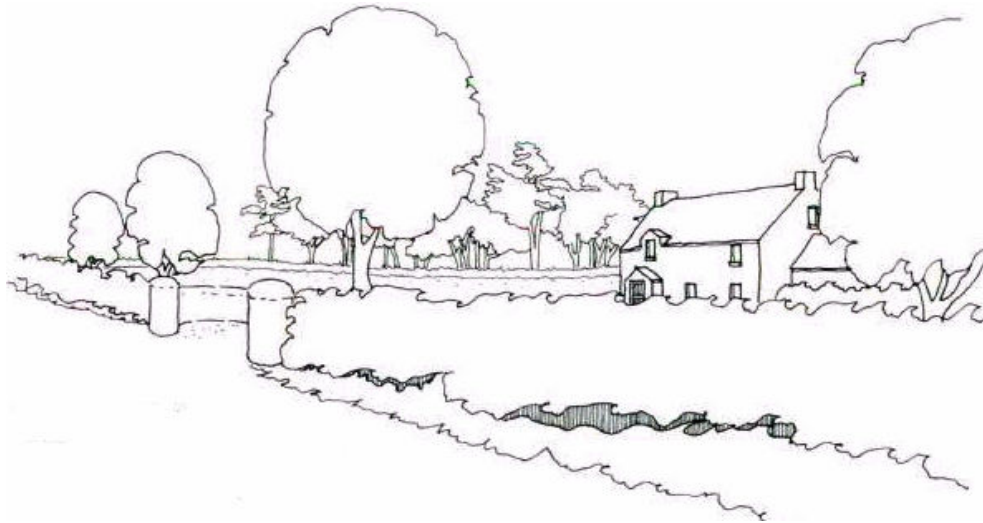
Figure 4.9: Roadside Frontage



The new opening should integrate into the existing roadside treatment. The most favourable point of access is where an existing hedgerow is degraded, or a tree through age or condition requires removal.



All too often the opening appears as a gash in the hedgerow, filled in with an inappropriate boundary enclosure such as concrete fencing.



Judicious design can minimise hedgerow and tree removal by carefully locating and shaping the entrance gateway to achieve the required sightlines

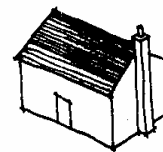
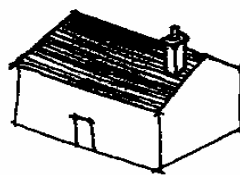
4.7.8 Details

Listed below are a number of design details which have important bearing on the appearance of rural houses.

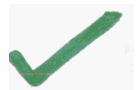
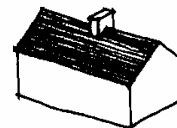
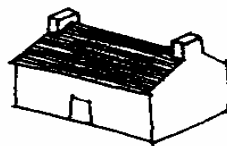
- Minimal eaves avoiding box soffit and fascia.
- Avoid thick tiles on small roofs.
- Chimney breast should be internal, with the chimney stack positioned centrally on the ridge, preferably at the gable end of the dwelling
- Carefully proportion chimneys - through and across the ridge line and flush with the gable.

Figure 4.10: Chimney Detail

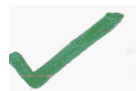
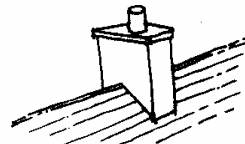
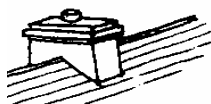
Inappropriately proportioned and positioned



Appropriately proportioned and positioned

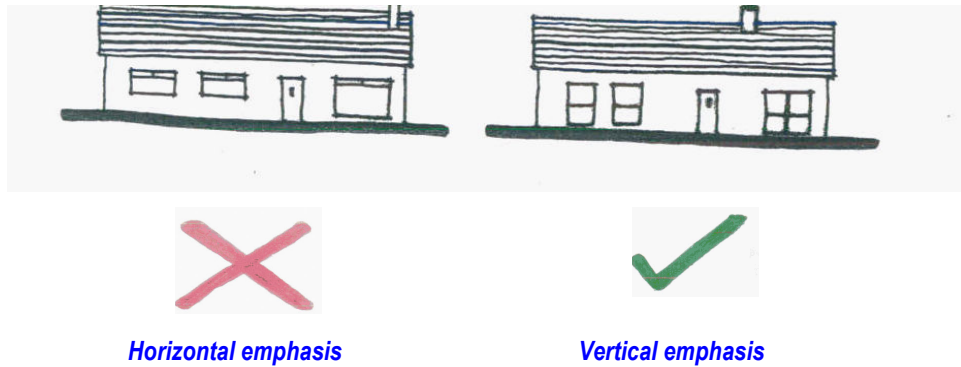


Through and access the Ridge Line



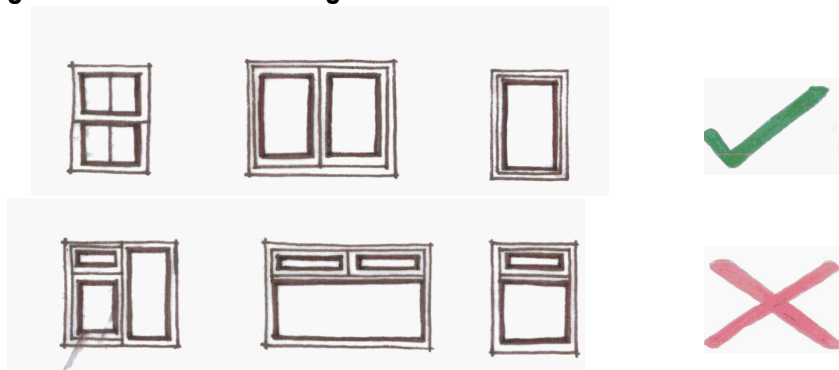
- The size, shape and arrangements of windows are important. The range of opening sizes should be kept to a minimum and the shape of openings simple, with a vertical emphasis generally preferable to horizontal. Windows should be centred either exactly on the axis of symmetry or purposely of it.

Figure 4.11: Window arrangement



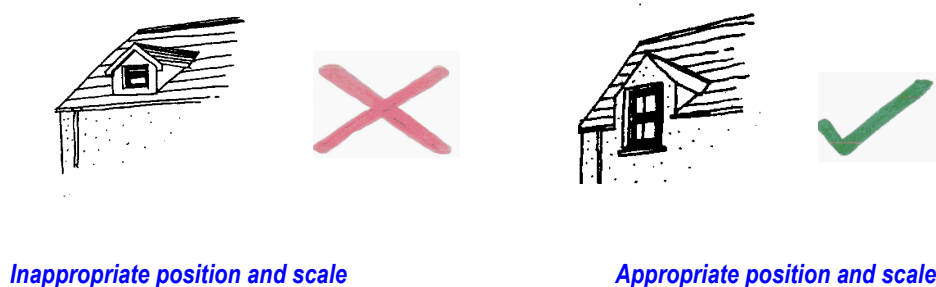
- Window glazing should divide window exactly symmetrically horizontally and vertically with glass panes of an identical or as near as possible identical size. Mock Georgian glazing is inappropriate and should be avoided.

Figure 4.12: Window Glazing



- Dormers are preferable on unseen roof slopes. Where used, simple wall plated dormers are preferred. Slate, plaster or stained timber should be used for side cladding and PVC should be avoided.

Figure 4.13: Dormer windows



Chapter 4 Settlement Strategy

- Flashings which allow roof lights to sit flush with the plane of the roof slope should be used.
- The design of doors to both house and garage should be simple. Mock Georgian, mock Tudor and PVC should be avoided.
- Where porches are proposed they must be simple in form and detail. Suburban type porches or the use of different materials is considered inappropriate.
- The shape of conservatories and extensions should be simple, consistent to the shape and in proportion to the dwelling to which it is attached.

