

Chapter 3. Core Strategy statement

Section 10(1A) of the Planning Act requires the development plan to include a Core Strategy which shows that the Plan’s objectives are consistent with the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and with specific planning policy requirements (SPPRs) contained in planning guidelines issued by the Minister (so-called “Section 28 guidelines”).

The Act specifies the “required elements” of a Core Strategy. These elements include the definition of a settlement hierarchy, allocating population and housing targets, providing details on lands zoned for residential and mixed uses, integrating transport considerations in the phasing of development and setting out a retail strategy for the county.

All the required elements are addressed in detail in Chapters 3 to 9 of this Volume (Volume 1).

This chapter (Chapter 3) represents the **Core Strategy Statement**, which summarises the required elements, as recommended in Section 4.6.4 of the Development Plan Guidelines 2022:

- Consistency with national and regional policy, and in particular the total quantum of additional housing and population targeted over the plan period;
- The rationale for the settlement strategy, that informs the settlement hierarchy, which must address each settlement and area type in the hierarchy;
- The rationale behind the distribution of housing and population for each settlement type, identifying key issues such as any local infrastructural deficiencies
- The total quantum of existing and proposed land zoned for residential use.

3.1 Consistency with national and regional policy

3.1.1 Consistency with the National Planning Framework

The 2018 **National Planning Framework (NPF)** is the main document that will guide, at a high level, strategic planning and development for the country over the period to 2040, so that as the population grows, that growth is sustainable in economic, social and environmental terms

The NPF recognises **Sligo Town** as a Regional Centre and highlights it as being a growth driver to a greater extent than any other towns in the North-West. The NPF indicates that “it will be necessary to prepare a co-ordinated strategy for Sligo at both regional and town level to ensure that the Town can grow sustainably and secure investment as a key regional centre”. This recommendation is reiterated in the NPO 7, which provides, inter alia, for the strengthening of Ireland’s urban structure, particularly in the Northern and Western Regions, to include the regional centre of Sligo.

The NPF Implementation Roadmap provides population projections for County Sligo up to 2031, which are in the range of 74,000 to 75,500.

Based on the higher-figure projection, **the County’s population should be approximately 75,000 by 2030**. This would equate to an additional County population of 4,800 above the circa 70,200 recorded by Census 2022.

There are no county-level housing targets set out in the NPF.

3.1.2 Consistency with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

The 2020 ***Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region (RSES)*** is a 12-year strategy which “provides a high-level development framework for the Northern and Western Region that supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant economic policies and objectives of Government”. It is intended to deliver “effective regional development” for the entire region, embracing the development opportunities specific to each sub-region.

The Strategy identifies Sligo Town as an “urban place of regional scale” and designates it a *Regional Growth Centre*. This is a significant position in the Region’s settlement hierarchy, second only to Galway City’s Metropolitan Area designation and on the same level as Letterkenny and Athlone Regional Growth Centres.

Regional Policy Objectives RPO 3.2 (b and c), RPO 3.3 and RPO 3.4 specifically support population growth in County Sligo, seeking to direct it within existing settlements’ built-up footprints and partially on brownfield sites in urban and rural areas.

The RSES sets population targets for Sligo Town while also indicating “minimum uplifts” to 2026, 2031 and 2040.

In line with the above provisions of the RSES, the Core Strategy of this Development Plan prioritises population growth in Sligo Town to a minimum level of **23,800 persons by 2030** (refer to the Core Strategy Table in Section 3.3). The 3,200 population increase (above the 2022 Census figure of 20,608) represents 68% of the projected total County population growth of 4,800 by 2030.

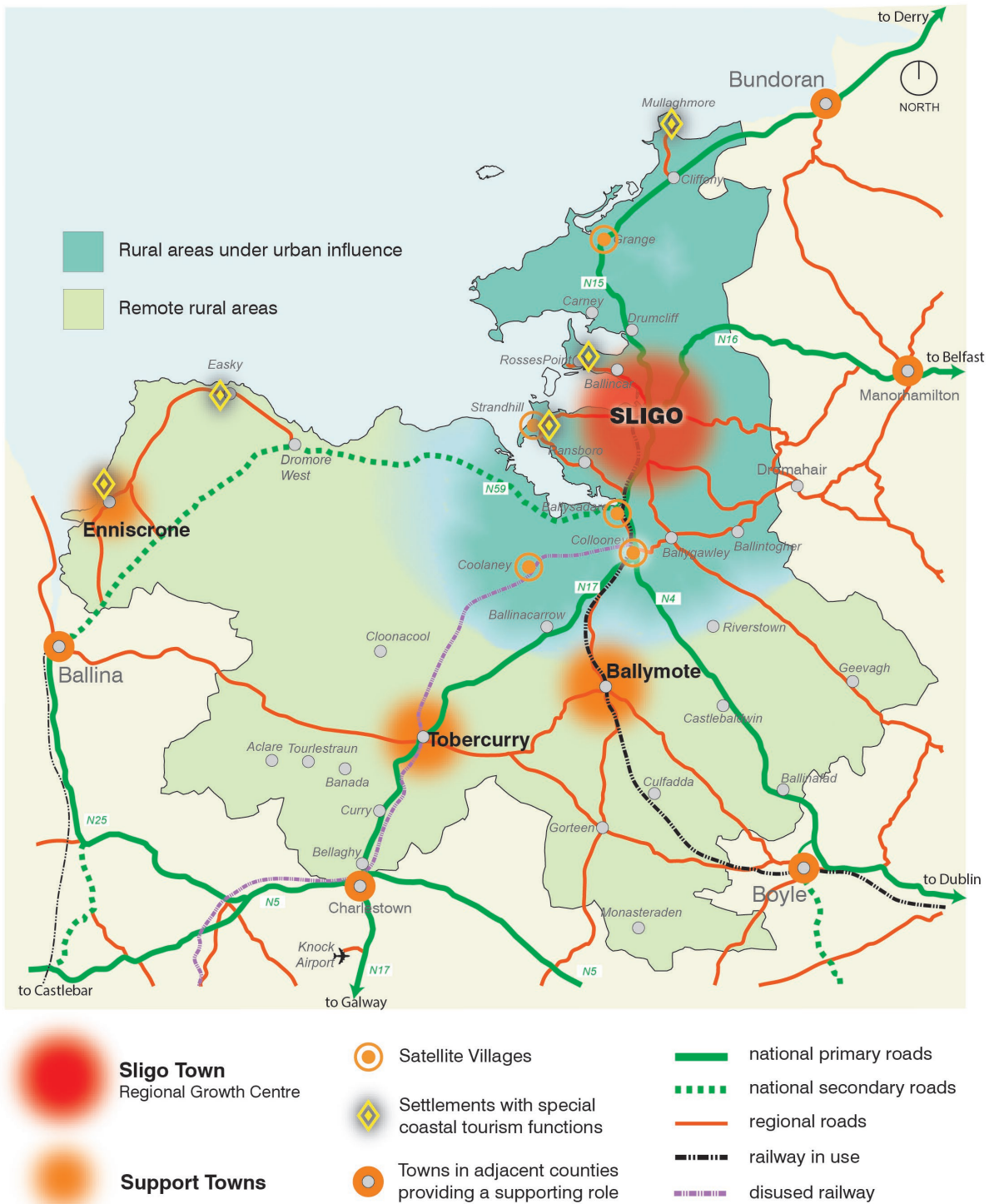
3.1.3 Consistency with national housing supply targets

The Core Strategy requirement is that each development plan must set out a clear housing supply target for the relevant six-year plan period calculated in accordance with the methodology prescribed in the Housing Supply Target Methodology Guidelines (HST Guidelines), which were issued by the DHLGH in 2020 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

For County Sligo, the total adjusted demand corresponding to the Plan period is **3,892 units**.

The calculations are detailed in **Chapter 5 Settlement Strategy, Table 5.2**.

Fig. 3.A Core Strategy Map



3.2 Distribution of population and housing

The additional population envisaged by the NPF and RSES and the housing demand calculated using the HST methodology have been allocated to the County's settlements based on the following criteria:

- designation and role in the **Settlement Strategy**
- outcome of **Infrastructural Assessment** (IA) of existing (2023) zoned lands
- outcome of **Settlement Capacity Audits** (SCA) of settlements proposed to be zoned

This section contains a summary of the process, which is detailed in Chapter 5 (Settlement Strategy) and Chapters 11 to 22 (individual town and village plans)

The resulting allocations of population and housing are presented in the **Core Strategy Table** (refer to **Section 3.3** in this chapter), designed in accordance with Section 1.3.2 in Appendix A of the Development Plan Guidelines (2022).

The differentiated approach recommended in the Guidelines means that “the smaller, more rural local authorities, with relatively few major settlements, should tailor the core strategy table accordingly and will provide a more limited amount of detail, reflective of the smaller number of often small-scale settlements”.

3.2.1 Summary of Settlement Strategy

County Sligo's settlement structure and hierarchy have remained largely unaltered for many decades, due to the slow pace of economic and social changes, similar to the entire North-West Region, where development continues to lag behind the EU average.

The NPF/RSES designation of Sligo Town as a Regional Growth Centre recognises the Town's complex role in the North-West and places it at the top of the County's Settlement Hierarchy.

Consistent with the NPF and RSES, the **Core Strategy will continue to focus on developing Sligo Town**, while ensuring that the County's lower-tier towns and villages retain their vitality.

The settlement hierarchy and the strategy for each category are summarised below and detailed in Chapter 5.

- **Sligo Town** is the County's main urban centre, which provides employment, education, healthcare and other services to people living in its large hinterland, within and beyond the County boundaries. It is the designated **Regional Growth Centre** of the North-West.
- In terms of size and social-economic role, the second level is occupied by **three Support Towns**. The market towns of **Ballymote and Tobercurry** and the tourism-focused **Enniscrone** are designated for consolidation, regeneration and a quantum of growth proportional to their current population and infrastructural capacity.
- Sligo Town's **Satellite Villages - Ballysadare, Collooney, Coolaney, Grange and Strandhill** – are home to large numbers of regular commuters who go to work or to school in the main urban centre. These larger villages have relatively good infrastructure and also offer a variety of local services.
- **Easky, Mullaghmore and Rosses Point** are **villages with special coastal tourism functions** (a role shared with Enniscrone and Strandhill). The Core Strategy supports the provision of adequate infrastructure for sustainable tourism development in these villages.

- At the lower end of the Settlement Hierarchy, **19 villages sustaining rural communities** (small villages with adequate wastewater treatment plants) are supported through the Core Strategy to cater for limited local needs in terms of residential development.
- A substantial population continues to live in dispersed communities throughout the County’s rural areas, including small villages without adequate wastewater treatment infrastructure.

Table 3.1 County Sligo – Settlement Strategy summary

Designation in the Settlement Hierarchy	Settlement name	Strategy
Regional Growth Centre (Principal Urban Area)	Sligo Town	Facilitate strong housing and population growth in accordance with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, implement Regional Growth Centre RPOs and other major projects, promote urban regeneration and economic development
Support Towns	Ballymote, Enniscrone, Tobercurry	Promote urban consolidation and regeneration, facilitating housing and population growth commensurate with town size
Satellite Villages	Ballysadare, Collooney, Coolaney, Grange, Strandhill	Carefully manage development, prioritising the provision of adequate service infrastructure, recreational and community facilities
Villages with special coastal tourism functions	Easky, Mullaghmore, Rosses Point	Ensure the provision of adequate infrastructure for sustainable tourism development
Serviced villages sustaining rural communities	Aclare, Ballinacarrow, Ballinafad, Ballincar, Ballintogher, Bellaghy, Bunnanadden, Carney, Castlebaldwin, Cliffony, Cloonacool, Culfadda, Curry, Dromore West, Drumcliff, Geevagh, Gorteen, Monasteraden, Riverstown	Support the retention of local services and the limited provision of residential development to satisfy local needs
Unserviced villages and dispersed settlement in rural areas	Ballygawley, Banada, Ransboro, Rathcormac, Tourlestrane and rural areas	Pursue the provision of wastewater treatment infrastructure in unserviced villages and manage development in rural areas in accordance with the strategic rural settlement policies set out in Chapter 5 (Settlement Strategy)

3.2.2 Summary of Infrastructural Assessment (IA)

In accordance with NPF requirements, the Planning Authority has carried out an Infrastructural Assessment (IA) of the existing undeveloped zoned lands in towns and villages which currently (2023) have land-use plans in place. IA was also carried out for sites in Tobercurry, which did not have a land-use plan in 2023.

The assessment considered the availability of service infrastructure (watermains, foul sewers, surface drainage systems) and transport infrastructure (roads, footpaths, cycle lanes) that would allow the development of lands immediately or during the Plan period.

From a total of 208 sites subject to IA, 205 sites were classified as Tier 1 (fully serviced lands) and three sites (all in Sligo Town) as Tier 2 (lands serviceable during the Plan period).

3.2.3 Summary of Settlement Capacity Audit (SCA)

The Tier 1 sites resulting from the IA have been subject to a further examination as part of the Settlement Capacity Audits for relevant settlements.

In the case of Sligo Town, the sites were assigned numerical scores based on criteria grouped under three main headings:

- “Spatially sequential” test – where the main consideration was proximity to the town/village centre (defined as the walking distance to a specified landmark)
- Availability of social infrastructure in the surrounding area (e.g. primary school, grocery shop, pharmacy, public open space etc.)
- Planning and environmental status (previous planning consents, sites highlighted in the RSES or reserved for social housing in the Council’s Housing Delivery Action Plan, flood risk etc.)

In carrying out the Settlement Capacity Audits of all other settlements where land is proposed to be zoned for residential and mixed uses, a simplified version of the SCA was applied.

Details of the IA and SCA, grouped by relevant settlement, can be found in **Appendix A** of this Plan.

3.2.4 Designation of sites for housing delivery

The outcome of the IA and SCA confirmed that there is an excess of fully serviced, undeveloped, zoned land in Sligo Town and County.

Settlement Consolidation Sites and Infill Sites

In the interest of achieving compact growth, it was decided to retain the most suitable (highest-scoring) sites for future residential (and mixed-use) development and designate them as **Settlement Consolidation Sites** and - in Sligo Town only – **Infill Sites**.

Additional Provision

In accordance with the Development Plan Guidelines (2022), which recommend that zoned and serviced housing land should not be subject to de-zoning, less centrally-located lands with live planning permission for residential development were designated as **Additional Provision** sites.

Regeneration Sites

Regeneration Sites, designated under Section 10(2)(h) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), have not been taken into consideration in the allocation of housing to settlements, because there is no certainty regarding their development during the Plan period, due to the variety of issues affecting these lands. Any amount of housing that may be provided through the redevelopment of Regeneration Sites will be regarded as a bonus.

Long-Term Strategic and Sustainable Development Sites

In line with the provisions of Section 4.4.4 of the Development Plan Guidelines (2022), several substantial sites in the Sligo and Environs area (outside the 2016 Census boundary of Sligo Town) have been designated as **Long-Term Strategic and Sustainable Development Sites**. No housing allocation is associated with LT SSDS for the duration of the Plan (2024-2030).

These sites have potential for significant residential development to be delivered over a timescale greater than a single six-year development plan period. It is considered imperative that these lands are reserved for the future co-ordinated development of new urban extensions to Sligo Town, on the basis of masterplans.

3.2.5 Strategic Land Reserve

In Sligo Town and other settlements in County Sligo, there is a legacy of lands previously zoned for residential and other types of uses. In the CDP 2011, the amount of zoned land was reduced where zoning was in excess of Core Strategy requirements at the time. The surplus land was designated as Strategic Land Reserve (SLR). Most of it was later carried forward into the CDP 2017.

Under this Draft Plan (2024-2030), the SLR designation is applied to lands which are not designated as Long-Term Strategic and Sustainable Development Sites, but may still be needed for future development of settlements. The SLR designation seeks to ensure that these lands remain available in the longer term. The Strategic Land Reserves are shown on the zoning maps associated with the town and village plans (Volume 2 – Urban Development).

3.2.6 Residential density

A key objective of the NPF and RSES is to promote the compact growth of towns and villages by increasing the density of development in existing built-up areas and new urban extensions.

The NPF also acknowledges that there is a need for more proportionate and tailored approaches to residential development. The *Circular Letter NRUP 02/2021* clarifies that "it is necessary to adapt the scale, design and layout of housing in towns and villages, to ensure that suburban or high density urban approaches are not applied uniformly and that development responds appropriately to the character, scale and setting of the town or village".

Having regard to the NPF, the *Sustainable Residential Development Guidelines* (2009) and subsequent *Circular Letter* (NRUP 02/2021), the Planning Authority has determined the appropriate average residential density in each town and village subject to land-use zoning. Details are provided in the individual town and village plans (Chapters 11 to 22 of this Plan).

3.3 Core Strategy Table

The **Core Strategy Table 3.2** presents population and housing figures for each of the County’s four towns, and aggregated figures for lower-tier settlements. Detailed figures and additional information can be found in Chapters 11 to 22, which contain the respective town and village plans.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Settlement	Population 2022 and percentage of County population	Population target 2030 and percentage of County target	Housing allocation 2030 and percentage of County HST allocation	RES and MIX zoning 2017, undeveloped in 2023 (hectares)	Proposed RES and MIX zoning 2024 (hectares)	Potential housing yield of RES and MIX proposed zoned lands 2024 (dwellings)	Current (2023) excess of zoned land (hectares)
Sligo Town Regional Growth Centre	20,608 (29.3%)	23,800 (31.77%)	2,512 units (64.54%)	43 ha	86.85 ha	2,952	No excess
Ballymote Support Town	1,711 (2.44%)	1,850 (2.46%)	185 units (4.75%)	22 ha	9.94 ha	215	12.09 ha
Enniscrone Support Town	1,291 (1.84%)	1,400 (1.86%)	130 units (3.34%)	18.5 ha	6.69 ha	151	11.86 ha
Tobercurry Support Town	2,307 (3.29%)	2,450 (3.27%)	130 units (3.34%)	No zoning in 2017	6.88 ha	153	Not applicable
5 Satellite Villages	7,250 (10.32%)	7,750 (10.34%)	370 units (9.50%)	34.5 ha	22.73 ha	433	11.81 ha
3 villages with special tourism functions	1,290 (1.83%)	1,400 (1.86%)	70 units (1.80%)	20.8 ha	6.29 ha	82	14.54 ha
All other villages and rural areas	35,913 (51.16%)	36,500 (48.73%)	495 units (12.71%)	59.2 ha	No RES or MIX zoning	580	59.2 ha
Total	70,198	75,000 (estimated from NPF)	3,892 units (HST allocation)	198 ha	132.5 ha	4,566 units (117% of HST allocation)	65.5 ha

3.3.1 Notes on the Core Strategy Table

- The figures presented in Columns 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 of the Core Strategy Table correspond to the **Draft County Development Plan 2024-2030**. These figures may change if amendments to zoning, housing or population allocations are made as a result of public consultation on the Draft Plan. The Core Strategy Table will be updated upon adoption of the new CDP 2024-2030.
- The total County population estimate of **75,000** by 2030 is based on the NPF/ESRI population projections contained in the **NPF Implementation Roadmap**. Based on previous demographic trends, this figure is considered reasonable and attainable.
- The total County housing allocation of **3,892** is calculated using the *Housing Supply Target Methodology* (refer to Table 5.2 in Chapter 5). There is no correlation between the population allocations and the housing allocations, because the HST figure is an “adjusted total housing demand”, which takes into account the undersupply of housing since 2017, and factors in a degree of “convergence to NPF strategy”.
- The allocations in Column 3 represent circa 85% of the potential housing yield of zoned lands in each settlement. Based on past trends, it would be unrealistic to expect that the zoned land is fully developed during the Plan period. The assumed utilisation rate of 85% is optimistic, given that less than 50% of residential development in County Sligo has taken place on zoned lands since 2011.
- The allocation of 580 dwellings (Column 6) to “All other villages and rural areas” consists of 480 one-off houses (estimated by the Housing Strategy) and an overall estimate of 100 dwellings that may be built within villages without housing allocations, on lands zoned RV (“Rural Village”).

3.3.2 Proposed redesignation of excess zoned land¹

At the time of drafting the CDP 2024-2030, there is an overall amount of **198 ha of undeveloped land zoned for residential and mixed uses** (including residential) distributed across 35 settlements.

The Draft Plan proposes to zone 132.5 ha of land for residential and mixed uses (including residential) **in only 12 settlements**. This represents a 33% reduction in the amount of land with residential potential within the County, resulting in a total excess of 65.5 hectares.

The excess zoned land detailed in Column 7 of the Core Strategy Table has been addressed in this Plan as follows:

- Long-Term Strategic and Sustainable Development Sites have been designated in Sligo Town;
- Regeneration Sites have been designated in most settlements;
- some lands previously zoned for residential uses have been rezoned for other uses (e.g. “RV/”Rural Village”) or included in the Green Belts of relevant settlements.
- a Strategic Land Reserve has been designated in certain settlements, where appropriate;
- lands have been dezoned in villages without adequate wastewater treatment.

Details can be found in Volumes 2 (Urban development) and 4 (Village Plans) of the Draft Plan. The respective details may change as a result of any amendments arising from public consultation on the Draft Plan.

¹ It is a requirement of the Development Plan Guidelines (Appendix A, Section 1.3.5) to “demonstrate how the level of any excess of land or housing will be addressed”.