



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

Sustainable Rural and Gaeltacht Housing

DRAFT National Planning Statement

(Subject to assessment for the purposes of
Strategic Environmental Assessment and
Appropriate Assessment)

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Minister's Foreword

To be provided.

James Browne TD

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage

To be provided.

John Cummins TD

Minister of State for Local Government and Planning

1. Introduction

This National Planning Statement (NPS) on Sustainable Rural and Gaeltacht Housing is issued by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), further to the approval of Government under Section 25 of the Planning and Development Act 2024¹ (Act of 2024). The purpose of the NPS is to set out national policy and provide guidance in relation to the proper planning and sustainable development of rural housing.

Section 25 (1) of the Act of 2024 states that the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage may, at any time, with the approval of the Government, issue a National Planning Statement consisting of two parts:

- a. National Planning Policies and Measures set out a policy direction and any national standards that are critical to the implementation of the policy. All Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), development plans, planning schemes or planning frameworks must be 'materially consistent' with National Planning Policies and Measures.
- b. National Planning Policy Guidance provides further detail on the procedures that should be undertaken or outcomes that should be achieved. This may include what further options may be considered or alternative courses of action that may be undertaken. All Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), development plans, planning schemes or planning frameworks must 'take due account of' National Planning Policy Guidance. This may provide flexibility as to how to give effect to the core 'materially consistent' elements of the National Planning Statement.

Where applicable, National Planning Policies and Measures are specified below. The remainder of the document comprises National Planning Policy Guidance.

Within two months of the issuing of this NPS, each regional assembly and planning authority is required to submit a report to the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR)

¹ [Planning and Development Act 2024](#)

setting out its view as to whether its RSES or development plan is materially consistent with the National Planning Policies and Measures.

Where a material inconsistency occurs, regional assemblies and planning authorities must set out the steps that will be taken to remove the inconsistency. Sections 36 and 61 of the Act of 2024 set out the process for RSES/development plans, respectively, to be varied after an NPS is issued.

For clarity, this NPS applies to any application for planning permission that is determined after the issuing of the NPS, and this NPS replaces the *Sustainable Rural Housing Development Guidelines (2005)* which have been revoked on the issuing of this NPS.

1.1 Overview of this NPS

This NPS reflects important changes that have taken place in our planning system in respect of rural housing:

- The Planning and Development Act 2024, which provides for a greater alignment of national, regional and local planning policies and reinforces a planned approach to development;
- The Revised National Planning Framework (2025), including National Policy Objectives (NPOs) which set out a high-level policy framework for the development of rural housing, including the interaction of development in rural areas with the environment;
- Ireland's national, European and international climate and environmental obligations to halt biodiversity loss and transition to climate neutrality by 2050; and
- The Town Centre First Policy Approach for Irish Towns (2022), funding programmes which have been introduced to address vacancy and dereliction, and a focus on infrastructure provision, all of which seek to attract more people to live and work in rural towns and villages.

This NPS builds on the policy approach set out in the Revised NPF, to provide clarity and consistency on where, and how, housing can be developed in different rural and Gaeltacht areas by defining the relevant planning and local needs criteria with which development plans need to be consistent, and in compliance with EU obligations in

relation to the free movement of goods, capital and people and to establish and provide services.

This NPS sets out how national policies on rural and Gaeltacht housing should be practically and consistently implemented by planning authorities in making and varying their development plans and in the operation of the development management system by planning authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála.

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2. Policy Context and Objectives

2.1 Policy Context for Housing in Rural and Gaeltacht Areas

The Revised **National Planning Framework** (NPF) seeks to ensure vibrant rural communities, protecting areas that are under strong urban influence from over-development on the one hand, while facilitating new rural housing for those with a local rural housing need, and to encourage population to be sustained in other rural areas including those that have experienced low growth or decline in recent decades, on the other. In support of this overall objective, the following NPF National Policy Objectives (NPOs) are of direct relevance to sustainable rural housing development:

National Policy Objective (NPO) 24:

Support the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and by managing the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.

National Policy Objective (NPO) 26:

Continue to support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services.

National Policy Objective (NPO) 28:

Ensure, in providing for the development of rural housing, that a distinction is made between areas under urban influence, i.e. within the commuter catchment of cities and large towns and centres of employment, and elsewhere:

- In rural areas under urban influence, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic or social need to live in a rural area and siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements;

- In rural areas elsewhere, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements.

National Policy Objective (NPO) 29:

Project the need for single housing in the countryside through the local authority's overall Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) tool and county development plan core strategy processes.

National Policy Objective (NPO) 39:

Support the implementation of language plans in Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks.

Ireland's **Climate Action Plan 2025** sets out to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions and deliver on climate targets to 2030. Under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 - 2021, sectoral emissions ceilings have been set in the areas of electricity, transport, buildings (commercial and public, residential), industry and agriculture. The transport sector represents the second largest source of emissions in Ireland. Measures identified to reduce transport include a reduction in travel associated with commuting and a move to more sustainable settlement patterns.

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) State of the Environment Report 2024 states that around 25% of all housing in Ireland tends to be in the form of single houses in the countryside, developed on agricultural land and that this can present challenges for service provision such as delivery of public transport or active travel solutions for rural populations and provision of water and sanitary services.

In November 2025, the Government launched a new housing action plan **Delivering Homes, Building Communities**. The Plan is wide-ranging and includes an objective to issue a National Planning Statement (NPS) under Section 25 of the Planning and Development Act of 2024 in order to provide consistency in the approach to rural housing across the Country, and an objective to publish a National Planning Statement relating to housing in Gaeltacht areas.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) complements and builds on Government policies such as **Our Rural Future 2021-2025** and **Our Living Islands National Islands Policy 2023-2033**.

Our Rural Future is the whole-of-Government policy for sustainable rural development in Ireland, which provides investment and supports to strengthen the economic, social and cultural development of rural areas and facilitate balanced regional growth between urban centres and rural areas.

The regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages is a key focus of Our Rural Future. In this context it is an action of the framework to update the 2005 Rural Housing Guidelines, to address rural housing in a broader rural development and settlement context.

Our Gaeltacht areas and offshore islands are an integral part of the Irish countryside and hold particular importance in the country's culture. The Irish language is an essential part of the community's identity and heritage on the Gaeltacht islands. The Gaeltacht Act 2012 gives statutory effect to the Language Planning Process under which language plans are prepared for Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas.

2.2 Investment Programmes to Support Rural Areas

A number of major Government funding streams are aligned closely with the Town Centre First Policy Approach for Irish Towns, launched in 2022, with a focus on tackling vacancy and dereliction, increasing housing supply and providing the necessary facilities and public infrastructure to attract more people to rural settlements.

Under *Delivering Homes, Building Communities*, the national housing action plan to 2030, the Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Ready to Build scheme, assists local authorities in making serviced sites in towns and villages available to individuals at a discount on market value. This provides a viable and attractive alternative for families who want to build their own home in a rural area, while still having easy access to a range of local services and amenities.

This, coupled with the CPO Activation Programme, the Croí Cónaithe Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant and Call 3 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

(URDF), are supporting rural towns and villages across Ireland in delivering new homes that respond to the varying needs and aspirations of their communities and tackle issues relating to vacancy and dereliction.

The Government is also committed to delivering infrastructure to support housing delivery across the Country.

Specifically in relation to rural areas, the Rural Water Programme provides investment in Group Water Schemes and in water and wastewater infrastructure for rural towns and villages, and the Private Well Grant and Domestic Waste Water Treatment System Grant schemes provide practical financial assistance to all households nationally, supporting housing delivery and ensuring environmental compliance where connection to a public system is not feasible.

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3. Key Principles for Sustainable Rural and Gaeltacht Housing

Single rural housing continues to be an important component of new housing delivery nationally reflecting Ireland's relatively dispersed development pattern, with on average around 4,000-5,000 new single rural dwellings being built annually. For example, in 2025, there were 4,842 single dwelling completions in rural areas, an increase of 9.3% on the 4,431 rural single dwelling completions in 2024².

This NPS acknowledges that there will continue to be a need for housing in the countryside and that this can arise in different circumstances. This Statement seeks to provide clarity and consistency by defining the relevant planning criteria that shall apply to proposals for new single housing developments in rural areas, which comprise both rural settlements under 1,500 population and the surrounding rural countryside.

The general policy approach in rural areas under urban influence i.e. within the metropolitan areas of cities and commuter catchment of large towns and centres of employment, is that new single housing is facilitated for people with a 'local need' to live or work in that rural area. These areas often come under pressure for development from those who do not have a connection to the rural area and are living and working in larger towns and cities but are seeking to live in a rural location and remote work or commute to the town or city for work or other activities. This type of 'urban generated demand' places significant pressure on the rural environment, reinforces car-dependent travel patterns and should be accommodated in the network of surrounding towns and villages.

As an alternative to urban generated sprawl in the rural countryside, the NPS promotes appropriately-scaled housing development in rural towns and villages, in line with the compact growth objective of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the government's Town Centre First Policy Approach, which seeks to attract more people to live and work in towns centres in order to promote their vitality and role in providing community services for their surrounding rural catchment.

² Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO) NDQ03 <https://data.cso.ie>

In wider rural areas, a more flexible approach is generally applied so that single rural housing will be facilitated based on normal siting, design and environmental criteria, with the exception of Gaeltacht areas and certain high amenity and environmentally sensitive areas where enhanced restrictions may apply to protect their character and heritage and manage second and holiday home pressures.

3.1 Avoiding prescriptive local policies to achieve clarity and consistency

This NPS sets out an overarching principle that shall apply so that each proposal for rural housing must be assessed on its individual merits having regard to the statutory policies, measures and guidance set out in this Statement, including standard siting, design and environmental criteria and technical standards as set out in Section 7.2.

In this regard, rural housing policies within development plans should not be prescriptive in including numerical requirements and arbitrary caps or limits on new single rural housing, for example relating to minimum site area, road frontage or landownership size requirements, limits on rural residential densities or on the number of dwellings that may be developed on a single landholding, along a stretch of road or within a rural area. Development plans should also avoid including prescriptive definitions of 'farmers' or 'farms', noting that a range of rural-based enterprises may be intrinsically linked to a rural area.

The vision for a thriving rural Ireland in *Our Rural Future* aligns with the overall approach to rural development in the Revised NPF, supported by Government investment programmes. This approach has been integrated into this NPS under the following four guiding principles:

A Building Sustainable Rural Communities and Economies

Rural housing can have positive benefits for communities and can enable rural enterprise and employment. This is particularly true in remote rural locations where new housing for permanent occupation shall be generally permissible and can provide a support network for families and communities and contribute to population renewal where ageing or decline is occurring.

In 'rural areas under urban influence' the policy approach is to facilitate people who need to permanently live or work in a particular rural area based on strong occupational or social

ties to that rural area. This is central to the local 'social or economic' need policy in NPO28 of the Revised NPF.

B Creating Thriving Rural Settlements and Housing Choice

In order to increase housing choice in rural towns and villages as an alternative to single rural housing, the refurbishment of existing housing stock, including vacant and derelict properties, and investment in infrastructure and services to facilitate new housing in rural settlements should form an important part of the local authority development plan settlement strategy.

To support their viability and vitality, 'local needs' criteria shall not apply to applications for new single housing within 'rural settlements' with a built-up-area of less than 1,500 population³ as defined by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to the most recent census year.

C Protecting the Rural Character, Environment and Amenities

Protecting the unique character and heritage of our rural landscapes is vital for local economies and tourism, attracting visitors, and creating jobs that sustain rural communities. Incorporating sustainable development principles into development plans and considering the capacity of the receiving rural environment for new housing development is an important means to protect and restore biodiversity and water quality, achieve climate action targets and sensitively manage landscape change, particularly as many of our scenic areas are under significant pressure from second home and holiday home development.

To sustainably manage the impact of new housing development, planning authorities may apply 'local needs' criteria in areas under high development or holiday home pressure.

D Protecting the Cultural and Linguistic Heritage of Gaeltacht Areas

The overall policy approach is to facilitate Irish speakers with strong local connections to either remain resident within, return to, or move between any Gaeltacht area designated under the 2012 Gaeltacht Act. This will be implemented through applying 'local needs' criteria, and a standardised Language Competency Assessment, to provide clarity and consistency within the planning system in relation to the protection and promotion of Irish as a community language.

Language competency may be considered in addition to compliance with local needs, and planning authorities may apply a level of flexibility in their consideration of social needs criteria if the required level of proficiency in spoken Irish⁴ can be demonstrated.

³ Based on clusters of 100 buildings. Census 2022 identified 649 BUAs between c 100-1,500 people.

⁴ Minimum Level B2 in spoken Irish on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

4. A Plan-led Approach to Housing in Rural Areas

4.1 Defining Rural Areas and Housing Need

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) defines 'rural' as the areas outside settlements with 1,500 or more people. For the purposes of this NPS, **rural areas** include:

- **Rural settlements**, defined by the CSO Built Up Areas (BUAs)⁵ as having less than 1,500 people in the most recent Census year, are home to 350,461 people in Census 2022 (19%⁶ of the population of rural areas), and;
- the surrounding **rural countryside**, which was home to 1,518,638 people in Census 2022 (81% of the population of rural areas).

Together, rural areas comprise around 36% of the national population with nearly 1.87million people living in rural areas in 2022.

The CSO Urban and Rural Life in Ireland, 2025⁷ sets out the national population breakdown by rural area types, based on Census 2022. This shows that 15.9% of people live in rural areas with high urban influence, 11.9% live in rural areas with moderate urban influence and 8.6% of people live in highly rural/ remote areas. Between 2016 and 2022 there was an increase in the number of people living in all rural area types.

While the policies in this NPS relate primarily to rural settlements of less than 1,500 people and the rural countryside, it is recognised that there are many larger towns and villages that are intrinsic to sustaining viable rural communities and do not function independently of their rural hinterland.

It is also recognised that there are settlements with a population of less than 1,500 people that provide important services for their rural hinterlands and may be designated in the local authority development plan as having the capacity for significant growth relative to their scale. The development plan is required, under section 46 of the Planning and Development Act 2024, to include individual population

⁵ CSO BUAs under 1,500 population <https://census.geohive.ie/datasets/IE-CSO::table-6-2-permanent-private-households-by-year-built-by-built-up-urban-areas-census-2022/about>

⁶ Source: (Census 2022): <https://data.cso.ie/table/FY107>

⁷ CSO Urban and Rural Life in Ireland, 2025 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-uri/urbanandrurallifeinireland2025/backgroundnotes/>

and housing growth targets for such designated settlements, in addition to setting out aggregate targets for groups of settlements of less than 1,500, and for the rural countryside outside settlements identified in the settlement hierarchy.

Gaeltacht Service Towns, which are designated under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012, and may have a population of 1,000 or more, also play a significant role in providing services and commercial facilities for the 26 Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, which are mostly located in rural areas. Language criteria may also be considered in conjunction with the application of 'local needs' criteria in Gaeltacht areas to protect their unique cultural and linguistic heritage (see Chapter 5).

In setting out sustainable rural settlement and housing development strategies in their development plan, planning authorities should not apply local social or economic needs criteria to rural settlements.

Where a development plan sets out additional smaller types of rural clusters or rural nodes in the settlement hierarchy that do not meet the CSO definition of a built-up area⁸, these will be identified as 'rural countryside' for the purposes of this NPS i.e. 'local needs' criteria will apply to new housing in rural clusters where applicable in areas under urban influence, in Gaeltacht areas and certain high amenity areas.

A person living or working in a rural settlement under 1,500 population is considered to have a '**rural generated housing need**' for the purposes of demonstrating compliance with 'local needs' criteria when seeking to build a single dwelling in the rural area. For clarity, such an applicant must also demonstrate that this would be their first home construction in that rural area (i.e. rural settlement and rural countryside).

⁸ Based on clusters of 100 buildings. Census 2022 identified 649 BUAs between c 100-1,500 people. <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2022/census2022urbanboundariesandbuiltupareas/census2022urbanboundariesandbuiltupareasfaq/>

4.2 Rural Areas and Land Use Zoning

The Planning and Development Act 2024 specifies that a development plan must include objectives for the zoning of land for a particular use, or a mixture of uses, and must include an accompanying map, which illustrates the zoning objectives applicable to all land within the functional area of the planning authority (including rural areas).

This approach marks a departure from the obligations set out under Section 10(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, where the requirement was that lands are zoned “*where and to such extent as the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, in the opinion of the planning authority, requires the uses to be indicated*”.

In assigning zoning objectives to rural areas outside of rural settlements, planning authorities may consider if lands should be zoned primarily for rural economic, agricultural, amenity or conservation purposes or a combination of such uses.

Such land-use zoning objectives should have regard to the approach to standardised zoning objectives for rural uses as set out in the ‘*Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities*’ (2022), and Table 1 below.

Table 1: Indicative Development Plan Zoning Objectives for Rural Areas

| Code | Zoning | Objective | Description |
|------|--------------|---|--|
| RU | Rural | Protect and improve rural amenity and provide for the development of agriculture and rural enterprise | Provide for zoned areas that prioritise the protection of rural amenity, avoid harmful impacts of urban sprawl, and provide for and protect agriculture activities and rural-related businesses. New single rural housing should be open for consideration. |
| HA | High amenity | Protect and enhance high amenity areas and protect, conserve and enhance built, natural and cultural heritage | Protect high amenity areas , including scenic locations such as coastal areas, uplands, lakelands, river valleys or historic landscapes, many of which are under pressure from holiday and second home development, from inappropriate development that would adversely affect their amenity and environmental quality. New single rural housing in high amenity areas should be open for consideration, but carefully managed. Enhanced restrictions may be required in highly sensitive scenic areas , such as those that are subject to a national or international heritage, landscape or conservation type designation, and |

| Code | Zoning | Objective | Description |
|------|------------------|---|--|
| | | | vulnerable flood and coastal erosion zones where new rural housing should not generally be permissible, and development should be restricted to the sensitive replacement or refurbishment of existing residential properties |
| RS | Rural Settlement | Protect and promote the vitality and viability of rural settlements | Promote plan-led housing growth in established small towns and villages in rural areas where growth is aligned with the overall settlement strategy, settlement hierarchy, and housing development strategy in the local development plan. Promote increased housing choice through the re-use of vacant properties and investment in services including the Developer Led Wastewater Infrastructure Initiative (DLI). New housing development should be acceptable in principle in Rural Settlements. |

The spatial extent of any land use zoning or designation to be applied will need to be informed by a process of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) in accordance with the relevant EU Directives.

A development plan may include a combination of land use zoning objectives, rural areas types and locally-specific designations and objectives to inform the rural settlement and rural housing development strategy, as set out in the following section.

4.3 Designated Areas and Locally Specific Objectives

While 'land use zoning' reflects the intended primary function of an area of land and dictates the types of development that may be permitted within that zoning objective, other types of 'designation' may also apply in addition to the base zoning objective for any given area of land, and these designations may include further protections that are relevant to that specific geographical area. For example, a site may be zoned for general rural or residential purposes but may be partially located in a designated flood risk zone, and as such it may be necessary to include further safeguards when considering development proposals.

For that reason, Table 1 above is not exhaustive and further locally specific objectives may be appropriate in addition to the standardised zoning objectives. This may relate to one or a combination of the following designations (which is not exhaustive):

- **Gaeltacht areas:** The protection of cultural or linguistic heritage in Gaeltacht areas designated under the Gaeltacht Act of 2012 (see Chapter 5)
- **Metropolitan areas:** as defined by the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and green belt designations in the immediate environs of larger towns with 5,000 or more population which are under significant urban development pressure, in order to manage urban sprawl, prevent urban areas from merging into each other and to retain their character and identity as distinct from the surrounding rural countryside.
- **Flooding and coastal erosion zones:** designations which regulate the type of development permitted in high-risk zones and seek to manage unavoidable risks and protect fragile eco-systems from climate change and inappropriate development.
- **High amenity areas:** in highly sensitive areas, involving national and international heritage designations such as specific landscape character areas that are given statutory protection in the development plan for their scenic beauty, scientific or ecological value (see Section 7.2.7 Natural, Cultural and Built Heritage) development should be restricted to sensitive replacement or refurbishment of existing residential properties. Where the planning authority considers it is necessary to carefully manage new housing development to protect the amenity value of other high amenity areas and manage second and holiday home pressures, development plans should not preclude the principle of development in high amenity areas from a zoning or designation perspective, but development in these areas is subject to careful management.

The policy approach in this NPS seeks to achieve more clarity and consistency in identification of such high amenity areas and makes a distinction between **high amenity areas** where housing is open for consideration, but may need to be carefully managed and **highly sensitive scenic areas**, where housing development is not generally permissible and should generally be restricted to the sensitive replacement

and/or refurbishment of existing structures. In these highly sensitive areas, new housing development should only be granted in exceptional circumstances where the planning authority is satisfied that an individual proposal would not have an adverse effect on the special character and environmental quality of the area in question, see Table 2 for an indicative (non-exhaustive) list:

Table 2: Approach to High Amenity designations

| Designation | High amenity areas | Highly sensitive scenic areas |
|---|---|--|
| Statutory protection and level of significance | Local development plan designates sites and features that define the distinct character of a city county or region , to protect their heritage and amenity value | National or international heritage sites and features with a higher level of protection and restrictions on development in line with their primary conservation objective. |
| Heritage sites and features (non-exhaustive list) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenic Routes, Views and Landscapes such as Coastal areas, Estuaries, Lakelands, River Valleys, Demesnes, Uplands, Woodlands, Bogs and Peatlands or Seascapes • Local sites and topography such as an elevated ridge or contour line, geological features and riparian corridors • Regional cross boundary assets such as greenways and blueways⁹ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Parks, Nature Reserves, Natural Heritage Areas, Special Amenity Areas, Marine Protected Areas, and National Monuments • Vulnerable flood zones and coastal erosion zones • UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves (core area) and Geoparks |
| New single rural housing | Open for consideration but may need to be carefully managed through planning criteria | Not generally permissible unless development satisfies exceptional planning and environmental criteria |
| Planning Criteria | Local needs criteria and visual amenity impact on distinct high value or regional scale landscapes | Exceptions for the sensitive refurbishment of existing residential properties and heritage buildings |

⁹ Regional Scale Green or Blue Infrastructure may be identified in Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies

For the avoidance of doubt, it is also necessary, where rural housing is acceptable in principle from a zoning/designation perspective, to comply with other requirements of this NPS, in particular with the requirement to demonstrate local need in **rural areas under urban influence, Gaeltacht areas** and certain **high amenity areas** (see NPPM3 of this NPS), in addition to statutory requirements in respect of other relevant project-level planning considerations.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY AND MEASURE 1 (NPPM 1):

The development of rural housing is considered to be permissible, acceptable in principle or open for consideration within **settlements with a population of less than 1,500** at the most recent census, and in the **rural countryside**, subject to the other policies, measures and guidance set out in this NPS, with the exception of **highly sensitive scenic areas** where the development of new rural housing is not generally permissible, apart from in exceptional circumstances where the planning authority is satisfied that the development will not adversely affect the special character and environmental quality of the area in question.

Notwithstanding that the development of rural housing in a particular location may be acceptable or open for consideration in accordance with this NPPM, the individual proposal will need to comply with relevant planning considerations, including in relation to location, siting, design, access, flood risk and the protection of areas of environmental sensitivity.

All statutory plans made under the Planning and Development Acts shall be consistent with this NPPM and this NPPM shall take precedence over any contrary provisions included in such plans.

To give effect to this Statement and in order to sustainably manage new housing in rural areas, development plan zoning objectives and zoning matrices shall clearly indicate in a manner that is materially consistent with NPPM 1 of this NPS the spatial areas where proposals for new single rural housing are either;

- **“Permitted in principle”** meaning new housing is generally acceptable, subject to normal planning and design standards, and this would generally relate to lands zoned or designated for new housing development, including in small towns and rural villages.

- **“Open for consideration”**; generally relating to lands that are not zoned or designated for residential development, but where single rural housing may be permitted where the proposals are consistent with relevant development plan policies, including compliance with ‘local needs’ and other key criteria.
- **‘Not generally permissible’**, which relate to those locations where housing development is inappropriate, such as highly sensitive scenic areas. Enhanced protection should also be applied in vulnerable flood and coastal erosion zones, whereby new housing development should be restricted to the sensitive replacement and/or refurbishment of existing structures, save in exceptional circumstances.

4.4 Rural Areas Under Urban Influence and Wider Rural Areas

A key and long-established principle underpinning the sustainable development of rural areas, is to encourage growth in rural towns and villages and areas that have experienced low population growth or decline, and to manage the growth of areas that are facing urban-generated housing pressures, to avoid overdevelopment, ensure local housing needs can be met and to sustain vibrant rural communities.

The Revised NPF aims to strengthen rural economies and sustainable communities and meet local housing need, acknowledging that demands for housing in rural areas arise in different circumstances and within different types of rural areas.

This NPS reflects and builds on the critical policy distinction made by National Policy Objective (NPO) 28 of the Revised NPF, between:

- **Rural areas under urban influence:** located within the metropolitan areas of cities¹⁰ and the commuter catchment of larger towns and centres of employment, where applicants must demonstrate a genuine ‘local economic or social need’ to live in a rural area, and;
- **Wider rural areas** elsewhere: where a more flexible approach is applied to facilitate anyone wishing to build a house, subject to normal planning

¹⁰ City metropolitan areas are defined in the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) for Dublin, Cork, Limerick-Shannon, Galway and Waterford

considerations including in respect of location, siting, design, access, flood risk and the protection of areas of environmental sensitivity and high amenity value.

The NPS will continue to allow local development plans to provide for housing in the countryside based on the considerations in NPO 28 of the NPF, also highlighting the need to carefully manage development in certain areas to improve and maintain the quality and character of rural areas and to protect natural and built heritage of certain designated areas, which are given statutory protection in the local development plan, such as:

- **high amenity areas**, in accordance with the established approach in local rural housing policies of prioritising those with a 'local need' in order to avoid overdevelopment, manage second or holiday home development pressures and protect their special landscape character and heritage value, which is often the basis for their unique tourism offer, attracting visitors and supporting job creation in that rural area.

The overall policy approach to managing new rural housing in Gaeltacht areas is aligned with the established approach of carefully managing development in designated areas in order to protect their character and heritage.

- **In Gaeltacht areas**, designated under the Gaeltacht Act 2012, applicants for a new single rural dwelling must demonstrate that they have a local economic or social need, however the planning authority may apply a level of flexibility in their assessment of local social needs, to protect the linguistic heritage of the area. (see Chapter 5).

4.4.1 Rural Areas Under Urban Influence

The CSO Urban and Rural Life in Ireland, 2025 publication shows the highest proportion (nearly three-quarters) of people who drive a car to work are in rural areas under high urban influence. The identification of 'Rural Areas Under Urban Influence' seeks to prevent piecemeal and unplanned urban encroachment, unsustainable car dependant development and protect the rural character of the countryside.

The overall policy approach supports people with demonstrable local social ties or occupational connections to a rural area based, to build new homes in that rural area.

Development that does not have a direct local connection with the rural area, based on the core considerations of economic or social need as set out in NPPM3 below, i.e. **‘urban generated housing demand’**, should be accommodated within the network of smaller towns and rural villages where there are existing services. This approach aligns with Town Centre First (TCF) policy approach of supporting the viability and regeneration of rural settlements through investment and new development.

Rural areas under urban influence include the city metropolitan areas and areas outside the boundaries of settlements and which exhibit characteristics such as rapidly rising population and considerable pressure for housing due to their location with the commuting catchment of cities and towns, or proximity to major transport corridors with ready access to these urban areas, and pressures on infrastructure such as the local road network.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY AND MEASURE 2 (NPPM 2):

For the purposes of this NPS, ‘Rural Areas Under Urban Influence’ shall be identified in accordance with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) urban/rural classifications for defining rural areas that are under ‘high and moderate urban influence’ at the most recent Census of population (see Appendix A).

The specific boundaries of ‘Rural Areas Under Urban Influence’ may be further refined by the planning authority within a statutory plan, in order to reflect the specific local circumstances, or, where justified, to apply a green belt type designation to areas in the five city metropolitan areas (defined in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies) and immediate environs of larger towns (defined for the purposes of this NPPM as towns with 5,000 or more people) that are under significant urban development pressure in order to manage urban sprawl, prevent urban areas from merging into each other and to retain their character and identity as distinct from the surrounding rural countryside.

All statutory plans made under the Planning and Development Acts shall be consistent with this NPPM and this NPPM shall take precedence over any contrary provisions included in such plans.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) urban/rural classifications provide a definition of rural areas that are under high and moderate urban influence as per Census 2022¹¹ (see Appendix A). However, the boundaries of these areas may need to be further refined by planning authorities to reflect the five city metropolitan areas as set out in the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) and to take local circumstances into account. In order to avoid excessive variation and abrupt transitions at a local level, planning authorities can aggregate the small area CSO data appropriately to the local authority level, in order to practically define the extent of urban areas under influence within their own administrative area.

A development plan must include an accompanying map, which clearly illustrates the rural housing policies that apply to different rural land use zones and designations including 'rural areas under urban influence'. A digitised record of 'rural areas under urban influence' and 'high amenity areas' where local needs criteria also apply, prepared in compliance with this NPS, will be provided by each local authority to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in an agreed standardised format, in order to enable the creation of a single map that allows all rural and Gaeltacht areas where local needs restrictions apply, to be viewed in a nationally consistent manner.

4.4.2 Wider Rural Areas

The policy approach in these areas outside of 'Rural Areas Under Urban Influence' is to generally support the provision of single rural housing with a more flexible approach, primarily based on siting and design criteria, and subject to other relevant planning considerations in accordance with statutory requirements. This will assist in sustaining more vulnerable rural communities and the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements. Proposals for rural housing in these wider rural areas, apart from in the Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas and areas of high amenity value as set out in Section 4.3 and NPPM1 above, will therefore be permissible in principle i.e. not subject to local social or economic needs criteria.

¹¹ CSO urban and rural classifications based on Census 2022: <https://data.cso.ie/table/FY107>

4.3.3 Local Economic or Social Need Criteria

Given the social impacts of urban generated rural housing, which can include undermining the viability of rural towns and villages, the economic costs of servicing dispersed housing and the need to meet wider sustainable development objectives, it is considered both reasonable and proportionate that the consistent application of genuine **local (economic or social) housing need criteria** is relied on in order to balance the demand for housing in areas under urban influence with the wider implications.

For clarity, the provision of a new house in rural areas under urban influence for use as a holiday or second home, or for short term letting use does not align with the social or economic need criteria set out in this NPS. The Revised NPF emphasises that in rural areas under urban influence within the commuting area of cities and towns, the policy approach is to facilitate new single rural housing in the countryside for people for whom the proposed dwelling will be their first home construction in the rural area and who can demonstrate evidence of their local connections based on social ties or employment related to that rural area, in accordance with NPPM 3.

Taking account of EU legislation and in particular Articles 49 and 63 (Freedom of Establishment and Free Movement of Capital) of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), it is necessary to ensure that the criteria in this NPS and in all development plans are non-discriminatory. Criteria relating to blood-line or family ties should not, therefore, be included in any development plan.

While applicants for new single rural housing in a Gaeltacht Language Planning Area or an area of high amenity value may also be required to demonstrate compliance with local needs criteria, the planning authority may apply a level of flexibility in the consideration of local **social** needs criteria as required, in order to manage the impact of the development in different rural area types, within the permitted range for the 'local area' proximity and 'substantial period' requirements as set out in NPPM 3 and Section 4.4.5 Rural Housing Policy Matrix.

For clarity, the location of the site of the proposed new dwelling forms the centre point for determining the maximum radial distance within which the applicant must either be living or has lived in, in line with the permitted range that applies to that particular site.

This shall also be applicable regardless of whether the 'local area' encompasses land within more than one local authority administrative area. In this regard, planning authorities should coordinate in relation to development plan objectives and in the management of development proposals as required.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY AND MEASURE 3 (NPPM3)

Proposals for single rural housing developments in 'Rural Areas Under Urban Influence', Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas and certain high amenity areas shall be permissible in principle where the applicant can demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the planning authority, either a local **economic** or a local **social** housing need, in accordance with this NPPM and the relevant policies and objectives of the adopted development plan.

A person living or working in a rural settlement under 1,500 population is considered to have a '**rural generated housing need**' for the purposes of demonstrating compliance with 'local needs' criteria when seeking to build a single dwelling in the rural area.

The following definitions of local economic and social housing need shall apply to the consideration of proposals for single rural housing development in 'Rural Areas Under Urban Influence':

(a) Economic Need: An economic need for a house at a particular rural location¹² can be demonstrated by a person whose primary (full or part-time) work is directly related to that rural location and who needs to live permanently in the rural area in question, at or close to their place of work, and where the economic need is linked to a **rural enterprise or occupation** that is generally consistent with one or more of the following criteria:

(i) related to agriculture, horticulture, equine, waterway, marine, forestry or other **primarily rural-based enterprises** where it is their main (part or full time) occupation. In the case of a working farm or other rural enterprise that relies on a landholding, a functional economic need for a house in the countryside will arise in the case of a functional working landholding only, the scale of which may vary depending on context;

(ii) intrinsically linked to a rural area, such as, but not limited to, teachers in rural schools who provide essential local services to a rural community;

¹² 'Rural Location' for the purpose of this NPPM is a location that is outside of a rural settlement

(iii) a person who has a demonstrated commitment to set up a 'bona fide' rural-related business. In the case of a new rural enterprise (proposed or operational for less than 5 years), the applicant is required to submit a verified statement of existing operations (where the enterprise is established) or a business plan (where it is not), along with a phasing strategy to ensure that the dwelling is constructed at an appropriate stage in the establishment of the enterprise and not before the enterprise has become operational; or

(iv) a **locally**-specific economic need that is set out within a statutory plan that is consistent with and does not undermine the policy objective of this NPPM.

While the applicant may own or have previously owned a home outside the rural area in question, the proposed dwelling must be the applicant's first home construction in the rural area in question, and it must be the intention of the applicant(s) to occupy the proposed rural house as a permanent and primary residence.

(b) **Social Need:** A social need for a house at a particular rural location¹³ can be demonstrated by a person who is living in, or has lived in, a rural area for a substantial period of time and who demonstrates a need to make a permanent primary home in the locality on the following basis related to close social ties or local connections to the rural area:

(i) The applicant has spent a '**substantial period**' of at least 7 years or more (continuously or cumulatively) (see below and the Rural Housing Policy Matrix for details) living or working in the local rural area in question and has close social ties or connections to the local rural community (this includes returning emigrants and people moving back to a rural area where they grew up); **and**

(ii) The applicant has lived in or is living in the '**local rural area**' (i.e. at or within close proximity of up to 10km radius (see below and the Rural Housing Policy Matrix for details)) of the site of the proposed dwelling.

In areas under significant urban generated pressure in the city metropolitan areas and immediate environs of large towns, and in certain areas of high amenity value, the planning authority may apply a more restrictive approach in accordance with the

¹³ 'Rural Location' for the purpose of this NPPM is a location that is outside of a rural settlement

range of 'local area' proximity and duration criteria set out in the Rural Housing Policy Matrix at Section 4.4.5. In Gaeltacht areas, the planning authority may apply a level of flexibility in their assessment of the local social need criteria, in order to promote and protect the linguistic heritage of the area, as set out in the Rural Housing Policy Matrix at Section 4.4.5.

While the applicant may own or have previously owned a home outside the local rural area in question, the proposed dwelling must be the applicant's first home construction in the rural area in question, except for certain limited scenarios, where exceptional health or personal circumstances apply, and the application is supported by robust documentation from a medical or legal practitioner as relevant.

In all cases it must be the intention of the applicant(s) to occupy the proposed rural house as a permanent and primary residence for at least 10 years.

All statutory plans made under the Planning and Development Acts shall be consistent with this NPPM and this NPPM shall take precedence over any contrary provisions included in such plans.

For clarity, while it may be possible to work remotely from a rural area in a job that is based elsewhere, this type of employment is not in itself intrinsic to a rural area and does not meet the definition of 'economic need' for the purposes of this NPS.

The onus will be on the applicant to demonstrate a genuine local need for a new single house in the countryside in accordance with NPPM3 and the Rural Housing Policy Matrix at Section 4.4.5 and the relevant policies and objectives of the development plan (see also Section 7.1: Information Required to Demonstrate Local Rural Housing Need), and proposals will also need to comply with other relevant siting and design and environmental criteria as part of the development management process.

While Section 7.1 also sets out examples of verified documentation that may be considered by a planning authority in the case of certain limited exceptional health or personal circumstances, this should not become the norm, and the planning authority should generally adhere to NPPM 3 and Table 3 (Rural Housing Policy Matrix) in their assessment of local rural housing need.

Where the planning authority is satisfied that a particular proposal is in accordance with NPPM3, condition(s) should be attached to the grant of permission to exclude

seasonal or short-term letting, and to require the new dwelling be used only as a permanent primary residence by the applicant for at least 10 years.

4.4.4 Rural Housing Policy Matrix

| Rural Type | Area | Requirement to Demonstrate 'Local Need' for a new single rural dwelling in the rural countryside* | |
|-----------------------------------|------|--|---|
| | | Where Economic <u>or</u> Social Need criteria apply | Other Criteria |
| Rural Areas under Urban Influence | | <p><u>'Local Social Need' criteria:</u> 10km radius and 7 years duration</p> <p>except for: Metropolitan areas and green belts that are under significant urban generated development pressures, where the following more restrictive social need criteria may apply: 3 km radius/10 years duration</p> | Occupancy clause (10 years) |
| Wider Rural Areas | | <p><u>'Local Need' requirements do not generally apply</u> Applicants to comply with normal siting and design criteria and standards of environmental and technical compliance</p> <p>except for: High Amenity Areas where it is necessary to protect the special character of that rural area and manage second and holiday home pressures, and where the following social need criteria may apply: 5km radius/10 years duration</p> | Occupancy clause (10 years) |
| Gaeltacht areas | | <p><u>'Local Social Need' criteria:</u> 3km radius and 10 years duration except for Irish speakers: A level of flexibility may apply to assessment of Social Need, where the required level of language competency can be demonstrated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'local area' incorporates any designated Gaeltacht area nationally and/or 3km from the proposed site - 10 year 'substantial duration' can be reduced dependant on linguistic impact of the proposal (to 5 years) | Language criteria** Language enurement clause (10 years) |

The proposed dwelling must be the applicant's first home construction in that rural area except for certain limited scenarios where exceptional health or personal circumstances apply, as demonstrated by supporting medical or legal documentation in accordance with Section 4.6 (Provision for adaptive dwellings) and Section 7.1. (Information required to demonstrate local need)

An occupancy clause should be attached as a condition of permission, mandating that property remains the permanent and primary residence of the applicant (or person/s with the required level of language proficiency in the case of Gaeltacht areas – see Chapter 5) for a minimum period of 10 years, and to exclude any use for short-term letting.

| Rural Area Type | Requirement to Demonstrate 'Local Need' for a new single rural dwelling in the rural countryside* | |
|---|---|----------------|
| | Where Economic <u>or</u> Social Need criteria apply | Other Criteria |
| <p>*Local needs criteria do <u>not</u> apply within rural settlements i.e. those settlements as defined by the CSO Built Up Areas (BUAs)¹⁴ having less than 1,500 people in the most recent Census year. Where a development plan sets out additional smaller types of rural clusters or rural nodes in the settlement hierarchy that do not meet the CSO definition of a built-up area¹⁵ these will be identified as 'rural countryside' for the purposes of this NPS (see Section 4.1 Defining Rural Areas and Housing Need).</p> | | |
| <p>**The language criteria can be demonstrated by submission of evidence (such as a Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) certificate of standardised language competency assessment) that shows a nominated adult member of the household has achieved a minimum B2 level in spoken Irish on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.</p> | | |

Table 3: Rural Housing Policy Matrix

¹⁴ CSO BUA Map (Census 2022): <https://census.geohive.ie/datasets/IE-CSO::table-6-2-permanent-private-households-by-year-built-by-built-up-urban-areas-census-2022/about>

¹⁵ Based on clusters of 100 buildings. Census 2022 identified 649 BUAs between c 100-1,500 people. <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2022/census2022urbanboundariesandbuiltupareas/census2022urbanboundariesandbuiltupareasfaq/>

4.5 Refurbishment or Replacement of Dwellings

The Revised NPF and the Town Centre First Policy Approach promote a proactive approach to the refurbishment and reuse of the existing housing stock in rural towns and villages and the surrounding countryside in order to increase housing supply provide more housing choice in rural areas.

The **reuse of vacant dwellings** is encouraged, noting the planning authority will need to consider the suitability of the site for residential use having regard to current policies and standards, particularly with regard to traffic safety and wastewater disposal. It may be necessary to upgrade arrangements on site to ensure that standards are met. 10 year occupancy requirements should generally not be applied to such proposals.

The **sensitive restoration and re-use of protected structures or other historic structures of architectural interest** such as traditional vernacular structures is encouraged. Development plans should provide clarity in relation to the types of structure within this category taking account of local circumstances. Where permission is granted for the re-use and restoration of a protected structure or a vernacular structure of heritage value, an occupancy clause should not generally be applied.

The reuse and retrofitting of existing habitable dwellings is generally favoured over replacement, on sustainability grounds. Where permission is granted for the **replacement of a habitable dwelling**, it should be the intention of the applicant(s) to occupy the proposed rural house as a permanent and primary residence and the 10 year occupancy clause requirement should be applied as part of the eligibility criteria.

4.6 Provision for Adaptive Housing for Older Persons and Disabled Persons

In some circumstances, it may be suitable to adapt, extend or subdivide an existing family home to accommodate inter-generational living as an alternative to building a new dwelling.

Well-designed family flats or habitable accommodation within the curtilage of the primary residence can provide flexible accommodation options for immediate family members or carers as an alternative to a new dwelling. To facilitate this, the Government is bringing forward proposals for planning exemptions to allow the

construction of detached auxiliary habitable dwellings and the subdivision of existing dwellings without the need for planning permission.

In certain limited health or personal circumstances, as demonstrated by supporting medical certification in accordance with Section 7.1, this NPS also makes provision for an applicant seeking planning permission to build a new accessible single-storey dwelling with a maximum floorspace of 90 sqm. Any new dwelling must be located within the site curtilage, adjacent to the applicant's existing dwelling or in close proximity, and may rely on existing services and vehicular access.

This approach facilitates adaptive housing options for people with a particular housing need relating to older persons rightsizing, mobility, disability or health needs, who can choose to either modify their current home or move into a more accessible new home, where evolving family support structures can be facilitated utilising appropriate forms of infill and cluster designs and promoting social and community connections.

5. Housing in Gaeltacht Areas and Language Criteria

The Gaeltacht Act 2012 sets out legislative provisions for Gaeltacht areas with the aim of increasing and strengthening the use of the Irish language. Gaeltacht regions (Irish-speaking areas) are located in counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Cork, Meath, and Waterford. Larger populated offshore islands within the Gaeltacht include Oileáin Árann (Galway), Árainn Mór and Toraigh (Donegal) and Cléire (Cork). Other non-Gaeltacht islands with significant permanent populations include Clare Island and Inishturk (Mayo), Inishbofin (Galway) and Bere and Sherkin Islands (Cork).

Gaeltacht areas are predominantly found in the Atlantic coastal region and are largely rural, including sections of coastline and inhabited offshore islands. However, these areas also include villages, towns and suburbs.

The Planning and Development Act 2024 sets out the obligation for planning authorities to prepare strategies and include objectives, which must be addressed in the drafting of development plans, governing local development policies in respect of any Gaeltacht area. Where there is a Gaeltacht area within the planning authority's administrative area, the development plan strategy must include objectives for "*the protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage, including the promotion of Irish as the community language (in the Gaeltacht)*".

Where a development plan sets out settlement-specific objectives in respect of any Gaeltacht area, a 'Priority Area Plan' under the Planning and Development Act 2024 will subsequently be required for that Gaeltacht area to guide its development, renewal or regeneration and to specify how the relevant settlement-specific objectives in the development plan are to be implemented.

The 'Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities' published in July 2022 also provide guidance in relation to the preparation of housing strategies that have particular regard to the needs of Gaeltacht residents, and reflecting the Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas (Limistéir Pleanála Teanga), which are a separate designation under the Gaeltacht Act 2012.

Where there is a designated Gaeltacht area within the functional area of the planning authority, this NPS sets out the following policy and measures, with the objective of

protecting the cultural and linguistic heritage in those Gaeltacht areas in line with the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2024 and Gaeltacht Act 2012.

To provide clarity and consistency within the planning system in relation to the protection and promotion of Irish as the community language of the Gaeltacht, a standardised Language Competency Assessment may form part of the assessment of Gaeltacht language criteria for single and multi-unit developments in Gaeltacht rural areas and inhabited offshore islands within the Gaeltacht, as set out in the following sections.

| Standardised Language Competency Assessment |
|--|
| <p>Planning authorities in Gaeltacht areas may apply Language Planning Criteria and Language Enurement Clauses to manage the linguistic impact of proposals for new single or multi-unit housing in Gaeltacht areas.</p> <p>To ensure that linguistic integrity is maintained and promoted in a consistent manner, language criteria requirements can be demonstrated by submission of standardised Language Competency Assessment and evidence (such as a Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) certificate of standardised language competency assessment) that shows a nominated adult member of the household has achieved a minimum B2 level in spoken Irish on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.</p> |

5.1 Single Housing in the Rural Countryside in Gaeltacht Areas

In order to protect the rural character and cultural and linguistic heritage of rural Gaeltacht areas, **local social or economic needs** criteria shall apply to consideration of proposals for new single dwellings in the rural countryside in Gaeltacht areas.

Additional language criteria, by way of a standardised language competency assessment may also form part of the planning authority's considerations when assessing a proposal for rural housing in conjunction with the consideration of local economic or social need. To ensure that linguistic integrity is maintained and promoted in a consistent manner, a person seeking to build a new single rural dwelling in a

Gaeltacht area may provide the appropriate evidence¹⁶ to show that a nominated adult member of their household has achieved a minimum level of B2 in spoken Irish.

While the applicant would still need to demonstrate that they have a local housing need in accordance with NPPM 3 and Section 4.4.5 Rural Housing Policy Matrix, the planning authority may apply a level of flexibility in their assessment of local social need, where the required level of language competency can be demonstrated i.e.:

- (a) '**local area**' is generally 3km distance from the site of the proposed dwelling in a Gaeltacht area– but in the case of an Irish speaker, the planning authority may consider an application from a (current or former) resident of a particular designated Gaeltacht area to move to any other designated Gaeltacht nationally subject to compliance with (b) in line with the principle of the free movement of Irish speakers between Gaeltachts ('Inter-Gaeltacht Recognition').
- (b) '**substantial duration**' is generally a minimum of 10 years living in a Gaeltacht area - but in the case of an Irish speaker, the planning authority can apply the lower threshold of 5 years duration (continuously or cumulatively) if they consider the proposal would have a positive linguistic impact on the area.

Inter-Gaeltacht Recognition for Irish Speakers

All Gaeltacht areas, despite being spread across different counties, share the core purpose of preserving the Irish language as a living community language. While each Gaeltacht has its own unique local dialect and geography, all Gaeltacht areas hold an official designation under the Gaeltacht Act 2012 and share a deep linguistic and cultural heritage connection to the Irish language.

In recognition of this shared core linguistic identity and culture between Gaeltacht areas, this draft NPS introduces the concept of an Inter-Gaeltacht Recognition that would facilitate Irish speakers who live and work in one particular Gaeltacht to demonstrate compliance with local needs for the purpose of building their first home in any Gaeltacht nationally (subject to compliance with standard planning and environmental criteria and other requirements set out in NPPM 3 and Section 7.1 of this NPS).

¹⁶ By submission of a Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) or equivalent to a minimum B2 level

This is in accordance with an overall policy approach of facilitating Irish speakers with local connections to a Gaeltacht to either remain resident or to move back to a Gaeltacht, where they can enrich rather than dilute the language. By facilitating freer movement of Irish speakers between different Gaeltacht areas designated under the Gaeltacht Act 2012, this may help to address demographic and economic challenges and counter population decline in more remote and rural Gaeltacht areas

This flexibility should be balanced with the need to avoid a proliferation of second homes and holiday homes in Gaeltacht areas. Therefore, an occupancy clause should be included as a condition to any grant of permission to ensure the dwelling remains in use as the applicant's permanent and primary residence for a period of at least 10 years, and that any use for short term letting is excluded.

5.2 Proposals for Multi-Unit Housing in Gaeltacht Areas

Developers proposing multi-unit residential in designated Gaeltacht areas (including all settlements either fully or partially located within a designated Gaeltacht area) are required to submit a Linguistic Impact Statement (LIS). The information included in a LIS (see Appendix B) will enable a planning authority to consider how a proposed development will alter the demographic and linguistic makeup of the community and whether it supports or threatens the use of Irish as the community language.

| Linguistic Impact Statement (LIS) |
|---|
| A developer shall submit a Linguistic Impact Statement as part of their planning application, which addresses the likely impact of the proposed multi-unit development on the Irish language in that Gaeltacht area and sets out the proposed percentage of dwellings in the scheme to be reserved for Irish speakers who can provide their competence to speak Irish to the required level (B2 in spoken Irish on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). As with single rural housing proposals, a nominated adult member of the household in each of the specified dwellings must have the required B2 level of competence in spoken Irish. |

This can be implemented by a condition of permission specifying the occupation of a proportion of dwellings to be reserved for Irish speakers in that development, with the evidence of language competency to be provided to the planning authority in respect of each of the dwellings prior to first occupation.

See Appendix B for more detail information to be submitted with a LIS and relevant information on the level of Irish in Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas (LPAs)

The percentage of units required to demonstrate language competency for multi unit proposals will be based on the **number of daily speakers outside the education system as a percentage of the population aged 3 years or over in the Gaeltacht Language Planning Area in which the development is to be situated** - as defined in the relevant, most recent Census. However, in order to not alone maintain but to enhance the use of the language on a daily basis, 10% should be added to these percentages. For example, in a Language Planning Area where 66% of the people speak Irish on a daily basis, 76% of units should be reserved for Irish speakers (rounded up where possible subject to the retention of at least one unit for non-Irish speakers).

A language enurement clause should be attached to a condition of permission to require the dwelling to be occupied as a permanent and primary residence for a minimum period of 10 years, and to exclude any use for short-term letting, where the planning authority considers it necessary to protect the linguistic character of that Gaeltacht area. An example of a language enurement clause that may be attached to a planning permission for housing in a Gaeltacht Language Planning Area is provided In Section 7.

6. Promoting Housing Delivery in Rural Towns and Villages

The national strategic objective of compact growth, set out in the Revised NPF and supported in the Town Centre First Policy Approach for Irish Towns, applies to all settlements, including rural towns and villages under 1,500 population, which are recognised as local drivers for their surrounding areas through well-established economic, administrative and social functions. They support clusters of local services, have a significant share of homes and jobs, and act as hubs for a much wider rural hinterland.

Accordingly, the provision of additional housing in smaller towns and villages is a key policy objective which aims to meet the identified housing needs of the local community, in addition to assisting in the overall delivery of housing to meet national housing targets in line with the National Planning Framework.

The overall policy approach of promoting appropriately-scaled development in rural settlements¹⁷ which are designated for new housing in the relevant development plan, being generally permissible (i.e. local needs criteria shall not apply), aligns with Town Centre First policy of attracting more people to live and work in our town centres including in smaller rural towns and villages.

6.1 Developer Led Infrastructure for Wastewater Services to support Housing

The delivery of housing in many smaller settlements has been constrained due to the lack of public wastewater infrastructure to serve new residential development. Due to factors including the limited size and rural location of these settlements, circumstances frequently arise where there is no existing Uisce Éireann public wastewater infrastructure and no foreseeable provision planned to support new housing.

To address such identified deficits in wastewater services constraining housing development, the Government is implementing integrated measures under the

¹⁷ For the purposes of this NPS, Rural Settlements under 1,500 population are identified by the CSO Built Up Urban Areas (BUAs) definition

national housing action plan, *Delivering Homes, Building Communities*¹⁸, to increase wastewater capacity, including enabling housing developers to provide wastewater infrastructure under a structured partnership model with Uisce Éireann.

Through the Developer-Led Initiative for Wastewater Services (or 'DLI'), there is a collaborative delivery model between developers and Uisce Éireann for the provision of new wastewater facilities. Under the model, the developer will finance and construct the required infrastructure for their housing developments in accordance with Uisce Éireann standards, with Uisce Éireann taking ownership and responsibility for ongoing operation and regulatory compliance.

For new wastewater infrastructure to serve up to 150 population equivalent (about 40 residential units) developers can avail of new regulatory arrangements¹⁹ establishing a registration-based authorisation process for small-scale wastewater discharges.

The provision of DLI is intended to positively enable plan-led housing growth in rural settlements across the Country and thereby assist in supporting sustainable local services, employment, community development and wider rural regeneration.

Accordingly, planning authorities should support the development of new housing in small settlements through the DLI initiative, including rural settlements that are identified as unsewered or unserved in their development plans, and should facilitate such proposals for DLI where appropriate through the development management process.

This includes the siting of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) proposals for DLI comprising constructed wetlands or reed-bed systems on agricultural or unzoned lands that immediately adjacent to, lands which are zoned or designated for new housing development. Such natural elements can make a positive contribution visually and in biodiversity terms to the setting and context of the related housing development and the wider amenity of the area.

¹⁸ Action 1.11 - 'Government will bring forward measures for developers to deliver new standalone wastewater treatment plants to bolster the service provided by Uisce Éireann to support increased levels of housing.'

¹⁹ European Union (Water Policy) (Small Waste Water Discharge Registration) Regulations 2026 (pursuant to the European Communities Act 1972)(pursuant to the European Communities Act 1972)

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY AND MEASURE 4 (NPPM4)

Development plans shall facilitate the provision of Developer-Led Infrastructure (DLI) for Wastewater Services, as appropriate, through the development management process that the individual proposal meets the requirements of the DLI Initiative.

Where such proposals include Nature Based Solutions (NBS) such as constructed wetlands or reed-bed systems, the NBS solution may, subject to compliance with other relevant policies and objectives, be accommodated on agricultural or unzoned lands that are located immediately adjacent to lands which are zoned or designated in the relevant development plan for new housing.

All statutory plans made under the Planning and Development Acts shall be consistent with this NPPM and this NPPM shall take precedence over any contrary provisions included in such plans.

6.2 Infill, Backland and Ribbon Development

The careful management of single housing developments, in particular in the immediate environs of settlements, can also assist in preventing inappropriate forms of scattered, ribbon or linear development extending along radial roads from towns and cities that can strain infrastructure and services such as water, drainage, footpaths and street lighting, or prevent the planned expansion of these settlements over time.

Where such infrastructure and services are in place however, appropriate infill or backland development should be supported where it would not have an adverse impact on the planned provision of public infrastructure or utilities, or the planned expansion of the settlement, and the development would not 'landlock' potential future planned urban expansion, infrastructure or transport improvements (see also Section 7.1.2 Vehicular Access and Traffic Safety).

Where 'ribbon' development is proposed, each case should be judged on its own merits in relation to normal siting, design and environmental criteria, and development plans should not include prescriptive standards in relation to the number of dwellings that may be permitted on a stretch of road.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY AND MEASURE 5 (NPPM 5)

The principle of infill or backland development shall be supported where existing services and vehicular access exist, subject to consideration of the suitability of the individual proposal in relation to normal siting, design and environmental criteria, and subject to the need to prevent an adverse impact on the planned provision of public infrastructure or utilities or on the potential for the planned expansion of any nearby settlement.

Prescriptive quantitative standards relating to 'ribbon' development, including outside of settlements, should not be provided within development plans, in line with the principle that every application for rural housing shall be assessed on its individual merits, having regard to the statutory requirement to be consistent with this NPS and relevant statutory policy and guidance, including consideration of the suitability of the individual proposal in relation to normal siting, design and environmental criteria..

Development plans should not include 'minimum road frontage' or 'no more than five houses in a row' requirements, where these may restrict appropriate infill, backland or 'ribbon' development, in accordance with this NPPM and the relevant policies and objectives of the adopted development plan.

All statutory plans made under the Planning and Development Acts shall be consistent with this NPPM and this NPPM shall take precedence over any contrary provisions included in such plans.

7. Development Management Process

7.1 Information Required to Demonstrate Local Rural Housing Need

The applicant (and any person acting on the applicant's behalf) will need to ensure that the application includes all relevant information required in support of a case made for an economic and / or social housing need with a 'rural area under urban pressure', having regard to the specific criteria set out in the development plan.

Given the likelihood that information submitted with a rural housing application to demonstrate local housing need will include information of a personal or commercially sensitive nature, planning authorities must ensure compliance with all relevant data protection requirements.

In order to assist applicants and to ensure clarity and consistency in the development management process, planning authorities should ensure that, in addition to the statutory requirements for making a planning application, planning application forms and validation guidance/checklists specify what supplementary information will be required in relation to applications for single housing in rural areas.

The following are examples of relevant supporting information that may, subject to the individual circumstances of the case, be considered by the planning authority to demonstrate local rural housing need include:

- applicant details including a copy of a valid form of identification (original passport, driving licence or public service card) from the main signatory or signatories on the planning application form;
- details relating to the applicant's current place of residence as well as any other prior residence for a specified substantial previous period of time such as utility bills, tax documents, mortgage or rental documentation;
- land ownership details including the extent of the subject lands, folio reference/relevant land registry documents, the relationship of the application site to any landholding, confirmation of ownership or interest in the land;

- any relevant information with regard to the planning history of the site e.g. any existing planning permissions or exemptions from the need to obtain planning permission, that relate to the site;
- details relating to the nature and duration of the applicant's close local connection to the local rural area and documentary evidence of that connection e.g. copy of applicant entry on electoral register, school records, official correspondence, letter from a local sport, community, or cultural organisation etc.;
- details related to language criteria requirements where the site is a Gaeltacht area, in accordance with Chapter 5 Gaeltacht Areas and Language Criteria, e.g.
 - submission of TEG (Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge) certificate or similar standardised language competency assessment may be submitted with a planning application for a single rural dwelling
 - Language Impact statement (LIS) shall be submitted with all applications for multi-unit developments (see Appendix B);
- details relating to the nature and duration of the rural enterprise or type of economic activity/occupation, duration of operation/practice, number of employees, with relevant documentation such as accounts, business plan, contract of employment);
- details to show an established ongoing farming activity such as a registered herd number and animal profile and evidence of scheme payments or income supports, where verified by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine;
- site location details including its distance from the location of the applicant's connection to the local rural area or the rural enterprise or employment;
- a declaration stating whether the applicant owns or previously owned a house;
- a declaration stating whether the applicant previously obtained permission for a single house in a rural area of the local authority in question and / or in a rural area of another local authority;
- a sworn affidavit by the applicant verified by a legally authorised official confirming the accuracy of all information provided, stating that the applicant conforms to the requirements of the objective and confirming that the proposed

dwelling will be the applicant's sole and permanent primary residence as per written agreement with the planning authority.

This level of verification is required to ensure that the application and the particulars submitted are genuine, to avoid the need for any further information requests during the planning application process, to enable an informed decision within the required statutory time period and to ensure that any permission granted for a single rural dwelling is specific to the applicant.

On an exceptional basis, a planning authority may consider whether local housing need has been demonstrated due to health or personal circumstances and in such cases, applications should be supported by:

- relevant documentation from a registered medical practitioner and/or disability organisation that confirms an applicant's need to live in a particular rural location close to family or carer support, due to exceptional health reasons; or
- relevant documentation from a registered legal practitioner that confirms a applicant's genuine local housing need due to personal circumstances such as a legal requirement to sell a rural house on foot of a court order e.g. following a divorce or legal separation.

Each planning authority should endeavour to provide assistance to prospective rural housing applicants through information provided on their website and the pre-application consultation process. The information provided on the local authority website should make clear that the Planning and Development Act makes it an offence to submit false information or documentation in connection with a planning application.

Pre-application advice

Planning authorities should be proactive in providing pre-planning consultation in relation to a proposed rural housing development further to receipt of a request under Section 247 of the Planning and Development Act.

This process will allow the prospective rural housing applicant to engage with the planning authority and to scope out policy and technical requirements that will need to be addressed in the application. Planning authorities should offer a 'planning clinic' system in areas where there are a high volume of rural housing applications.

The local authority website should provide easy to understand information in relation to the planning application process for a single rural house, including step-by-step details on how to make a planning application and in relation to the rural housing criteria that apply.

The website should detail the type of information that may be required in order to demonstrate an economic or social need for a rural house, and highlight other matters of relevance that are typically considered in the assessment of a rural housing application.

Planning authorities also should publish information relating to naming and numbering requirements for new developments on their website, setting out the details of any Irish language requirements, and engage with prospective applicants when requested. Where possible, the planning authority should seek to agree the naming and numbering scheme with the applicant during the assessment process and to attach a condition to the grant of permission in relation to the implementation of the agreed naming and numbering scheme.

7.2 Other Planning Considerations

Where the principle of rural housing development has been established as being acceptable in accordance with the NPPMs and policies and guidance contained within this NPS and the provisions of the relevant development plan, a planning authority or An Coimisiún Pleanála must also consider the application in all other respects under their statutory obligations set out in the Planning and Development Acts.

Some of the more common matters that arise in the consideration of applications for rural housing development and are outlined below to assist those engaging with the planning system. For clarity, while this NPS does not provide an exhaustive checklist of the considerations that may arise in respect of any individual proposal and other relevant existing statutory policy or guidance also needs to be considered, this section of the NPS provides a useful point of reference for prospective applicants and planning authorities.

Each application will need to be considered on its own merits, having regard to the proposed development, the location of the site, all relevant legislative and policy requirements and guidance in relation to the matters addressed hereunder.

7.1.1 Siting and Design

It is important to ensure that the design and siting of rural housing integrates well with the physical surroundings, makes best use of the natural landscape and supports the conservation and restoration of biodiversity. This includes natural features such as topography, trees, hedgerows, woodlands, watercourses and traditional boundaries.

Landscape character assessment and characterisation of the qualities and sensitivities of different landscape types can help to inform policies in the development plan relating to the location and siting of rural housing.

In assessing design, planning authorities should make well balanced and informed judgements on the merits of each proposal, having regard to the degree to which a site is sensitive in visual, environmental and other terms, the character of surrounding development and the wider area and the need to encourage innovation in design and construction techniques.

A number of planning authorities have published siting and design guidance that provides a useful resource for prospective applicants and this is encouraged in all areas where there is a high volume of rural housing applications. The guidance should not be overly prescriptive and should aim to promote best practice in the areas of: Site Location; Siting; Scale and Form; Building Design; Materials and Finishes; Habitat and Biodiversity Management; Boundary Treatments; Sustainability and Energy Efficiency; and Accessibility and Lifetime Adaptability.

The design of housing in rural areas should reflect high architectural standards, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area. New dwelling house design must respect the character, pattern and tradition of existing places, materials and built forms. The incorporation of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) in the design and construction of rural dwellings is generally supported. A successful design should consider every aspect of a building and its setting to achieve an outcome that responds to the requirements of the applicant while integrating into the landscape.

As a result, applicants will be required to demonstrate that the design of the proposed new dwelling, whether vernacular or contemporary, responds to the context of the site and its rural surroundings and that it reflects and respects the built tradition of the rural area in question. Dwelling designs which are suburban in influence, or are visually

dominant, intrusive, or incongruous in the rural setting, will not generally meet these requirements.

Where there are particular sensitivities or designations in the area (see Section 7.2.8) of the site the applicant is advised to consult with the planning authority before making an application.

7.1.2 Vehicular Access and Traffic Safety

The vehicular entrance serving a rural house must be designed and located so as to provide safe access. Drawings submitted with a planning application for a rural dwelling will need to include details of the proposed vehicular entrance and show available sightlines, having regard to the horizontal and vertical alignment of the road.

The adequacy of the sightline will be determined by the planning authority, or An Coimisiún Pleanála on appeal, on a case-by-case basis taking account of factors such as the road type, the designated speed limit and the condition of the road.

Where the application proposes to undertake works to improve sightlines, the proposed works should be detailed on the submitted drawings and included within the site boundary and form part of the application.

The removal or alteration of substantial sections of existing roadside boundaries, such as trees, hedgerows, open watercourses or other ecological features that contribute to biodiversity and rural character should be avoided where possible.

The planning authority should, in making a balanced and reasoned decision, seek to identify where detailed matters can be resolved by attaching conditions to a grant of permission, while, informed by the relevant technical advice, ensuring that a proposed development will not undermine public or traffic safety, avoiding any potential traffic hazard and protecting the safety and capacity of the road network in a manner that is appropriate to the location and context.

The *‘Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities’* (2012) set out national planning policy in relation to the national road network, aligned with national transport policy which falls under the remit of the Department of Transport. The Guidelines state that the policy approach should be to avoid the creation of any additional access point from new development or the generation of increased traffic

from existing accesses to national roads to which speed limits of greater than 60 kilometres per hour apply.

The Guidelines do however allow for an exception to be made in the case of 'lightly trafficked sections' of national secondary roads serving structurally weak and remote communities where a balance needs to be struck between the important transport functions of such roads and supporting the social and economic development of these areas. Development plans may identify such sections of road subject to consultation with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), to ensure that traffic safety is not undermined.

When proposing a new access point onto regional and local roads, the applicant will need to demonstrate that vehicular entrances provide effective visibility for all road users, avoid creating or exacerbating a safety hazard, and minimise the provision of new entrances where possible, particularly onto regional roads.

The applicant will be required to demonstrate that the vehicular access will satisfy road safety requirements and that no suitable alternative exists, for example where access could be provided off a nearby local road.

While new access arrangements are not precluded, the provision of shared vehicular access for two dwellings or small groups of clustered housing will be preferable, where feasible, to the creation of new, individual vehicular accesses, and may allow for the improvement of existing access arrangements.

7.2.3 Water Quality

The quality of Ireland's water resources is a key national asset. The planning system has a key role to play in ensuring the maintenance and improvement of water quality through the location and sustainable management of development.

The countryside is home to extensive sections of our rivers, lakes, canals and groundwater bodies and interfaces with much of Ireland's coastal waters, which are an important natural asset that people, nature and our economy rely upon. The Water Action Plan 2024: A River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027 sets out a programme of measures to protect and, where necessary, restore bodies of water, and identifies Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems as a growing pressure on the water environment.

7.2.4 Wastewater Treatment

In most cases wastewater from a single rural house is disposed to an on-site domestic waste water treatment system. The domestic systems are designed to discharge treated effluent via percolation through soil and/ or subsoil to water (generally to groundwater in Ireland).

As a general principle, new development should be guided towards sites where acceptable wastewater treatment and disposal facilities can be provided. Sites where it is inherently difficult to provide and maintain such facilities, such as sites that are prone to extremely high water tables and flooding or where groundwater is particularly vulnerable to contamination, should be avoided.

Where it is proposed to dispose of wastewater from a proposed development other than to a public sewer, information on the on-site treatment system proposed and evidence as to the suitability of the site for the system proposed must be submitted with the application.

The EPA Code of Practice: Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Population Equivalent ≤ 10), issued in 2021 (which replaces earlier manuals) sets out a detailed methodology in relation to site assessment and in relation to the selection, installation and maintenance of an appropriate domestic waste water treatment system. This Code of Practice (and any subsequent updates or replacements) should form the basis for the assessment of proposed domestic waste water treatment systems.

It is important that the system is located, constructed and maintained to the highest standards in order to protect the environment and public health.

In settlements, the Developer-Led Initiative (DLI) for Wastewater Services may provide a means to ensure that satisfactory wastewater arrangements are in place.

7.2.5 Water Supply

The submitted planning application will need to show that there are suitable provisions in place for water supply. In areas with a public water supply or group water scheme, the development should connect to the public supply or group scheme.

In other areas it will be necessary to supply potable water via a domestic well. In order to ensure that a suitable water supply can be provided within the site the results of

groundwater sampling should be sought as part of the application process. The test results should be from a certified laboratory.

Details should also be sought as part of the application in relation to measures to be undertaken to protect the well from contamination and that accord with EPA practice guidance in relation to well protection.

7.2.6 Flood Risk

The *'Planning System and Flood Risk Management, Guidelines for Planning Authorities'* (2009), set out the need to avoid development in areas at high risk of flooding and to avoid the risk of flooding elsewhere as a result of development. The assessment of flood risk will be an important consideration in the assessment of proposals in or near areas identified as at risk of flooding, and the submission of a flood risk assessment may be required as part of the application.

7.2.7 Natural, Cultural and Built Heritage

Section 50 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 sets out a list of objectives which development plans must include for the conservation and protection of natural, cultural and built heritage.

Considerations relevant to the assessment of rural housing include the need to consider any relevant international and national designations for the protection and enhancement of conservation areas, and any highly sensitive scenic landscapes, protected sites or features that are given statutory protection in the local development plan.

For example:

- **International designations** such as UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, Geoparks, or World Heritage Sites, Ramsar Wetlands and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), European protected sites including Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Natura 2000 network in accordance with EU Birds and Habitats Directives.
- **Landscape** including statutory designations such as National Parks, Special Amenity Area Orders and Tree Presentation Orders, and any sensitive landscapes, seascapes or geological features, views or prospects, which may

be identified as part of a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in a local development plan. The location, design and siting of a rural house should be informed by the character and value of the landscape and its sensitivity to change (see also Section 7.2.1). The National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025 establishes high-level principles for the protection and enhancement of landscape, and positive management of change.

- **Biodiversity** including national statutory designation as a Natural Heritage Area (NHA), Refuge for Fauna, Wildfowl Sanctuary, Statutory Nature Reserve or any relevant site-specific or local conservation objectives in a development plan, that identify important local habitats and species, or ecological networks.
- **Built Heritage** including statutory protections for historic, archaeological or architectural heritage sites such as National Monuments in the Record of Monuments (RMP) and Register of Historic Moments (RHM), underwater archaeology/wrecks; and Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) and Record of Protected Structures (RPS) that are designated in a local development plan.
- **Cultural Heritage** where there is a designated Gaeltacht or inhabited offshore island, a development plan prepared under the Planning and Development Act 2024 must include objectives for the protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage and promotion of Irish as a community language and identify any priority area plan to be prepared to guide development of that Gaeltacht area.

Proposals for rural housing will be assessed having regard to the extent to which the development is consistent with development plan objectives that relate to the protection and enhancement of natural, cultural and built heritage as set out above, also having regard to the extent to which the development would detrimentally interfere with the character of the landscape or with a view or prospect of special amenity value or natural interest or beauty, the preservation of which is an objective of a development plan or local plan for the area in which the development is proposed.

Development proposals for new single rural housing which are located in areas identified as **highly sensitive scenic locations**, including those areas that are subject to a national or international designation, should not generally be permissible except in exceptional circumstances.

7.2.8 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA)

Rural housing developments may, depending on the circumstances of the case, be subject to the requirements of the EU EIA and Birds and Habitats Directives, which have been transposed into Irish Law.

Where screening under these directives indicates that further assessment is required, a planning application will be required to include the necessary reports or assessments to facilitate consideration by the planning authority of such matters. This may include an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and/or Appropriate Assessment (AA) report in order to ensure compliance with the EU Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive or EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

7.3 Planning Conditions

A planning authority or An Coimisiún Pleanála may attach a condition or conditions to a grant of permission in order to manage the impact of the development. In the particular context of rural housing developments, this may include conditions specifying that the use of a structure as a dwelling shall be restricted to use by persons of a particular class or description.

The Planning and Development Acts also provide for the use of agreements for the purposes of restricting or regulating the development and use of land permanently or for a specified period.

Example of an Occupancy Clause

Ensuring that new rural housing is maintained in the ownership and occupancy of the applicant(s) is a key requirement of any permission for a single rural house.

It is recommended that the planning authority should attach a condition to the grant of permission (in addition to the occupancy condition) that stipulates that the grant of permission will apply only to the named applicant(s) and cannot be transferred to any other party.

Where planning permission is granted with an occupancy condition, before any development commences, the applicant should be required to enter into an agreement with the planning authority, providing for the terms of this occupancy requirement.

A register to record the details of the occupancy clause should be created, maintained and monitored by the planning authority.

An example of an occupancy clause to be attached to a planning permission for housing in a rural area is provided below:

CONDITION:

(a) The proposed dwelling when completed shall be first occupied as the permanent primary residence of the applicant and shall remain so occupied for a period of not less than ten years thereafter.

(b) Before development commences, the applicant shall enter into an Agreement with the planning authority, pursuant to Section 257 of the Planning and Development Act 2024²⁰, as amended, providing for the terms of this occupancy requirement.

(c) Within two months of the occupation of the proposed dwelling, the applicant shall submit to the planning authority, a written statement of the confirmation of the first occupation of the dwelling in accordance with paragraph (a) and the date of such occupation.

(d) This condition shall not affect the sale of the dwelling by a mortgagee in possession or by any person deriving title from such a sale²¹.

REASON: To ensure that the proposed dwelling is used to meet the applicant's stated housing needs and that development in this rural area is appropriately restricted [to meeting essential local need] in the interest of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Sample Language Enurement Conditions

Planning condition to be attached to a grant of permission for multi-unit schemes in Gaeltacht areas

1 (a) A minimum of X % of the residential units hereby permitted shall be restricted to use by those who can demonstrate the ability to preserve and protect the language and culture of the Gaeltacht, for a period of 10 years from the date of first occupancy.

²⁰ Section 47 of the Planning and Development Act 2000

²¹ To facilitate the sale of property by lending institutions in circumstances relating to a loan foreclosure.

(b) Prior to occupation of the development, the developer shall enter into a legal agreement with the planning authority (*under the provisions of section 47 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, or section 407 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 whichever applies*), the purposes of which shall be to restrict or regulate a portion of the residential elements of the development hereby permitted for the use of occupants who have an appropriate level of proficiency in spoken Irish in line with a standardised language competence assessment. The restriction shall apply to households who occupy these dwelling units whether as owners, lessees or tenants.

(c) The standard level of proficiency is a minimum Level B2 in spoken Irish in the Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) or similar standardised language competence assessment, which must be demonstrated by a nominated adult member of the household.

(d) The determination of the planning authority as required in (b) shall be subject to receipt by the planning authority of satisfactory documentary evidence from the developer regarding the sales and marketing of the specified housing units, in which case the planning authority shall confirm in writing to the developer or person with an interest in the land, that the legal agreement has been satisfied and the requirement of this planning condition has been discharged in respect of each specified housing unit.

This condition shall not affect the sale of the dwelling by a mortgagee in possession or the occupation of the dwelling by any person deriving title from such a sale.

REASON: To ensure that development in this Gaeltacht area is appropriately restricted [to protect the special Irish language heritage of the Gaeltacht area] in the interest of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Planning condition to be attached to a grant of permission for a single new rural dwelling

(b) The dwelling hereby permitted shall be restricted to use as a house by a household where at least one adult member can demonstrate competence/fluency in Irish (minimum Level B2 in spoken Irish in the Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) or

similar standardised language competence assessment) and their cohabitants, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the planning authority, for a period of 15 years from the date of first occupancy.

(b) Prior to commencement of development, the applicant shall enter into a legal agreement with the planning authority (*under the provisions of section 47 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, or section 407 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 whichever applies*), the purposes of which shall be to restrict the dwelling hereby permitted for the use of occupants where a nominated adult member of that household has demonstrated the minimum level of language proficiency required in (a).

REASON: To ensure that development in this Gaeltacht area is appropriately restricted [to protect the special Irish language heritage of the Gaeltacht area] in the interest of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Appendix A: Mapping Rural and Gaeltacht Areas where Local Needs Criteria Apply

In the interest of clarity and transparency a digitised record will be sought from each local authority of all Rural and Gaeltacht Area designations where local needs restrictions are required to manage overdevelopment and protect the unique rural character and heritage of that area. This will facilitate the creation of a single map layer that allows all such areas to be viewed in a nationally consistent manner, including:

- **Rural areas under urban influence**; will be informed by the CSO 'Urban and Rural Life in Ireland', 2025 mapping of 'small areas'²² (rural areas under high and moderate urban influence) based on population density and the proportion of usual residents who are in employment in urban areas. While the CSO data to the most recent census year provides a baseline, development plan maps should include the five city metropolitan areas as set out in the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) and may be further refined to take local topography and development pressures into account and to avoid excessive variation and abrupt transitions at a local level in aggregating the small area CSO data appropriately to the local authority administrative area.
- **Metropolitan areas**, comprise cities and large urban centres and their surrounding commuting zones, which are designated through the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and managed by Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) to coordinate housing, transportation, and economic growth.
- **High amenity areas**, comprise areas where housing is open for consideration but may need to be carefully managed in order to protect the heritage sites or features that contribute to the distinct character of a city county or region, in particular high value regional scale landscapes that may cross local administrative boundaries and require a consistent mapping approach.

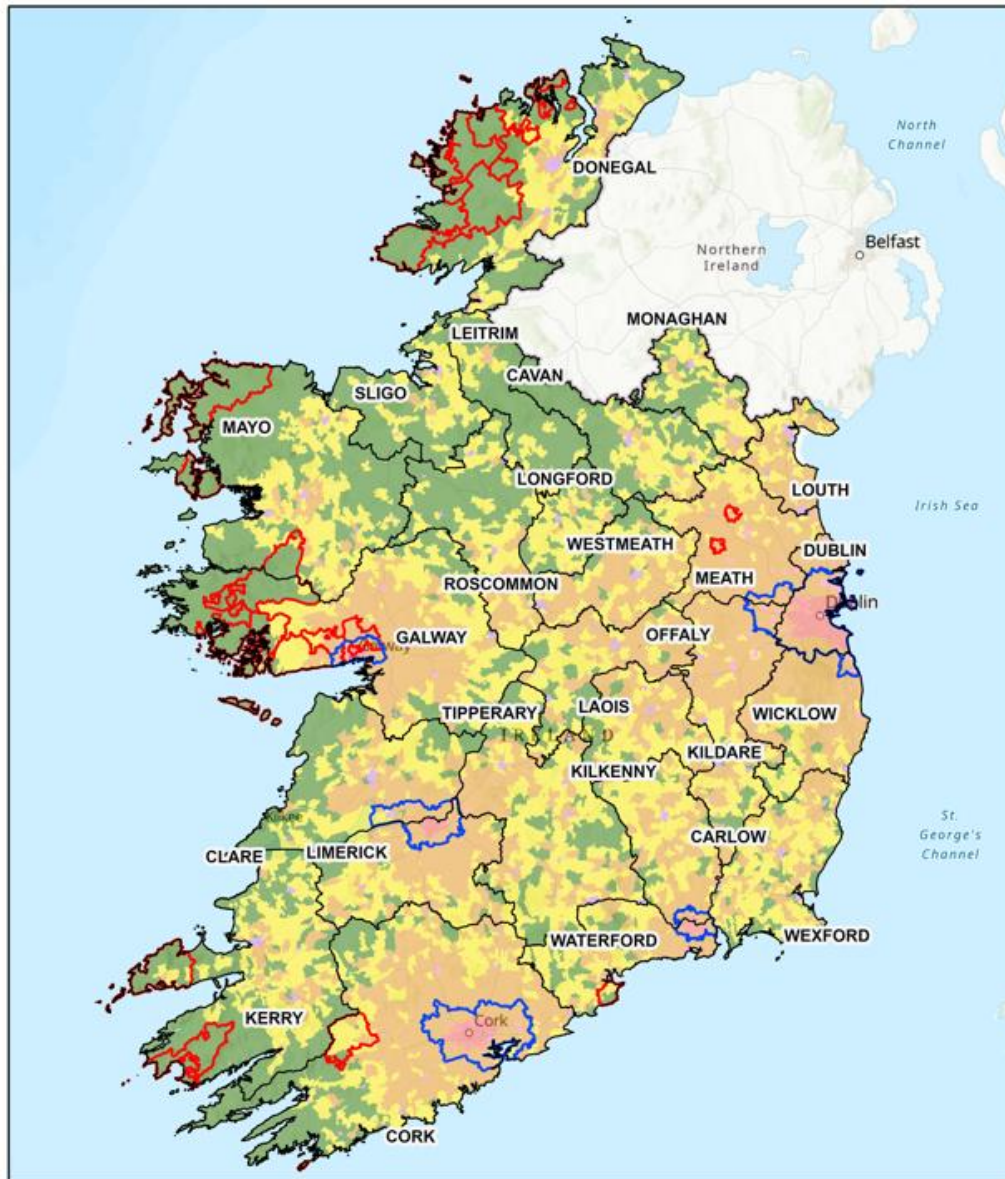
See indicative Map 1 that will provide a baseline for development plan maps.

²² CSO Urban/Rural Classifications (Census 2022) 'Small Areas' generally comprise either complete or part of townlands or neighbourhoods of 80 to 120 dwellings and are the lowest level of geography for the compilation of statistics in line with data protection

<https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=0a03e35f72cb49a1a00714211134995a> .

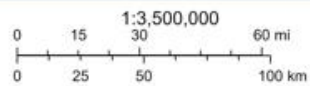
Map 1 Indicative Map of Rural and Gaeltacht Areas where local needs criteria apply

Urban Influence, MASPs and Gaeltachts



10/06/2026

- County Boundaries
- Metropolitan Areas (DHLGH 2020)
- Gaeltacht LPTs
- Cities
- Independent urban towns
- Satellite urban towns
- Rural areas with high urban influence
- Rural areas with moderate urban influence
- Highly rural/remote areas



Taife Eireann, DHPLG, OSI, CSO, CSO. Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Esri, USGS

Appendix B: Language Impact Statement (LIS) in Gaeltacht areas

Sample Information to be submitted by a developer in a LIS to accompany all applications for multi-unit residential schemes in Gaeltacht areas (including in all Gaeltacht settlements and those parts of settlements that are partially located within a designated Gaeltacht area):

- Name of Applicant
- Address of New Development
- Language Planning Area in which the development is located
- Number units in the proposed development
- If the development is planned to be phased. Please indicate the number of units in each phase of the development
- Percentage of daily Irish speakers in the Language Planning Area to the most recent Census year (see Table below or any update thereof)
- Please indicate the number of units to be reserved for Irish-speaking purchasers who can demonstrate the required minimum B2 level of proficiency in spoken Irish in each phase of the proposed development and confirming the 10 year period of enurement for which such requirement will apply
- Please indicate the basis on which such a proposal is being put forward and how it will contribute in an appropriate way to the maintenance of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the area.
- Please indicate how the period of enurement will be ensured if reserved units are re-sold before the period of enurement has lapsed
- Please outline any other proposals which you may have to contribute to the protection of the linguistic heritage of the Gaeltacht including the promotion of Irish as the community language

The percentage of units required to demonstrate language competency for multi unit proposals will be based on the **number of daily speakers outside the education**

system as a percentage of the population aged 3 years or over in the Gaeltacht Language Planning Area in which the development is to be situated as defined in the relevant, most recent Census. However, in order to not alone maintain but to enhance the use of the language on a daily basis, 10% should be added to these percentages. For example, in a LPA where 66% of the people speak Irish on a daily basis, 76% of units should be reserved for Irish speakers (rounded up where possible subject to the retention of at least one unit for non-Irish speakers).

Each planning authority which has a designated Gaeltacht area within their administrative area should endeavour to assist developers, by providing relevant information on the level of language proficiency to the most recent census year and relating to Language Planning Areas on their website and through the pre-application consultation process, supported by the Irish Language Officer of the local authority.

Daily Irish speakers outside education system as percentage of population aged 3 years and over by LPT, 2016 - Table 5.4²³

| Na Limistéir Pleanála Teanga Ghaeltachta (Language Planning Areas) | Population (3+ years) | Speaks Irish daily outside education system | % |
|--|------------------------------|--|----------|
| Toraigh | 114 | 85 | 75 |
| Ceantar na nOileán | 2,057 | 1,474 | 72 |
| An Cheathrú Rua | 2,392 | 1,558 | 65 |
| Oileáin Árann | 1,187 | 681 | 57 |
| Conamara Láir | 2,855 | 1,603 | 56 |
| Gaoth Dobhair, Rann na Feirste, Anagaire agus Loch an Iúir | 5,704 | 2,900 | 51 |
| Cois Fharraige | 6,439 | 3,104 | 48 |
| Árainn Mhór | 464 | 219 | 47 |
| Cloich Chionnaola, Gort an Choirce, An Fál Carrach agus Machaire Rabhartaigh | 3,903 | 1,546 | 40 |
| Ciarraí Thiar | 6,708 | 1,928 | 29 |
| Na Déise | 1,738 | 467 | 27 |
| Cléire | 145 | 36 | 25 |
| Múscraí | 3,619 | 836 | 23 |
| An Ghaeltacht Láir | 1,541 | 337 | 22 |
| Ráth Chairn agus Baile Ghib | 1,776 | 283 | 16 |
| Dúiche Sheoigheach agus Tuar Mhic Éadaigh | 3,088 | 426 | 14 |
| Dún na nGall Theas | 2,955 | 322 | 11 |
| Tuaisceart Dhún na nGall | 2,716 | 246 | 9 |
| Maigh Eo Thiar | 2,088 | 180 | 9 |
| Maigh Eo Thuaidh | 6,968 | 563 | 8 |
| Maigh Cuilinn | 4,285 | 299 | 7 |
| Ciarraí Theas | 1,753 | 121 | 7 |
| Bearna agus Cnoc na Cathrach | 11,184 | 660 | 6 |
| Na Rosa | 5,211 | 274 | 5 |
| An tEachréidh | 7,676 | 223 | 3 |
| Oirthear Chathair na Gaillimhe | 7,524 | 215 | 3 |
| All Gaeltacht language planning areas | 96,090 | 20,586 | |

²³ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp10esil/p10esil/ilg/>

List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| AA: | Appropriate Assessment |
| ACA: | Architectural Conservation Area |
| CEFR: | Common European Framework of Reference for Languages |
| CLÁR | Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais |
| CSO: | Central Statistics Office |
| DHLGH: | Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage |
| DLI: | Developer Led Infrastructure |
| DRCDG: | Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht |
| EIAR: | Environmental Impact Assessment Report |
| EPA: | Environmental Protection Agency |
| ERDF | European Regional Development Fund |
| HNDA: | Housing Need and Demand Assessment |
| LCA: | Landscape Character Assessment |
| LIS: | Language Impact Statement |
| NDP: | National Development Plan |
| NPF: | National Planning Framework |
| NPS: | National Planning Statement |
| NPO: | National Policy Objective |
| NPPG: | National Planning Policy Guidance |
| NPPM: | National Planning Policy and Measure |
| OPR: | Office of the Planning Regulator |
| RHM: | Register of Historic Moments |
| RMP: | Record of Monuments and Places |
| RPS: | Record of Protected Structures |
| RRDF: | Rural Regeneration and Development Fund |
| SAC: | Special Areas of Conservation |
| SPA: | Special Protection Area |
| TCF: | Town Centre First |
| TEG: | Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge |
| TFEU: | Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union |
| URDF: | Urban Regeneration and Development Fund |

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An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage