

Section 1 Introduction

One of Ireland's larger counties, Donegal has long been admired for its outstanding and diverse scenic rural landscapes, which include rolling fertile plains and valleys, magnificent upland and mountain, spectacular rugged coastline and a profusion of inland waterways and loughs. Our landscape is not only unique in its diversity and beauty; it has had and continues to have an essential economic function. Within this landscape the traditions of agriculture, forestry and fishing continue while tourism, a more recent economic growth area, expands and intensifies.

The quality of our landscape is essential to our economic and cultural well-being. In 1973 the National Coastline Study found that within the County's coastal zone Donegal has the highest proportion of sublime and highly scenic combined categories in Ireland. Ballymastocker Bay has been voted the world's second most beautiful seascape. Tourism alone accounted for a revenue gain in excess of €200m in 2000. Furthermore the value of living within pleasant environments, which are as unspoiled and unpolluted as they are diverse and scenically beautiful, cannot be measured.

In recent times Donegal has experienced unprecedented economic growth, which in turn has resulted in increased development pressure. The Council received 5,265 applications for individual houses in 2004, the highest of all the counties for this type of development. Compounding development pressure is an emerging trend towards unsuitable and insensitive pattern book dwellings of suburban design and construction. Such buildings are unsuitable within a rural context and have little or no regard for local characteristics, requirements of the individual, landscape sensitivity, site surrounds or orientation.

Modern building practices and site manipulation methods disregard traditional prohibiting factors such as slope, exposure and naturally occurring landforms. Such practices can undermine the landscape value of Donegal, threatening tourism and cumulatively degrading scenic amenity and sense of place.

Clear policies are needed to guide appropriate development. The aim of this document is to guide development in accordance with council policy and in a sustainable manner, allowing for population growth and development. The Council acknowledges that flexibility within design guidance may be appropriate in certain circumstances and at certain locations with regard to high quality contemporary design. However, the challenge is to direct development appropriately, ensuring both the creation of vibrant rural communities and the protection of our valuable landscape asset.

County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2012 (as varied)



County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2012 (as varied)

Section 2 Aim

Donegal has an opportunity to develop its own unique style of architecture. The aim of this guide is to increase knowledge of that which constitutes good and sensitive design and encourage appropriate sustainable development.

There is a growing appreciation of our traditional and vernacular building forms and increased concern that new buildings are rapidly and irrevocably changing our rural landscapes forever.

The Donegal rural landscape is a finite resource, the development of which is a joint and shared responsibility. In particular, there is an onus of responsibility on those who prepare and submit plans on behalf of the public to guide, advise and give suitable direction. The Council strongly recommends that applicants for planning permission seek the professional services of a qualified architect.

The Council does not wish to impose a sameness of design on every applicant for planning permission; rather it aims to encourage creative and innovative designs that celebrate and reflect local roots and site specifics.

The guide focuses on fundamental criteria that should be addressed in all the build process stages. It is aimed at applicants, planners, builders, designers, elected members, community groups and council officials.

This Design Guide must be read in conjunction with the Core Document of the County Development Plan for the complete statement of policy.

All construction should be designed and constructed in accordance with the Building Regulations 1997 and subsequent amendments, including Part M, 2000, Part F and L 2002.

All developments must comply with the Development Guidelines & Technical Standards Appendix A of the County Development Plan 2006.

County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2012 (as varied)



Section 3 Why have a guide?

3.1 Create Places and Sustain Communities

Few would disagree that Donegal's unique **character** and **sense of place** is derived not only from its outstanding natural landscape but also from its traditional buildings, which appear to merge seamlessly with their host environments, thereby exerting a **Low Impact** on them.

New rural developments are often inspired by pattern book or suburban designs, widely reproduced regardless of location and site suitability. This can result in a "mish-mash" of architectural styles that are wholly inappropriate within a rural context and have a high level of impact within localities.

Dwellings developed in this way appear to be dropped onto landscapes, they cannot foster a sense of community or place as they display characteristics that are not locally rooted. Such developments effectively weaken local identity.

New Rural housing should draw from distinct regional identities, local materials and those aspects of local traditional building which remain constant, durable and timeless, thereby maintaining links with the past, creating a sense of place and preserving a sense of shared history, heritage and continuity.

This guide seeks to encourage the growing appreciation of our traditional built heritage whilst also encouraging high standards of innovative and contemporary design, thereby creating attractive and unique living places.

County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2012 (as varied)



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3.2 Mitigating Impact

A balance between the traditional and the contemporary can be achieved. Figures derived from planning applications received by the Council for traditional style houses show that where vernacular features have been adapted in new housing, the floor area averaged at over 2,000sqft.

New development can sympathise and integrate with the landscape, and successfully reflect the legacy of those traditional buildings that have laid the foundations for our rural communities, without compromising on modern living requirements.

New rural houses should not exert unduly high impacts on the localities in which they are developed. The impact of new housing can be lowered through sensitive, thoughtful and forward thinking siting and design.

The promotion of **Low Impact Development** will be a recurrent theme in this guide. It is anticipated that by investing a little additional time and thought, in the initial planning stages of development, quality of life for rural dwellers will be improved and costs reduced.

Low Impact Development can be defined as the use of planning and design techniques that minimize the undesirable impacts of development.

Your home can be developed in such a manner as to ensure the following benefits

Social	ensuring an attractive living environment for everyone
Cultural	protecting heritage, sense of place and local identity
Infrastructural	reducing congestion, journey time, electricity & fuel usage
Environmental	reducing pollution & heat loss, sustaining our environment
Economic	minimizing costs, waste & encouraging tourism expansion
Personal	improving quality of life and reducing personal costs

3.3 A Sense of Guardianship

Any new development will **permanently** alter the landscape in which it is sited. It is the responsibility of each of us to ensure that the heritage, landscape and environment left to us is preserved and that the buildings we pass on enhance and integrate with our rural areas.

We are the present guardians of the countryside for those who will come after us. Our built legacy should be durable, positive and flexible enough for those following us to utilise. The heritage we create for future generations should be one that can be enjoyed, not regretted.



3.4 Objectives

To encourage an increased awareness of the range and diversity of our County's landscapes and the kinds of design appropriate to them.

To promote sympathetic and sustainable **Low Impact Development** and to discourage the growing trend of **High Impact** suburban style housing within rural landscapes.

To promote a new style of contemporary design unique to the County through models of best practice and drawing from the aesthetics of vernacular architecture.

To increase quality of design and through this the quality of life for rural dwellers.

To increase awareness of **Low Impact Development**, energy efficiency and associated cost savings which may be achieved through thoughtful siting, design and use of renewable energies.

To reduce uncertainty and promote a greater understanding of how to achieve planning permission, thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Planning Process.

To achieve clarity on what constitutes good siting and design.

