

1. Introduction

County Donegal is urbanising at a faster rate than ever experienced before in its history. The unprecedented demand for new building has resulted in a buoyant construction industry with welcome associated employment and increased scale of supply. However recent emphasis has shifted away from the provision of attractive and individual places to live or work and has become focused more on the provision of large numbers of new buildings... fast.

A pattern of supplying homogenous, bland and unsympathetically treated buildings for the housing of businesses and services has emerged. This is coupled with the development of increasingly standardised, low density multiple housing developments, with many meeting only the basic specified technical standards and requirements. Such developments are often characterised by limited variation, poor layouts, minimal landscaping, minimal open space provision and a general lack of quality.

Developments such as this cater only for the physical needs of users while ignoring recreational, cultural and emotional needs. Too frequently new development patterns are simply reproduced, from town to town and from estate to estate, resulting in a sameness that cumulatively detracts from overall town and village attractiveness and identity.

Unattractive, impersonal living environments are unsustainable in that they cannot foster a sense of place and therefore limit any sense of community ownership or pride. Many new homes, for example, are simply seen as a stepping-stone to better things and are aimed in the main at the first time buyer market. Such developments often become saturated with high turn over rental properties, suffering from associated social and maintenance problems.

Good urban design can shape the quality, safety and sustainability of our built living environments. New development provides the opportunity to create individual places, which will be not only appreciated by future generations but also cherished by them.

County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2012 (as varied)

Our built environment should be flexible and dynamic enough to accommodate the changing needs of society including increases in the service sector, smaller and single person households, working parents and access for those with disabilities. The changing needs of the individual should also be fully accommodated, as a child or a parent and as an older member of society.

It is an objective of the Council to ensure that new development creates places which are attractive, distinctive, sustainable and safe, meeting not only the physical needs of their users but also the emotional, recreational and cultural needs of the communities they house.

2. Why Have a Guide

2.1 Retaining Local Identity and Distinctiveness

The aim of this guide is to encourage the development of quality urban environments, ensuring new development respects local landscape settings and existing built forms. Through thoughtful urban design this guide seeks to ensure that new developments encompass an inherent sense of place and distinctiveness, one that links with and enhances rather than detracts from local character and identity.

2.2 Creating Places, Encouraging Communities

It is a widely accepted truism that attractive places attract people, hence the oft used expression "location, location, location". By improving the quality of our built environments we will not only attract people to live in them but to invest in and even visit them. More people living within a coherent and compact urban fabric simply translates into more services, more business and more employment.

Creating exciting, dynamic, interesting and safe places to live, work and frequent ensures permanent and life long residencies with a strong sense of identity, community and civic pride. It also enhances the unique character of what makes a certain place what it is. Attractive places become destinations for would be residents, day-trippers, shoppers and tourists alike.

In short good design ensures environmental, social and economic benefits.

County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2012 (as varied)



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3. Objectives of the Guide

- To enhance the overall attractiveness and image of the County's urban spaces, facilitating both residents and visitors alike.
- To ensure the creation of new places that are distinct and have their own identity, yet reflect and respect the historical built environment and landscape of which they will form part.
- To raise awareness amongst developers, architects, designers, elected members and Planning Authority officials as to how sites should be developed in the best interests of the County.
- To draw attention to the benefits of better design with regard to quality, sustainability and safety, and through this increase quality of life for urban dwellers.
- To encourage creative and innovative design solutions for urban associated problems.

This document is not a restrictive set of rules or a substitute for the employment of experienced and qualified designers. It is a design guide, seeking to provide a disciplined framework to work within, and should be employed as such.

Creating quality living environments requires quality design concepts undertaken by skilful and imaginative designers. The Council strongly urges developers to employ fully qualified individuals to ensure the creation of dynamic new places.

Designers, interested others and those who regulate should come together in the early stages of design, and work together to agree on overall design concepts most appropriate to the site and setting.

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)

