

# Section 5

Location of Development:  
Policies



### Main Points:

- To assist the framing of the plans and strategies of national, regional, and local bodies, the NSS sets out indicative policies in relation to the location of employment related and residential development, rural development, access to services and environmental quality.
- The NSS framework takes account of the various factors influencing the location of enterprise – the key driver of spatial patterns of development. The NSS outlines specific supportive measures that need to be considered, including the development of strategic reserves of land, access to streamlined planning processes where appropriate, improved capacity for innovation, research and development, effective spatial and transportation frameworks and access to international markets.
- The NSS outlines the spatial responses needed to maximise the potential of the tourism sector to support balanced regional development.
- The agriculture, food, forestry, fishing and aquaculture sectors and other activities in the natural resource sector have a key role to play as a primary economic basis for vibrant and diversified rural communities and the retention of the rural population.
- Housing: In planning for the 500,000 additional dwellings estimated to be needed over the next ten years, the NSS gives local authorities clear indications of where major demands are likely to arise, particularly in strengthening gateways and hubs.
- The NSS emphasises the importance, particularly in urban areas, of combining the location of housing with good transport facilities; and the need to ensure that housing requirements are matched by the supply of zoned and serviced land.
- In relation to housing in rural areas, the NSS provides guidance on the different policy responses appropriate to different circumstances.
- The NSS addresses policies to enhance quality of life issues in different types of areas.
- The NSS will be implemented within a framework of strong and ambitious policies for protection of the environment and policies for integrating environmental considerations into sectoral policies.

## 5.1 Introduction

The national strategic approach to Ireland's development over the next twenty years presented in Section 3, set out the ways in which various places will develop in the context of strategic roles that will enable different areas to play to their strengths. In addition, a broad framework outlining how more effective movement within, to and from the country could be achieved has been outlined.

To assist in addressing the spatial aspects of the plans and strategies of various national, regional, and local bodies, this section of the Strategy sets out indicative policies in relation to the spatial issues for key development sectors.

These policies relate to

- the location of employment-related development
- the location of residential development
- spatial aspects of rural development
- how people access services
- how people can continue to enjoy a high quality environment.

## 5.2 Economic Development

### 5.2.1 The NSS and Enterprise Development

#### Introduction

As confirmed by the NSS research, the performance of areas in terms of enterprise, has been spatially uneven, with the bulk of employment growth occurring in the South and East Region. This Strategy will build upon the advantages that this region possesses, but it also establishes a spatial framework to guide future investment priorities for enterprise development in the Border, Midlands and Western Region (BMW).

#### Spatial Patterns of Enterprise Activity

The characteristics, location, concentration and distribution of future economic activity will have a crucial bearing on the achievement of more balanced spatial development.

In general, foreign-owned companies display a preference for locations in or near large urban areas that provide labour force, skills, infrastructure and business and social networks. In contrast, the existing base of Irish-owned firms is distributed more widely. Outside Dublin eighty percent of Enterprise Ireland's indigenous clients are located in towns of less than 30,000 population and thirty-five percent in towns of less than 3,000. This latter pattern reflects the presence of entrepreneurship at a wide variety of locations and at varying levels. It also reflects the powerful influence of family and community ties on the location of indigenous enterprises which have been formed or are developing.

#### Emerging clusters of economic activity

The NSS provides a framework that takes account of a range of factors influencing the location of enterprise. International trends in business location will also have a significant influence. These trends include:

- the tendency towards spatial concentrations of technology intensive companies in electronics, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, medical products and software
- the attraction of companies and skilled workers toward urban areas
- the growing importance of services which have reinforced the role of large centres of population.

In Ireland, the clustering of economic activities has been especially evident along the eastern seaboard, particularly in the Greater Dublin Area. This is also true of Cork, Limerick/Shannon and Galway. The research undertaken for the NSS confirms therefore that Ireland's existing and emerging city-regions are critical sources of economic dynamism within the Irish economy and should be nurtured and built upon for the benefit of all. In particular, they represent important resources for the future development and expansion of the enterprise sector.

#### Other recent enterprise trends

In addition to increases in employment, the enterprise base in Ireland has experienced other significant changes over the last decade. These include the emergence of a sophisticated and internationally competitive software sector comprising Irish and foreign-owned companies. Seven of the world's top ten software companies now operate in this country. Foreign-owned companies have increasingly been allocating design and development responsibilities to their Irish affiliates. This underscores the importance of supporting and strengthening the capability and quality of research and development functions at various regional locations in Ireland to sustain a competitive and innovative enterprise sector.

While extremely strong inflows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) have been a major contributor to growth over the last decade, indigenous industry has also undergone substantial structural re-positioning, by building new areas of competence to avail of major new business opportunities. This has included an increasing number of Irish-owned companies investing overseas, especially in the services sector in the United States. This trend is likely to continue over time and could result in the emergence of an expanded group of Irish-based, possibly Irish-owned, multinationals using overseas locations to develop markets, skills, technology and earnings, giving rise to a greater need for effective international linkages between Irish-based companies and their overseas operations.

Particular growth sectors for industry in the 1990s included the high-technology sectors of software, financial services and electronics. Balanced against this growth, low technology sectors, which tend to be open to competition from lower cost countries, have experienced decline. In addition, some sectors are undergoing considerable internal restructuring through the introduction of new technology and processes. This results in a dynamic within the indigenous sector of job gains arising from the exploitation of new market opportunities and job losses as new technology and processes are introduced. Investment in training and skill formation is an important feature of the movement to a high value-added economy.

A major characteristic of the enterprise sector in Ireland has been its improved productivity performance. Over the next two decades and beyond, sustaining an acceptable level of economic growth, and the associated benefits in terms of income and employment opportunities, will require a strong productivity performance. Given expected long-term demographic changes in the ageing of the population, labour force growth is expected to contribute a smaller proportion of total productivity growth than it has in the past. As a result, innovation, embracing and harnessing technological change, together with efficient and competitive infrastructure, will become the key requirements for continued productivity improvement.

### **Future trends in enterprise development**

Future trends are likely to include the following.

The majority of new jobs will continue to be created in services rather than manufacturing, with an increasing number of new start-up enterprises operating in the services sector.

The increasing importance of companies in the services sector will have spatial effects in the form of their preference for locations at or close to major points of consumer demand and end clients, plus their requirements for infrastructure to trade in products and services which have a high information content.

Local services, health care, leisure and tourism will become even more significant as the population ages and disposable incomes rise in the high productivity and traded sectors.

To remain competitive and viable, companies will need to increase the technological content of their products and services by allocating additional investment to research, design, innovation and development.

Skills related to technological and organisational development and innovation will become more significant requirements for business enterprises.

Regions with a strong population base that can support high quality business infrastructure, technological development and innovation will continue to be major attractions.

Foreign Direct Investment will remain a significant structural feature of the Irish economy, although the character of the projects attracted to Ireland will change over time in response to changes in the advantages offered by Ireland and the evolution of the multinational firms and industries operating here.

A range of high quality locations will be necessary to present opportunities for business to attract skilled labour from abroad to support operations in Ireland.

Effective physical and electronic access to customers, suppliers and other sources of information will remain a critical requirement for business success.

The overall shape, size, performance and spatial distribution of the enterprise sector will be heavily influenced by public policy decisions at home and in the EU. The following will be especially significant

- national, regional and local spatial planning that offers clarity and certainty
- a high quality environment
- affordable housing supply
- the timely and cost effective provision of infrastructure, particularly transportation and energy
- taxation, competition, planning and environmental legislation.

### **What is needed for Enterprise to support Balanced Regional Development?**

The central importance to balanced regional development of promoting critical mass at key, strategic locations has been emphasised previously. In these circumstances, it will be essential to develop and nurture a strong enterprise base supported by the critical mass provided by the gateways and hubs. Establishing and developing this critical mass and enterprise base will also demand a focus on supporting infrastructure investment.

In addition to the general approach to building up the spatial structure set out in the NSS, the following factors should be borne in mind in developing more detailed spatial policies to support enterprise development.

Policy must recognise the different locational requirements of enterprise activity in various parts of the country. Targeted strategies must seek to strengthen a wider range of areas, without damaging areas that are already performing strongly.

The inherent advantages of the South and East (S&E) region in its overall contribution to national economic development must be consolidated and, at the same time, the relative deficit of demographic, settlement and productive resources which is limiting the development potential of the Border, Midlands and West (BMW) region must be addressed.

The spatial framework of the NSS, including the gateways and hubs must be supported by Government policy and private sector investment, to underpin the evolution of the enterprise sector in these two regions.

The role of the state development agencies,<sup>14</sup> fostering and attracting private investment in the regions, will be pivotal in supporting the spatial structure outlined in the NSS.

### **The Role of the Development Agencies**

Over the next decade and beyond, in line with international trends towards major growth in the services and technology areas and Ireland's growing competitiveness in these areas, the development agencies will be targeting more innovative, technology-intensive, high value-added activities and start-ups. Spatial clusters of international excellence are emerging in Ireland, particularly focused around the city regions and other strategic locations. Accordingly this Strategy, with the support of the agencies, seeks to strengthen these areas and increase their number by supporting the formation of self-sustaining clusters of economic activity in line with the national spatial structure that the NSS has established.

The establishment and strengthening of such clusters will require the support of high quality education, skills and research, together with physical infrastructure. These supporting investments will only be effective in a globally competitive market if they are spatially co-ordinated and targeted at strategic locations. The development agencies will work towards supporting the development of the spatial structure of gateways and hubs to attract significant levels of enterprise investment and support innovation and entrepreneurship.

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<sup>14</sup> These include IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Shannon Development and Údarás Na Gaeltachta

The indigenous internationally trading enterprise base is widely distributed. Nonetheless, Enterprise Ireland's strategies incorporate specific spatial elements which link the development of companies in key new sectors such as informatics, e-Business, digital media and health sciences to a small number of centres where there is a third level education presence. Similarly, IDA Ireland will continue to target cities and towns with the potential to develop their advantages in terms of the existing enterprise base or economic, social or innovation infrastructure. Developing competitive advantage associated with such cities and towns supports the creation of an internationally competitive position in new and emerging services activities, the pharmaceutical and chemical sectors, information and communications technology, bio-pharmaceuticals, medical devices and engineering.

This approach is and will continue to be supported by a substantive IDA presence in strategic centres. As a first step in enhancing its support for regional development, the IDA's offices in Sligo, Athlone and Waterford were significantly strengthened during 2001, complementing the already established positions in Cork, Limerick, Galway, Letterkenny, Dundalk and Dublin.

The NSS, with the support of the development agencies for the indigenous sector will have a vital role to play in ensuring that the potential of smaller towns in the regions is developed. Enterprise Ireland's vision for regional development is concerned with *'the creation of an environment for business regionally in which competitive capability is developed and sustained within companies, high growth start-up business is encouraged and innovation flourishes'*.

The widely distributed and strong characteristics of existing indigenous enterprise will play an important role in achieving balanced regional development. This will be enabled through the agencies embedding and building on the existing enterprise base with a particular focus on innovation. Identifying and encouraging new start-up companies with strong growth potential will remain a key priority. New opportunities will continue to be identified for economic development in the regions, including expansion investments by Dublin-based companies.

In addition, there are a number of policy priorities that will flow from the approach set out in this Strategy through the industrial development agencies in a way which is responsive to international enterprise trends and to the specific brief of the agencies. These priorities include the following.

Strategic reserves of lands for enterprise development should continue to be developed, aligned with the spatial structure outlined in Section 3. These should provide high quality setting and location, easy access to key infrastructure such as transport, energy, water services and communications and be well integrated with the spatial structure of adjoining urban areas and their educational facilities.

Locations in or close to the gateways should also, where appropriate, have access to streamlined planning processes such as the Strategic Development Zone mechanism under the Planning and Development Act 2000.

National and regional capacity for innovation, research and development must be bolstered, focusing on the quality of third level education and research facilities as well as encouraging the emergence of particular centres of excellence. Again the spatial structure outlined in Section 3 will be the focus for such efforts, with a particular emphasis on the development of existing educational facilities and enhancing the innovative capacity of facilities in the South East, Midlands and North West.

It will be important to ensure that regions have the required access to international markets for goods, services and labour mobility. The capacity to attract mobile investment will be supported by the strategic development of infrastructure such as telecommunications, energy networks, regional air and sea port services.

The necessary key infrastructures for the gateways and hubs, including reliable energy networks, waste management facilities and advanced broadband telecommunications must be co-ordinated.

Ireland must realise the potential for significant economic development opportunities through effective cross-border co-operation between large cities or towns such as Derry-Letterkenny, Monaghan-Armagh, Cavan-Enniskillen and Dundalk-Newry and through further enhancing the emerging Dublin-Belfast economic corridor.

Ireland must also build an 'information based society' through rapid changeover to e-business throughout the public and private sectors.

From an enterprise perspective, implementing the NSS represents a major opportunity for a better distribution of competitive enterprise activity across the State.

### 5.2.2 Employment in Tourism

Expenditure by tourists to Ireland (including receipts paid to Irish carriers by foreign residents) was estimated to be worth almost €3.9 billion in 2001. Tourism supported 150,000 jobs (or job equivalents) in 2000. Of the estimated 1,741, 000 people at work in Ireland, tourism spend supported one in twelve jobs in 2001. It has been estimated that over fifty-one jobs are supported for every million pounds of out-of-state tourism expenditure and thirty-six jobs for every million pounds of domestic tourism expenditure.

Tourism is characterised by the fact that consumption takes place where the service is provided. Also significant is the fact that tourism activity is focused in some cases on areas with an otherwise weak economic base. As a result it can have a positive influence on regional development.

Looking to the location of tourism activity, it is possible to distinguish between different parts of the country in terms of their current level of tourism development and its potential into the future. Factors that drive this include

- The tourism resource base in an area – including natural resources like climate, topography, cultural and entertainment facilities and shops. When highly developed, the tourism resource base achieves a critical mass that supports its further development.
- Access – in terms of ease of and cost-effective international access via ports and airports, local access through road and rail/bus networks and information about attractions and facilities.
- Visitor preferences – current preferences in holiday experiences and how this alters over time.

The interaction between these and other factors has led to the emergence of three broad types of area.

- (1) *Established tourism areas* such as Dublin, parts of the West like Galway, the Mid West region, Cork and Kerry. These areas frequently contain premier international tourism destinations ranging from cities themselves such as Dublin and Galway to the highly developed 'tourism districts' in parts of County Kerry, the Mid West and other areas.
- (2) *Developing tourism areas* such as other parts of the West coast, high amenity areas close to the main cities and certain inland areas associated with water based recreation where tourism is beginning to have a significant impact.
- (3) *Undeveloped tourism areas* such as inland river valleys, many parts of the canal network like the Royal and Grand Canals, where significant potential for tourism based development exists but has not developed as yet.

In each of these areas, specific spatial responses are needed to maximise the potential contribution of the tourism sector to balanced regional development, while protecting the assets which make these areas attractive for visitors.

In established tourism areas, rather than seeking a diversion of activity from already strong tourism areas, an effective spatial response will address infrastructural bottlenecks and promote off-season activity to spread demand.

For developing tourism areas, the appropriate spatial response is to augment the already successful areas by building up their capacity for tourism. This would broaden the number of places where strong tourism occurs in Ireland, with consequent regional benefit. Westport is a good example of how this has happened in recent years.

Undeveloped tourism areas frequently offer a different type of resource base, such as inland waterways or built heritage as opposed to the dramatic landscapes of the West.

The appropriate spatial response to developing the potential of such areas is to look to strategic opportunities in tourism niches. This will seek to build upon locations with potential such as the Midlands or Border, which, in the context of NDP funded improvements to transport infrastructure, will be more accessible from major centres of population and tourism demand than in the past.

There are strategic tourism development opportunities that arise from the varying types of potential in different areas. Examples of these are set out in Box 5.1.

## Box 5.1

### Strategic Tourism Opportunities

1. New Tourism Centres – opportunities to facilitate the emergence of new tourism centres in some of the less developed tourism areas, based on new major visitor attractions which have potential to develop a critical mass of visitor numbers with a strong overseas component.
2. Additional Short-Break Urban Destinations – opportunities related to expanding the number of cities, e.g., Cork, Limerick, Waterford, which can thrive as short-break urban destinations in themselves, building on their attractive settings and developing the presentation of their built heritage, general quality of appearance, cultural scene and hospitality base.
3. Heritage and Natural Landscapes – opportunities to realise the potential contained in the landscape, habitats and culture of some of the least developed tourism areas, particularly but not exclusively in the West and North West – Mayo, Sligo, Donegal – through facilitating better access and developing appropriate special interest activities.
4. Inland Waterway Circuits – opportunities to develop tourism possibilities by linking waterways and creating tourism circuits linking urban settlements and waterways in the Border and Midlands areas; and also to develop the potential of the river valleys of the South East.
5. Tourism Clusters – opportunities to develop a number of tourism clusters based primarily on existing attractions and facilities within a coherent geographic area by appropriate linking, upgrading and packaging.
6. Urban Generated Rural Recreation – opportunities related to the presence of attractive landscapes close to major urban areas such as Dublin, Cork Limerick, Derry and Waterford where weekend type leisure activity could become a significant driver of year round tourism activity.

### 5.2.3 Employment in Agriculture, Marine and Natural Resources

Agriculture and food production, forestry, fishing, aquaculture and related industries and natural resource development all have a key role to play as primary economic bases for vibrant and diversified communities in rural areas and the retention of the rural population.

Agriculture has traditionally been the most important contributor to rural economies. While it is now providing less employment, it remains important as a significant source of income and employment in rural areas. However, it must adapt to the challenges posed by modernisation, restructuring, market development and the increasing importance of environmental issues.

An economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, are essential components of the development of the rural economy. No one economic sector offers all the solutions to the challenges in rural areas. Instead, the response lies in different packages of measures to tap the potential that rural areas possess.

In the agricultural and food sectors themselves, issues relevant to spatial policy include

- facilitating farm based diversification and alternative enterprises such as organic foods, rural tourism or small and medium enterprises
- promoting research and development linkages between centres of innovation and food producers to establish excellence in particular areas of the country such as dairy products in West Cork for example. This can have associated tourism benefits as well
- recognition of the role of farmers as custodians of the natural resources of the countryside and support for this role.

Developments in marine and natural resource sectors offer significant advantages for stable, long-term economic activity in rural areas, providing work for which many of the skills required are available locally.

The acceleration of forestry development has seen a noticeable change in rural landscapes which will continue in coming years under the momentum of Ireland's forestry programme. With effective management, based on coherent policy guidelines, this change can be a positive force by

- harnessing the national potential for producing forestry products, including the use of under-utilised agricultural lands, the adding of value to timber products in Ireland and further developing regional specialisations such as the furniture sector in the North East
- promoting forestry to address concerns regarding greenhouse gas emissions
- fostering rural tourism development through forests as attractions, rights of way for long distance walking promoting the positive dimensions of the rural landscape by encouraging diversity of species and sensitive landscaping
- contributing positively to the forestry and forestry products sector through the county development plan process by identifying areas suitable for and sensitive to afforestation
- recognising the potential for forestry to contribute to integrated development by complementing other land uses e.g. by providing leisure amenities.

The sustainable development of the marine and natural resources sectors has a key role to play in supporting and advancing the economic well being of rural and coastal areas. It is of particular importance for peripheral coastal communities. The following spatial issues arise.

Coastal infrastructure, commensurate with the needs of the seafood and marine leisure sectors, at strategic ports and other key locations of particular importance for local economies must be developed.

An appropriate balance must be struck between the wide range of economic, leisure and amenity activities and uses in coastal and island areas.

Access infrastructure appropriate to the requirements of these sectors and the areas in which they operate is needed.

Inland fisheries resources must be supported through effective catchment management and planning, embracing all key factors and with effective integration of inland fisheries considerations and land use planning.

## 5.3 Housing

Good quality accommodation is a fundamental human need. Ensuring as close a match as possible between the national housing stock and the requirements of a growing and changing national population is essential, to avoid barriers to Ireland's continuing economic growth, competitiveness and social development.

In relation to housing, four public policy priority areas are highlighted in the National Development Plan

- the need to implement a strategic spatial framework for Ireland
- integrating the location of housing with the location of good transport facilities, particularly public transport
- zoning and servicing of residential lands to ensure a good supply of land relative to development needs
- provision to meet social and affordable housing requirements.



The four policy priority areas outlined above have important implications for the NSS.

The NSS, especially in the development of gateways and hubs, identifies for local authorities where major future housing needs are likely to arise. This will allow for timely, comprehensive and sustainable planning responses that integrate housing provision with employment, services, transport and the local environment.

Through combining the location of housing, employment and other services with good transport facilities, especially public transport, more effective and sustainable mobility within Ireland will be achievable.

Housing availability requires close monitoring to ensure that, within agreed spatial frameworks, whether at national, regional or local levels, housing requirements are matched by the supply of zoned and serviced land.

The development of socially balanced communities can be supported through catering for social and affordable and other housing market needs in an integrated way.

It has been estimated that it will be necessary to provide some 500,000 additional dwellings to meet likely demand in the period up to 2010. Ireland's housing stock per thousand of population is the lowest in the EU at 327 housing units per thousand population as compared to 435 per thousand in the UK and a European average of 450 per thousand. Provision of 500,000 dwellings over the next decade would bring the Irish housing stock to around 400 units per thousand population. Over the following ten years of the life of the NSS, it is reasonable to assume that convergence towards the EU average would continue, leading to further substantial housing demand, especially as average household sizes in Ireland also move towards EU averages.

The optimum choice of locations for housing, from a spatial planning point of view, has many dimensions, depending on urban or rural context, the quality of the living environment, transport and social balance. The following is an overview of housing location considerations in the NSS context.

### 5.3.1 Housing Location in Urban Areas

Local authorities, under the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, are obliged to prepare detailed estimates of housing demand for all sectors – private, social and affordable housing – through the preparation of housing strategies as part of the development plan process. It is vitally important that both housing strategies and development plans take account of the spatial framework provided by the NSS as set out in Section 3 and the considerations relating to the location of different activities set out in this Section.

In addition, it will be critical to provide for an adequate supply of land in line with assessments of housing land needs, through the development plan system. Such provision will require

- strategic reservation of land through the development plan process, coupled with ensuring timely and sequential release of land, to avoid delays in the availability and servicing of land on the one hand and premature release of zoned land on the other
- broad evaluation frameworks such as that suggested in Box 5.2 as an aid to the most appropriate spatial locations for housing land.

#### Box 5.2

##### Housing Location in Urban Areas

##### Evaluation Considerations

The Asset Test	Are there existing community resources, such as schools etc, with spare capacity?
The Carrying Capacity Test	Is the environmental setting capable of absorbing development in terms of drainage etc?
The Transport Test	Is there potential for reinforcing usage of public transport, walking and cycling?
The Economic Development Test	Is there potential to ensure integration between the location of housing and employment?
The Character Test	Will the proposal reinforce a sense of place and character?
The Community Test	Will the proposal reinforce the integrity and vitality of the local community and services that can be provided?
The Integration Test	Will the proposal aid an integrated approach to catering for the housing needs of all sections of society?

Sustainable provision of housing in urban areas also involves

- Concentration of development in locations where it is possible to integrate employment, community services, retailing and public transport
- Mixed-use and well-designed higher density development, particularly near town centres and public transport nodes like railway stations. Further advice on this issue is provided in the Department of the Environment and Local Government's Guidelines on Residential Density
- The efficient use of land by consolidating existing settlements, focusing in particular on development capacity within central urban areas through re-use of under-utilised land and buildings as a priority, rather than extending green field development. See the suggestions in this regard in Box 5.3 below.

- Ensuring that new housing development in or at the edges of villages and small towns is of a quality of design, character, scale and layout that is well related to the character and form of the village or small town in question at its particular stage of development.
- Avoiding environmentally sensitive areas in developing proposals for major extensions to built-up areas.
- Placing a high degree of emphasis on creating living environments of the highest quality through attention to detail in urban design, integration of amenities, facilities for children, older persons and sections of the community with special needs.

## Box 5.3 Urban Consolidation Priorities

1: Identify Opportunities for Re-Use	Through the development plan process, identify under-utilised, derelict or undeveloped lands within towns and villages.
2: Realise Options for Re-Use	Realise identified opportunities using, for example, the Derelict Sites Act and acquisition of key sites.
3: Identify Extension Options	Where sufficient development opportunities within the urban area are not available, consider appropriate extension options to the village or town.
4: Realise Extension Options	Follow up on options for extensions to the built up area using the tests in Box 5.2.

Towns and villages in some areas are declining in population, resulting in under-utilisation of serviced land, dereliction and consequent impacts on the quality of places. This cycle can be broken by a more positive approach to urban consolidation through the housing strategy process. In particular, such strategies should consider

- realistic targets for the location of housing within existing built up areas of villages, towns and cities
- policies to support the achievement of such targets, including interventions designed to ensure the availability of under-utilised or derelict land in urban areas through the use of the various local authority powers referred to in Box 5.3 above
- evaluation of progress to inform review of future strategies.

Socially diverse local communities located in well-planned development can foster a sense of place, pride, security and neighbourliness. It is important that new housing development secures a good social mix. Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides mechanisms to assist the achievement of this objective.

Housing strategies are the prime vehicle for better integration at local level and in particular for

- assessing the range of housing needs
- matching housing needs with supply and identifying necessary measures such as aids to affordability where local circumstances require this
- meeting particular housing needs such as those of smaller households, vulnerable sections of society and the Travelling community.

Within the above considerations, it will be vital to ensure the highest standards of design and layout by availing of professional design advice and supervision to create a high quality living environment.

### 5.3.2 Housing Location in Rural Areas

In Ireland, there is a long tradition of people living in rural areas. This Strategy, in seeking to achieve balanced regional development, supports sustainable rural settlement.

Rural settlement issues are complex and varied. Different forms of rural settlement have evolved over time through the interaction of economic, social and environmental forces.

This section of the National Spatial Strategy sets out a spatial planning framework to support sustainable rural settlement, taking account of the different forms of settlement that have evolved. The on-going process of evolution and change in rural settlement must be directed in ways that are sustainable economically, socially and environmentally.

As set out elsewhere in this Strategy, balanced regional development is to be promoted by creating economic and social opportunities at a wider range of locations. A key driver of this process will be the strengthening of the structure of cities and towns within regions to increase job opportunities and services, thereby providing additional locations for economic development. These cities and towns will in turn strengthen their own catchments.

In addition, achievement of balanced regional development depends on a high quality environment that sustains the competitiveness of rural based economic sectors and complements strong cities and towns.

#### Rural Settlement and Housing Framework

At an overall level, the sustainable rural settlement policy framework has four broad objectives

- (1) To sustain and renew established rural communities and the existing stock of investment in a way that responds to the various spatial, structural and economic changes taking place, while protecting the important assets rural areas possess
- (2) To strengthen the established structure of villages and smaller settlements both to assist local economies and to accommodate additional population in a way that supports the viability of public transport and local infrastructure and services such as schools and water services
- (3) To ensure that key assets in rural areas such as water quality, the natural and cultural heritage and the quality of the landscape are protected to support quality of life and economic vitality
- (4) To ensure that rural settlement policies take account of and are appropriate to local circumstances.

Within the overall objectives of this policy framework, more detailed rural settlement policies in regional planning guidelines, county development plans and in local plans need to take account of

- the specific character of rural housing demands in the area concerned
- the characteristics of the rural area and economy concerned, which will vary between areas and regions.

#### Rural Housing Demand Issues

Demands for housing in rural areas arise in different circumstances. In many cases, housing needs relate to people who are an established part of the rural community and who either work in rural areas or in nearby urban areas. In other cases, people living and working in towns and cities may seek to live in rural areas close to towns and commute daily to work. Some may have roots in these areas, others may have no connection with the land but seek a rural lifestyle. In recent years, increasing affluence, car ownership, improved building technology, personal mobility and urban house prices have extended the range of locations being targeted for residential development. In many cases, locations chosen are considerable distances from where people work, reinforcing travel patterns that are dependent on car based commuting.

Taking the above into account, it is normal in policy terms to distinguish between

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

Development plan policies must be tailored to address the different development issues that arise in relation to these two different categories of housing demand.

Rural generated housing needs arise for people who are an intrinsic part of the rural community by way of background or the fact that they work full-time or part-time in rural areas. As a general principle, subject to good planning practice in matters of location, siting, design and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and areas of high landscape value, rural generated housing needs should be accommodated in the areas where they arise. In addition, measures should be adopted by planning authorities that ensure that the provision of new housing is targeted to meet rural housing needs. This might include permitting new housing in rural areas subject to conditions that such housing be occupied by established members of the rural community.

With regard to urban generated housing in the open countryside, development driven by urban areas should take place, as a general principle, within the built up areas and on lands identified, through the development plan process, for integrated, serviced and sustainable development. However, it is acknowledged that some persons from urban areas seek a rural lifestyle with the option of working in and travelling to and from, nearby larger cities and towns. Smaller towns and villages have a key role in catering for these types of housing demand in a sustainable manner. A balance must be struck between encouraging appropriate residential development in villages and towns and ensuring that such development is of a design, layout, character and scale which fits well with the town or village involved and presents a high quality living environment. In addition, supporting public transport and reducing dependency on car based commuting should be priorities.

Achieving the right balance between encouraging development in towns and villages and the scale and nature of such development will vary from area to area depending on the existing character and scale of the town or village and the demand for housing in the area. Local authorities should encourage development of towns and villages through setting out clear policies in their development plans and in other local plans where appropriate. These plans should be supported where possible by measures such as the provision of appropriate services and sites. This would help to reduce the pressure for urban related development in the open countryside.

### Issues in differing types of rural areas

Section 3.3 of this Strategy identified a diversity of rural area types in Ireland. The different circumstances in these areas require different responses. Some rural areas, for example, are close to cities and large towns and are subject to growing pressure for single housing development in the open countryside to cater for people living in such urban areas. Others are more remote, with falling population, but in some cases are subject to pressure for the provision of second homes.

The broad types of different areas are

- rural areas under strong urban influences
- areas with a traditionally strong agricultural base
- structurally weak areas
- areas in which there are distinctive settlement patterns.

The types of housing demand that arise and the dynamics at work in these different types of areas suggest the following responses.

### **Housing in rural areas under strong urban influences**

In rural areas within commuting range of cities and larger towns development of urban generated housing in the open countryside is increasing rapidly. The extent of the commuting catchment varies from town to town, with the larger cities and towns tending to have the more extensive catchments.

There are various reasons behind the trends evident in these areas, including housing affordability, perceptions regarding quality of life in urban areas and inadequate support for sustainable urban development under past land use policies.

If present trends continue at their current scale, there will be an increasing environmental impact, in terms of additional car dependent commuting and on the character of the rural areas concerned, that will tend to undermine the viability of normal farming activities in those areas. Such development can also make the identification of routes and locations for the infrastructure needed to cater for national, regional and local development more difficult, thus undermining its economic viability.

To deal with these residential development trends, development plans must include measures to improve the attractiveness of towns and villages, with a view to promoting improved housing supply, affordability and design quality in those towns and villages. As stated above in relation to urban generated housing, development driven by cities and larger towns should take place within their built up areas or on lands identified, through the development plan process, for integrated, serviced and sustainable development. Well-planned development that extends urban areas to cater for new residential, commercial or other development, should not be prejudiced by prior, uncoordinated and ad hoc development of an excessive number of single houses.

As part of the response to the housing needs of a growing population, local authorities need to ensure that where new development is proposed in smaller towns and villages, this is of a design, character and scale that is in keeping with its context. This can be achieved by preparing detailed local plans and design frameworks, to ensure that new development adds to a village or town in urban design terms and that the settlement in question grows in an orderly and planned fashion. This is particularly relevant to smaller towns and villages close to the cities and main towns that are experiencing rapid growth.

Additionally, such development should aim to promote a high quality living environment and enhanced public transport usage, in preference to increasing reliance on car based commuting. Development plans should focus in particular on development possibilities in smaller towns and villages with ready access to public transport networks. Development plans also need to identify policies for ensuring the development in these towns of the economic and social infrastructure needed to support employment options and residential development.

### **Housing in rural areas with a traditionally strong agricultural base**

Many parts of the Midlands, the Border, the South East, the South and South West, traditionally have had a strong agricultural base that gave rise to an extensive network of smaller rural towns, villages and other settlements. This network of smaller towns and villages represents an important resource with much potential for additional development and population. Again, such smaller settlements would cater for the preference of people for a rural based lifestyle, while working in nearby areas, taking pressure off development in the open countryside. Additional development would help to support the viability of various services. However, the potential for development in smaller towns and villages needs to be unlocked with the support of public and private investment in essential infrastructure to enhance their attractiveness.

County development plans therefore need to recognise the resource that is the rural village and small town. Such plans should promote policies that incorporate a presumption in favour of appropriate development in villages and small towns, together with specific and practical measures in terms of providing serviced land and improved amenities that support and encourage the development of these towns and villages.

### **Residential development in structurally weak rural areas**

The weaker agricultural base and the weak urban structure in other parts of the Border, Midlands and in the West have led to population and economic decline. These areas are generally distant from major urban areas and the associated pressure for residential development. In general, any demand for permanent residential development in these areas should be accommodated as it arises, subject to good practice in matters such as design, location and protection of landscape and environmentally sensitive areas.

The long-term answer to strengthening structurally weak areas requires the strengthening of the structure of villages and towns in these areas. This process can be supported through the provision of services and encouraging investment in tourism supports, such as restaurant facilities and visitor accommodation, that harness in a sustainable way the potential of important local resources, such as the natural and cultural heritage, attractive landscapes and inland waterways. County development plans and county strategies should therefore contain policies of reinforcing weaker settlements to create more attractive conditions to support investment in rural development opportunities. Measures to be considered include public and private investment in the provision of water services, in-fill and new development opportunities, design frameworks and the provision of sites in villages and smaller towns.

### **Catering for housing development in areas with distinctive settlement patterns**

In some western seaboard areas, notably in Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Kerry and West Cork, distinctive settlement patterns have evolved in the form of small clusters of housing. There is a need to recognise this distinctiveness, while at the same time protecting valuable landscape resources and reinforcing rural communities. This can be achieved by seeking to address, within the development plan process, the extent to which existing clusters can be strengthened through appropriately scaled ‘in-fill’ development and avoiding linear or ribbon development. At the same time, it will be important to safeguard key resources, such as landscape and habitats.

### **Second Homes and Holiday Home Development**

Some scenic areas of the country, particularly in coastal and lakeside locations, are experiencing development pressures arising from the growing trend of building second homes and developing holiday home accommodation. This process is being driven by the increasing affluence of Irish people, the needs of the domestic tourism industry and the increasing levels of leisure time available.



Well-located and appropriately scaled second-home and holiday home development can act as a revitalising force in economic terms, particularly in areas that are structurally weak, but an emphasis is needed on clustering such tourism driven development in or adjoining small towns and villages.

Second home and holiday home type development can raise concerns regarding long-term sustainability, effects on the affordability of housing in rural areas for permanent rural dwellers and the incremental effect on the character of some smaller towns and villages where large-scale holiday home type development has taken place. In addressing this issue, development plans need to seek a balance between supporting a well-diversified rural economy and the protection of the environmental assets that attract visitors to an area.

Measures to be considered include

- integrated framework plans for rural development which identify locations for appropriate and sustainable development opportunities
- supporting affordability for rural dwellers in the context of housing strategies under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000
- integrated village and town plans that identify reasonable development needs for permanent as well as second homes or holiday homes, in balance with each other
- careful consideration of development proposals in environmentally or visually vulnerable areas, including areas of cultural heritage, landscape and local amenity value.

### Further rural housing policy development

Like other developments, rural housing can raise difficult land use issues that must be managed to ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of the country. This Strategy sets out key framework considerations. Further detailed rural settlement policies relevant to the specific circumstances of rural settlement land use for different parts of the country will have to be worked out as part of the regional guidelines and development plan process, having regard to the broad principles set out in this Strategy. The essential aim of this Strategy's overall framework is to ensure that the economic, social and environmental assets of rural Ireland are protected in the interests of the vital contribution they can make to achieving balanced regional development.

The Department of the Environment and Local Government will continue to monitor the progress of rural settlement policies. The Department will issue planning guidelines on rural housing to promote best practice, following public consultation.

## 5.4 Enhancing Quality of Life

### 5.4.1 Quality of Life Considerations in Different Areas

There can be a tendency, in considering ways of promoting more balanced development, to emphasise physical infrastructure such as roads, public transport, water services, energy and telecommunications. However, extensive studies in Ireland and abroad show clearly that infrastructure on its own does not deliver balanced development. There are many other economic and social factors that also influence spatial development. The social factors include

- the size and age profile of the country's population
- people's preferences in terms of quality of life (which vary according to age and background)
- education and health provision.

There are relationships between people's preferences, the location of social infrastructure (such as schools, third-level institutions, healthcare, sporting and cultural facilities) and the location of jobs and physical infrastructure. In combination these relationships drive patterns of movement and settlement in the population.

Discernible trends in Ireland include

- the attraction of major cities and other larger urban areas for younger people
- the appeal of certain medium sized towns
- the difficulty in maintaining social facilities in some rural areas
- the difficulty with accessibility to services and facilities in remoter rural areas.

The quality of life in the places to which different people are attracted has an important influence on the development of policies aimed at regional balance. In a spatial sense policy issues arise in relation to the following broad types of areas

- larger urban areas
- medium-sized urban areas
- rural areas.

### 5.4.2 Larger Urban Areas

Internationally mobile labour with ‘in-demand’ skills has particular preferences. People in this category are often attracted to cities and larger towns, where there is a vibrant social and cultural life, coupled with broad employment opportunities and a wide range of services including education, healthcare and childcare facilities, transport systems and ready access to entertainment and amenity facilities. In Ireland, certain cities and towns have developed strong economies around their power. The elements that contribute to the attractiveness of such places include

- a thriving, human-scale, cultural and social environment, concentrated around distinctive street patterns, mixes of restaurants, cafés, bars and attractive shops
- a high quality physical setting in terms of sensitive conservation of heritage buildings, contemporary architecture, street paving, formal and high quality public spaces and parks
- pedestrian friendly zones.

If balanced regional development is to work, the spatial structure outlined in Section 3 must be supported by policies aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of areas for people. Physical and cultural liveliness will be required to ensure that there is a combination of attractive social and cultural facilities for both people and business. The following are examples at the gateway level

- the potential of the central parts of Cork City to thrive around a rejuvenation of the docks precinct as suggested in the Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP), combined with other distinctive historic, retailing or university districts
- the possibilities for enhancing the central part of Limerick as a human-scale, traffic restricted district embracing the city’s historical and cultural heritage, thus complementing Limerick’s proven capacity for innovation and technological prowess
- opportunities for consolidating Waterford City around the River Suir, with particular emphasis on the possibilities for developing the North Docks precinct
- building on the appeal of waterways in the vicinity of the linked centre gateway for the Midlands, to spearhead the emergence of cultural and socially attractive districts on the lines of those already achieved in places like Athlone with the support of recent urban renewal initiatives
- building on the progress made to date in enhancing the physical fabric and improving cultural and leisure amenities in Sligo and Dundalk.

Progress towards more successful and attractive larger urban areas will continue to require targeted, area-based measures. These must continue to tackle areas of disadvantage, in the inner city areas and in major concentrations of social housing development on the periphery of cities and towns. In a spatial sense, the aims of such targeted measures must include the achievement of more cohesive and integrated local urban communities. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy sets out measures needed to assist in achieving this objective.

The issue of innovation is central to more spatially balanced forms of development. In the increasingly knowledge-based business environment, capacity for innovation will be the effective determinant of attractiveness from a business perspective. Bearing in mind the spatial distribution of third level educational facilities in Ireland, certain strategic considerations arise for the future.

The effectiveness of education, research and development services provided by third level facilities for the business community is critically important. The potential contributions of third level institutions, through innovation capacity and business linkages, suggests that there is a need to enhance their roles in support of business development.

There is also a need to look to co-ordinated, integrated and complementary development policies for third-level institutions in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford to support the urban networking options described in Section 3.

### 5.4.3 Medium Sized Towns

Many people are attached to a more rural way of life, with its emphasis on the importance of community. Places that offer a good range of services, such as a choice of primary and secondary schooling, retailing, employment, social and sporting facilities and access to national transport networks, are also appealing. Throughout most of the country, there is a reasonable distribution of medium sized towns that combine a largely rural setting with a good range of services. Such towns can have significant power to attract.

However, to thrive and develop into the future, such towns may need to look to emerging possibilities to act as networks offering a range of services similar to those in larger towns. This approach would benefit these towns themselves and their rural hinterlands. Rather than attempting to replicate a similar level of service in every town, the future development of facilities such as schools, hospitals, sports facilities and cultural centres might be based around the development of excellence in different towns. These towns could be linked through improved transport facilities and information, thus pooling resources and establishing a range of services similar to those in larger towns.

Within medium-sized towns, the sensitive conservation and use of heritage buildings and the physical quality of public areas such as footpaths, amenity areas and their security also make an important contribution to quality of life.

### 5.4.4 Services in Rural Areas

In more rural parts, it is not possible to make every type of service provided in a larger town available in the immediate locality. However for many people, a high quality natural environment, with the strong sense of community that exists in many parts of small town/rural Ireland is preferred to the immediate availability of the facilities provided in larger towns.

How best to protect and enhance these aspects of rural life, while at the same improving access to social and cultural facilities, is an important aspect of the NSS.

As described elsewhere in this Strategy, rural areas have undergone and will continue to experience a process of structural change. The declining numbers of people involved in agriculture has affected the viability of many services. Acknowledging the structural changes underway, the challenge is to find a way of supporting the future establishment of viable networks of rural services, from post-offices, to banks, childcare facilities, shops and rural public transport.

For such viable networks to flourish and sustain a rural way of life, rural settlements will play a key role. Many small towns and villages find it difficult to sustain local services and smaller scale development possibilities. However, policies designed to consolidate the small town or village, with the support for example of small housing developments and local enterprise units, would assist in sustaining them and their store of social and other services into the future.

The following are additional dimensions to rural quality of life.

In rural areas close to the larger urban centres, or close to road and public transport networks such as railways, strengthened rural settlement supports the development of rural public transport options. These would have the added benefit of enhancing access to local towns providing healthcare and education facilities, retailing etc.

In remoter rural areas, where access can be particularly difficult, there are special access issues that require consideration and which are beyond the scope of the spatial principles which can be laid out in this Strategy. For example, outreach facilities in the healthcare area or tailored physical access options for emergency needs are issues to be dealt with in the context of the development of the relevant sectoral policies.

#### 5.4.5 A Hierarchy of Access to Social Infrastructure

The enhancement of quality of life, through integrating the provision of social infrastructure with policies that affect where people live and work, is dependent on the fact that different types of infrastructure are appropriate to different points within the urban and rural structure.

For example, if hospitals or third level educational establishments are to support specialist, high-quality functions, they need to attain a certain threshold of size. Given this, such functions will tend to develop in larger settlements. For smaller communities to function well, there is a need to sustain strong community infrastructures, such as a multi-purpose hall, primary school, post office and local shop or pub.

Figure 5.1, based on a model provided by South Tipperary County Development Board, illustrates the foregoing by outlining the patterns of service provision that are likely to be appropriate at different levels ranging from the village to small town, county town and city levels.

A number of policy issues arise from this, which will help to inform the development plans of local authorities in particular.

There is a strong relationship between settlement size and the levels of service that can be supported. However, through good quality roads, public transport, information about services and appropriate outreach provision of services, improved accessibility can be secured to a wider range of services.

County development plans need to address the issue of settlement structure and service integration at a strategic level for their areas, by addressing gaps where these exist. Examples would include

- establishing a network of local centres, district centres and a county centre, supporting the planning of the appropriate levels of service to be promoted at different levels in the hierarchy of towns
- identifying particular villages to be strengthened in response to particular needs of the rural community
- establishing urban and rural networks by reference to the availability of, or prospects for developing rural public transport options
- integrating policies dealing with where people live and work with appropriate environmental considerations such as the availability of good quality water services.

## 5.5 Environmental Quality

The environment encompasses the natural and cultural heritage. This gives the environment two defining attributes:

- it is part of our national endowment
- its form and characteristics derive from both natural and human processes.

These processes have continued to interact in Ireland for thousands of years. This is most visibly evident in landscapes that are the product of interaction between natural and human processes.



As both of these processes are dynamic, the environment is continually changing. Policies must recognise this dynamism and seek to work with and creatively direct change rather than aim to maintain a static state of the environment.

The quality and character of Ireland's environment make a major contribution to national identity and to the green image of the country. This is an image defined in part by the outstanding and large-scale features of mountains, lakes, rivers, bogs and sea — particularly in the landscapes of places like Kerry, Connemara, Donegal and the Burren.

In addition, the multitude of other elements that combine to make the face of Ireland — clean water, biological diversity, historic buildings and structures — make an important contribution to the totality of the picture.

Ireland's national aims for achieving sustainable development point to three policy issues relating to the environment:

- an international responsibility to present and future generations which combines the concepts of sustainability and good stewardship
- the role of the environment in economic development
- the role of the environment in contributing to the quality of life of people.

International responsibility recognises that Ireland's natural and cultural environment is part of a shared European and world inheritance. The various components of that environment have to be safeguarded for their own intrinsic values. Any loss of part of this is a diminution of the riches of the world.

In addition to the idea of sharing, there is the idea of inter-relatedness. How we use our environment and its resources can have impacts upon the rest of the world. The use of fossil fuels and their contribution to global warming is a prime example of such environmental interaction.

In economic development, the environment provides a resource base that supports a wide range of activities that includes agriculture, forestry, fishing, aquaculture, mineral use, energy use, industry, services and tourism.

For these activities, the aim should be to ensure that the resources are used in sustainable ways that put as much emphasis as possible on their renewability.

More generally, the environment also has an economic role in adding to the attractions of the country, and of different places within the country, for enterprise and people. This is part of the social role through which the environment contributes to the quality of life of people. There are different spatial dimensions to this — from the immediate surroundings of a home to the wider settings of neighbourhood and town, to countryside and coast. The benefits can vary from active recreational uses to passive use in terms of viewing scenic landscapes. These benefits depend on appropriate accessibility for people to the different experiences offered by the environment.

The NSS does not replace or re-state environmental policies generally. However, development arising from the NSS will be implemented within the framework of strong and ambitious policies for the protection of the environment and policies to integrate environmental considerations into sectoral policies. Policy and action in this regard will focus, on limitations on greenhouse gas emissions in the context of the *National Climate Change Strategy* (2000), measures to support sustainable agriculture, and initiatives to address the impact of transport on the environment.

The NSS recognises that the environment is a prime ingredient of the potential of the country as a whole, and of different areas within the country. Looking at the environment in this way not only points to the developmental possibilities which it offers, but also to the fact that it is a potential that can be eroded if it is not managed carefully.

The EU Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will play an important role in ensuring that environmental issues are integrated into the implementation of the NSS. SEA requires assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of plans and programmes prior to their adoption. From July 2004<sup>15</sup>, regional planning

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<sup>15</sup> Transposition of the Directive into National Law is required by that date.

guidelines and city and county development plans which will support the implementation of this Strategy will undergo Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The environment is of prime importance in enhancing Ireland's competitiveness in the global market place. The spatial dimensions of this within Ireland are set out below under three headings derived from the broad strategic spatial roles for different parts of the country identified earlier in this Strategy. These dimensions are set out as considerations to be addressed in regional guidelines and strategies, with a view to their more detailed expression and delivery at county and local levels.

### Within the Consolidating and Strengthening Areas

In the **Consolidating** and **Strengthening** areas there are gateways, hubs and other large towns, together with extensive rural areas under strong urban influence. For large parts of these areas, the prime consideration from an environmental point of view is to maintain the distinction between the cities, the towns and the countryside, to prevent the further erosion of the respective advantages of both rural and urban areas. This can be expressed as putting in place, through regional and county level plans and strategies, a *Green Structure*, the objectives of which would be

- to prevent urban sprawl
- to reduce the loss of agricultural and other land to urban uses
- to protect rural identity and reduce disruption to farming by keeping rural-urban distinctions as clear as possible
- to create a green setting for cities and towns which will provide people with opportunities for outdoor recreation within easy reach
- to conserve and, where appropriate and possible, enhance biodiversity
- to protect buildings, structures and other physical elements of the cultural heritage.

The built environment provides the surroundings for the activities of the inhabitants of towns and cities. Its character and quality can provide an inspiration and a basis for cultural and social activities. These can act as a resource in developing tourism and attracting enterprise and labour. The urban heritage of our cities and towns is a particularly important environmental and economic resource that requires care and management. It is also a resource that each generation should add to through high quality architectural and urban design.

### Within the Reinforcing and Co-operating Areas

The **Reinforcing** and **Co-operating** areas are characterised, in general terms, by medium to small towns and rural areas associated with a changing or weak agricultural base. There are, of course, a variety of environmental conditions within these broad areas and the different circumstances call for particular responses. Overall, the following are the prime considerations.

Residential development should be encouraged in small towns and villages, thus supporting the economic provision of infrastructure.

Land on the better mineral soils, which may cease to be used for agriculture should be developed, where appropriate, for forestry. Examples of such areas are East Leitrim, East Mayo, Roscommon and North Galway. This would increase economic opportunities based on timber production, improve biodiversity and enhance the attractiveness of the countryside for tourism and recreation. In some areas the production of trees for biomass would be an appropriate option.

In areas of poor soils, including cutaway bog, favourable opportunities for the extensive development of wind power exist. The potential for this is particularly enhanced in areas that are close to main electricity transmission lines.

In areas where there is intensive agriculture, either on poorly drained land (such as Cavan and Monaghan) or on better land (such as North Cork and the Golden Vale), there is a potential for the alternative use of agricultural wastes for electricity generation. This would provide renewable energy and protect water quality by reducing the amount of slurry spreading.

Biomass and forestry by-products can be promoted as renewable fuel sources.

Water is a strong environmental component of these areas, for example, the river Shannon and its lakes. There are other river systems, lakes and canals that, with the Shannon system, provide a network for inland travel by water from Wexford to Donegal. The recreational and tourism potential of this water in all its aspects can support the reinforcement of this area and underpin the attractiveness of the Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar gateway in particular.

### Within the Revitalising Area

The **Revitalising** area is characterised by remoteness from the largest centres of population in the country and the relatively poor quality of the agricultural land. However, its environment includes outstanding mountain, lake and coastal scenery and rich flora and fauna.

The prime consideration for this area is recognising that its resource potential lies in the sheer quality of its environment, and that in its economic development this quality can help to compensate for the disadvantages of remoteness. However, if environmental quality deteriorates then the potential of this area is eroded.

The economic realisation of this resource potential will rest on

- a discriminating tourism product, where visitors are attracted by the qualities of landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage and a range of outdoor recreational opportunities
- attracting enterprises and people with a range of expertise and skills for whom living in smaller towns and villages provides the quality of life which they seek
- advanced communications infrastructure which can extend the range of economic activities undertaken.

The process of economic diversification is already underway in some places and can be intensified and extended.

The increased realisation of this resource potential calls for the wise management of all environmental resources in the form of landscape policies, settlement policies, biodiversity and conservation of the cultural heritage.

Coastal areas provide a scenically attractive environment that is biologically highly productive and diverse. At the same time, this environment accommodates a wide range of economic activities and recreational uses. Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) provides a holistic approach to the interactions between sectors, agencies and legal codes. The articulation of an integrated coastal zone management strategy will be taken forward by the Government Departments concerned, drawing on EU recommendations on the implementation of ICZM and national and international ICZM research and experience.