



**Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil**  
Environment, Heritage and Local Government



## **Guidance Note on Core Strategies**

**November 2010**

### **(1) Purpose of the Core Strategy**

The purpose of the Core Strategy is to articulate a medium to longer term quantitatively based strategy for the spatial development of the area of the planning authority and in so doing to demonstrate that the development plan and its objectives are consistent with national and regional development objectives set out in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) and especially as regards:

- (1) the hierarchy and role of Gateways, Hub towns, county towns, other towns and villages and rural areas outlined in the documents above; and
- (2) the process of giving effect to the hierarchy above by setting regional and national population targets and associated requirements for housing land.

Whether zoning objectives are outlined in the relevant development plan or in subsidiary local area plans, the Core Strategy of the development plan must be sufficiently specific in setting population targets and housing requirements across the overall area of the planning authority and the elements of the settlement hierarchy outlined above thereby to act as a clear framework for amendments to existing zonings or new zonings in lower-level plans. In turn, the population targets and housing requirements of lower-level plans must agree with the Core Strategy of the city or county development plan and this will be achieved either in subsequent amendments to such plans or in the preparation of new local area plans.

### **(2) Core Strategy and Other Relevant EU Directives**

The Core Strategy does not stand alone from other strategic and EU Directive-related requirements but will represent the practical demonstration of their influence on the preferred spatial planning framework for the planning authority concerned.

Moreover, matters such as the spatial distribution of Natura 2000 sites and their ecological inter-relationship with other parts of a city or county, the implementation of River Basin Management Plans as regards provision of water services infrastructure and other matters such as flood risk assessment must inform the development of the Core Strategy, with planning authorities reconciling such considerations with wider national planning, economic and social objectives.

In demonstrating consistency with higher-level plans, the Core Strategy must also integrate other national planning policy guidance issued under section 28 of the Act e.g. Development

Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities (June 2007) etc. and relevant EU Directive-related considerations that development plans must comply with, namely:

- The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) as regards considering strategic options for the area of the planning authority, taking into account the potential impact of the development plan and its objectives on the environment;
- The Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) as regards protecting and enhancing water quality, particularly with regard to securing the objectives of River Basin Management Plans; and
- The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) as regards protecting the integrity of NATURA 2000 sites. Pending the commencement of Part XAB of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 which implements the Habitats Directive Article 6.3 in relation to land use plans, planning authorities are reminded of the transitional measures outlined in Circular Letter SEA1/08 & NPWS 1/08, which requires all planning authorities to use the opportunity of the variation process to address overall compliance throughout the plan. Therefore, when considering any proposed variation to an existing plan which appears to contain elements that are non-compliant with the required process, planning authorities should use the opportunity of the variations to address overall compliance with the Directive throughout the plan.

In other words, the Core Strategy must provide a transparent evidence-based rationale for the amount of land proposed to be zoned for residential and allied mixed-use zonings in the development plan and associated compliance with relevant EU Directives. A benefit of such an evidence-based approach providing a high-level summary description of the key statistics and priorities underpinning the development plan is that it will be the touchstone against which future development decisions in the development plan can be tested as being consistent with national and regional policy thus further strengthening the development plan as the fundamental link with these policies. The Core Strategy will:

- identify the quantum, location and phasing of development for the plan period (allowing for market choice) linked back to regional population targets;
- demonstrate how future development supports public transport / existing services etc.;

- ensure that Councils and key stakeholders assess the needs and priorities for their area on a plan-led basis in their assessment of existing zoned/serviced land and new zonings; and
- provide the framework for deciding on the scale, phasing and location of new development, having regard to existing services and planned investment over the coming years.

The Core Strategy will subsequently provide a fundamental consideration in the making of development plan decisions so that such decisions are themselves consistent with national and regional policy which will at the same time strengthen public confidence in the plan-making process.

### **(3) Timing for Preparation of Core Strategies**

As required under section 10(1B), planning authorities should ensure that they have incorporated Core Strategies into their development plans within 1 year of the adoption of the relevant Regional Planning Guidelines for their area i.e. the RPGs 2010-2022. Appendix 1 outlines the specific deadlines by which each of the 34 City and County Councils are required to put Core Strategies in place.

Core Strategies for other development plans e.g. Town Development Plans, will need be informed by and prioritised in tandem with the preparation of the County Plan. The priority must be to complete the Core Strategy for the County Plan within the time frame set out in the 2010 and, in parallel to the extent possible, progressing the Core Strategy for Town DPs as these will ultimately also have to be delivered within the overall 1-year time-frame.

### **(4) Content of the Core Strategy**

The content of Core Strategies which is set out in Section 7 of the 2010 Act varies somewhat between city and county development plans but must include:

- population targets;
- quantification of requirements for zoning of lands for residential and or a mix of residential and other uses; and

- in the case of county development plans, proposed existing and future distribution of population within the plan area within a settlement hierarchy.

In line with the provisions of the Act, the Core Strategy must contain:

- (1) A Core Strategy section of the written statement, outlining the origins and broad aims of the strategy, including in particular the population targets or allocation for the plan period; and
- (2) A diagrammatic type Core Strategy Map, depicting how the planning authority anticipates its area will develop out over the plan period and in line with the availability of infrastructure, services and amenities.

Taking account of the importance of the quantum and distribution of future population and housing development lands in the Core Strategy and the numerical nature of this information, it follows that in addition to the two items above, the Core Strategy should include a third item, namely:

- (3) A Core Strategy Table, summarising the key statistics in the Core Strategy as regards the distribution of future population and housing and its alignment with Regional Planning Guidelines.

### ***National and Regional Population Targets***

Regional Planning Guidelines for the period 2010 to 2022 have been adopted by each regional authority area across the country, and have been set in the context of policies of the Minister in relation to national and regional population targets communicated to the regional authorities in October 2009. Therefore, for the purposes of Section 10 (2A)(b) of the Act, all Regional Planning Guidelines are deemed to be consistent with the policies of the Minister and consistency with the RPGs is the way in which plans demonstrate they are taking account of the policies of the Minister outlined above.

Accordingly, the starting point for all Core Strategies is the population target for the respective City or County Council in the 2010 RPGs. For the purposes of identifying land requirements for zoning and to ensure consistency at regional and national level, these targets are maximum allocations.

Apart from Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area, the RPG housing figures above already take account of the headroom requirements (of up to 50% extra over actual predicted land/unit requirements) specified in the Planning Guidelines on Development Plans; therefore, no further headroom capacity should be provided in development plan zoning outside of the seven planning authorities in the GDA.

### ***Residential/Mixed Use Development***

Working with the relevant population target or allocation for a particular planning authority in the relevant RPGs, Sections 10(2A)(c) and (d) of the Planning Act 2000 (as amended) requires that Core Strategies contain information on the area of land already zoned in the development plan for residential use or a mix of residential and other uses and the amount of land proposed to be zoned for such uses.

In this regard, the Core Strategy Table should summarise:

- (1) the amount of land being zoned for development of housing or a mixture of housing or a mixture of housing and other uses if such mixed use zones permit housing,
- (2) how the amount of land specified at (1) compares to the previous zoning of such lands in the preceding development plan, and
- (3) the area or level of any shortfall or excess of lands or housing capacity.

Any excess under (3) above will not normally include lands identified for strategic long-term (i.e. 10 to 15+ year) development as part of Strategic Development Zones or major regeneration sites within key areas such as Dublin and Cork Docklands and strategic areas of other Gateway cities. Later phases of development in these strategic areas can be considered to form part of a strategic land bank within the development plan area that may take a number of development plan cycles to be realised.

Apart from the situations described above, taking account of the requirements of Section 10(2A)(b) with regard to policies of the Minister in relation to national and regional population targets, the amount of land and/or level of housing for the plan period that is identified in the Core Strategy must be in line with the amount of land or housing specified in the relevant RPGs.

Subject to the comments below, the Core Strategy must demonstrate how the level of any excess of land or housing will be addressed, taking account for example of zoning objectives of previous development plans. Ideally, all of the three mechanisms below should be considered to the full in addressing any excess:

- (1) Prioritising / phasing of development: by indicating on relevant tables and maps, where any surplus capacity of land and/or housing will be regarded as a strategic reserve and that proposals for the development of such lands or housing will not be considered for development purposes during the plan period;
- (2) Alternative Objectives: by indicating lands that will be considered for alternative appropriate uses within the plan period such as employment, amenity, community or other uses;
- (3) Discontinuing the Objective: by deletion of the zoning objective and related lands from the written statement and maps of the development plan.

In considering the options above, cognisance must be taken of the need to consolidate urban settlements by keeping them as physically compact as possible and applying the sequential approach to land-use zoning (as set out in Chapter 5 of NSS and section 28 Guidelines such as the Development Plan Guidelines and Sustainable Urban Residential Development Guidelines).

Appendix 2 contains an illustrative example of the Core Strategy Table referred to above that would be especially suitable for county development plans and could be modified to suit city development plans. All Core Strategies should therefore contain such a table.

A number of county development plans around the country do not contain detailed zoning maps and such zoning is addressed in subsidiary local area plans. In such cases, the Core Strategy of the development plan must identify the relevant population figure and housing land requirement for the various urban centres in its area and a schedule of the local area plans that will have to be amended to take account of the Core Strategy and the timeframe for such amendments bearing in mind the provisions of the 2010 Act with regard to the review of local area plans to ensure their consistency with newly adopted development plans (section 12(2B)).

### ***Retail Development***

Section 10(2A)(e) of the 2000 Act requires a Core Strategy to contain information to show that, in setting out objectives for retail development, the planning authority has had regard to the statutory Retail Planning Guidelines. The critical aspect of such information is that the estimates of the requirement for future retail development are based on, or take account of, the specific population target or allocation for the relevant planning authority outlined in the RPGs.

The above may require the planning authority to revisit recently adopted retail strategies to ensure that estimates of future floorspace provision are realistic and take account of nationally and regionally coherent population targets and allocations.

Where retail strategies are 3-4 years old, it would be more appropriate to review the implementation of such strategies in the light of a new Core Strategy if the Core Strategy changes fundamental assumptions of the retail strategy such as the amount of, or strategic location of, estimated population growth. Subsequently, when the time comes to review the retail strategy, it should be updated to take account of the Core Strategy.

### ***Other Development***

While section 10(2A) does not expressly require core strategies to contain information concerning other land uses such as employment, nonetheless, taking account of wider policies relevant to proper planning and sustainable development such as the Government's Smarter Travel strategy, the recently published consultation draft of planning guidelines on Spatial Planning and National Roads and the 2009 Sustainable Urban Residential Development Guidelines, which advocate the need to promote compact urban development and reducing car dependency and promoting sustainable mobility, the location of other significant uses such as employment and commercial zones and amenity and community facilities and areas should be closely integrated with locations for future housing development. Information in this regard should be included in the Core Strategy.

In particular, to complement the preparation of Core Strategies, planning authorities should undertake an appropriate level of analysis to ensure that sufficient lands are identified for employment purposes at suitable locations, taking proper account of national planning policies such as those above and the availability of the required physical infrastructure, particularly access and water services.



The matters above are in any event a requirement of Section 10(2C)(b)(ii) of the Act in framing the settlement hierarchy or strategy of the development plan.

### ***Settlement Hierarchy: County Development Plans***

Section 10(2A)(f) of the Act requires the Core Strategy of all County Development Plans to contain a settlement hierarchy, subsection (2B) requires the hierarchy to be depicted on a diagrammatic map and subsection (2C) requires the hierarchy to be consistent with RPGs and the policies of the Government.

In practical terms, the best way in which to represent the requirements above is for the Core Strategy Table to summarise the existing and future population levels of and associated housing land or dwelling number requirements for

- (a) Gateways,
- (b) Hub towns,
- (c) other towns, including county towns with a population of 1,500+ persons at the last Census,
- (d) aggregated smaller villages under 1,500 population and
- (e) the open countryside.

The requirements above should be summarised in the Core Strategy Table, as shown in the example at Appendix 2 and highlighted in the Core Strategy Map.

For development plans with rural areas, the Core Strategy must also contain the classification of differing rural area types required under the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing including the depiction on the Core Strategy Map of the areas are being defined as:

- Areas under Urban Influence;
- Strong Rural Areas;
- Structurally Weak Areas; and
- Areas with distinctive settlement patterns.

The Core Strategy should also outline the evidence basis upon which the classification above has been derived and the Department is giving further consideration to setting specific technical requirements in this regard.

### ***Settlement Structure: City and Town Development Plans***

Section 10(2A)(g) (in conjunction with section 10(2B) and 10(2C) of the 2000 Act as amended) requires development plans for urban planning authorities to outline in their Core Strategy Map the following areas:

- (1) City and Town centre areas;
- (2) Retail centres (for example, these could be taken from the existing Retail Strategy);
- (3) Areas where significant greenfield or brownfield development is anticipated over the plan period; and
- (4) How the above relates to the availability of public transport.

### ***Core Strategy Map***

Section 10(2B) of the Act requires the key elements of the Core Strategy to be depicted on a diagrammatic map. Such a map should be of a high visual standard, in colour and to a scale that enables members of the public to easily understand the map. Some existing examples of mapping are included in Appendix 3.

### **(5) Core Strategy: Relationship with Housing Strategy**

The Minister has published previous guidance on Housing Strategies under Part V of the 2000 Act (in December 2000) and as amended by the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2002 (in August 2003). A key element of Housing Strategies related to the calculation of housing demand from estimates of future population. Insofar as the Core Strategy now sets the development plan population target or allocation as derived from RPGs, there is a potential for overlap between Core Strategies and housing strategies.

Such overlap should be avoided and while the Housing Strategy will remain the vehicle to address overall housing needs within the relevant planning authority area, the Housing Strategy should be informed by the Core Strategy as regards overall population and housing land requirements. The Housing Strategy will also continue to focus on housing affordability, the spread of tenure responses (e.g. provision of private, social, affordable housing) and the level or provision for social and affordable housing in future development (subject to the maximum of 20%). Where planning authorities have to incorporate Core Strategies into their development plans by way or variation, they should assess whether the future population and housing land requirements specified in their Housing Strategies also need to be amended by way of variation to be consistent with the Core Strategy estimates of future population and housing. Essentially, the development plan should be fundamentally based on one figure for future population, that of the Core Strategy.

It is envisaged that the previous guidelines on Housing Strategies will be revised in due course.

### Appendix 1: Schedule for Preparation of Core Strategies

Regional Authority	Planning Authority	Date Development Plan Adopted by Council	Date Review Due to Commence	Date plan due to be adopted	Operative date for Core Strategy
<b>Dublin</b> (RPG GDA 2010 – 2022 made on 15 June 2010)	Dublin City Council Fingal County Council South Dublin County Council Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	24 Nov 2010 27 June 2005 06 Oct 2010 08 April 2010	24 Nov 2014 01 May 2009 06 Oct 2014 08 April 2014	24 Nov 2016 01 May 2011 06 Oct 2016 08 April 2016	<b>15 June 2011</b>
<b>Mid East</b> (RPG GDA 2010 – 2022 made on 15 June 2010)	Meath County Council Wicklow County Council Kildare County Council	02 March 2007 06 Sept 2010 18 May 2005	02 March 2011 06 Sept 2014 18 May 2009	02 March 2013 06 Sept 2016 18 May 2011	<b>15 June 2011</b>
<b>Border</b> (Draft RPGs due to be made on 29 September 2010)	Cavan County Council Donegal County Council Leitrim County Council Louth County Council Monaghan County Council Sligo County Council	13 Oct 2008 11 July 2006 26 Jan 2009 16 Nov 2009 17 April 2007 18 April 2005	13 Oct 2012 09 July 2010 26 Jan 2013 16 Nov 2013 17 April 2011 18 April 2009	13 Oct 2014 09 July 2012 26 Jan 2015 16 Nov 2015 17 April 2013 18 April 2011	<b>29 Sept 2011</b>
<b>Midlands</b> (RPGs made on 20 July 2010)	Offaly County Council Westmeath County Council Laois County Council Longford County Council	19 Jan 2009 15 April 2008 04 Jan 2006 16 Feb 2009	19 Jan 2013 15 April 2012 31 Dec 2009 16 Feb 2013	19 Jan 2015 15 April 2014 30 Nov 2011 16 Feb 2015	<b>20 July 2011</b>

<b>West</b> (Draft RPGs due to be made 19 October 2010)	Galway City Council Galway County Council Mayo County Council Roscommon County Council	31 Jan 2005 03 May 2009 08 May 2008 03 June 2008	31 Jan 2009 03 May 2013 08 May 2012 03 June 2012	31 Jan 2011 03 May 2015 08 May 2014 03 June 2013	<b>19 Oct 2011</b>
<b>Mid West</b> (RPGs made on 6 Sept 2010)	Clare County Council Limerick County Council Limerick City Council North Tipperary County Council	28 Feb 2005 01 Nov 2010 25 Nov 2010 19 July 2010	27 Feb 2009 01 Nov 2014 25 Nov 2014 19 July 2014	27 Feb 2011 01 Nov 2016 25 Nov 2016 19 July 2016	<b>6 Sept 2011</b>
<b>South East</b> (RPG 2010 – 2022 made on 26 July 2010)	Carlow County Council, Kilkenny County Council, South Tipperary County Council, Waterford City Council, Waterford County Council, and Wexford County Council	28 Aug 2009 16 June 2008 09 Feb 2009 11 June 2007 11 July 2005 30 April 2007	28 Aug 2013 16 June 2012 09 Feb 2013 11 June 2011 23 March 2009 30 April 2011	28 Aug 2015 16 June 2014 09 Feb 2015 11 June 2013 23 March 2011 30 April 2013	<b>26 July 2011</b>
<b>South West</b> (RPG 2010 – 2022 made on 27 July 2010)	Cork City Council, Cork County Council, Kerry County Council.	27 April 2009 09 Jan 2009 04 May 2009	27 April 2013 09 Jan 2013 04 May 2013	27 April 2015 09 Jan 2015 04 May 2015	<b>26 July 2011</b>

## Appendix 2: Illustrative Example of Core Strategy Table

	Core Strategy Population Allocation	Housing Requirement <sup>1</sup>	Existing Zoning <sup>2</sup>	Proposed Zoning <sup>3</sup>	Housing Yield (Residential Lands <sup>4</sup> )	Housing Yield (Other Lands <sup>5</sup> )	Shortfall/Excess <sup>6</sup>
<b>County<sup>7</sup></b>							
<b>Gateway</b>							
<b>Hub Town</b>							
<b>County Town<sup>8</sup></b>							
<b>Other Towns<sup>9</sup></b>							
<i>Town (a)</i>							
<i>Town (b)</i>							
<i>Town (c) etc</i>							
<b>Other Villages<sup>10</sup></b>							
<b>Countryside</b>							
<b>Total<sup>11</sup></b>							

*Column 2 and sum of columns 6+7 must be equal.*

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<sup>1</sup> To be expressed in hectares, from RPG's (except in the case of the four Dublin planning authorities in which case dwelling numbers only will suffice)

<sup>2</sup> Amount of land zoned in previous development plan exclusively or primarily for housing, units to be expressed as per (1) above

<sup>3</sup> Amount of land zoned in this development plan exclusively or primarily for housing, units to be expressed as per (1) above

<sup>4</sup> To be expressed as per (1) above and density assumptions to be stated and in line with Planning Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas

<sup>5</sup> To be based on stated assumptions including densities in line with Planning Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas

<sup>6</sup> To be expressed in hectares (outside GDA RPG's) or dwellings (within GDA) as appropriate and excludes later phases of Strategic Development Zones and or major regeneration areas.

<sup>7</sup> From the relevant RPGs

<sup>8</sup> If different from the above

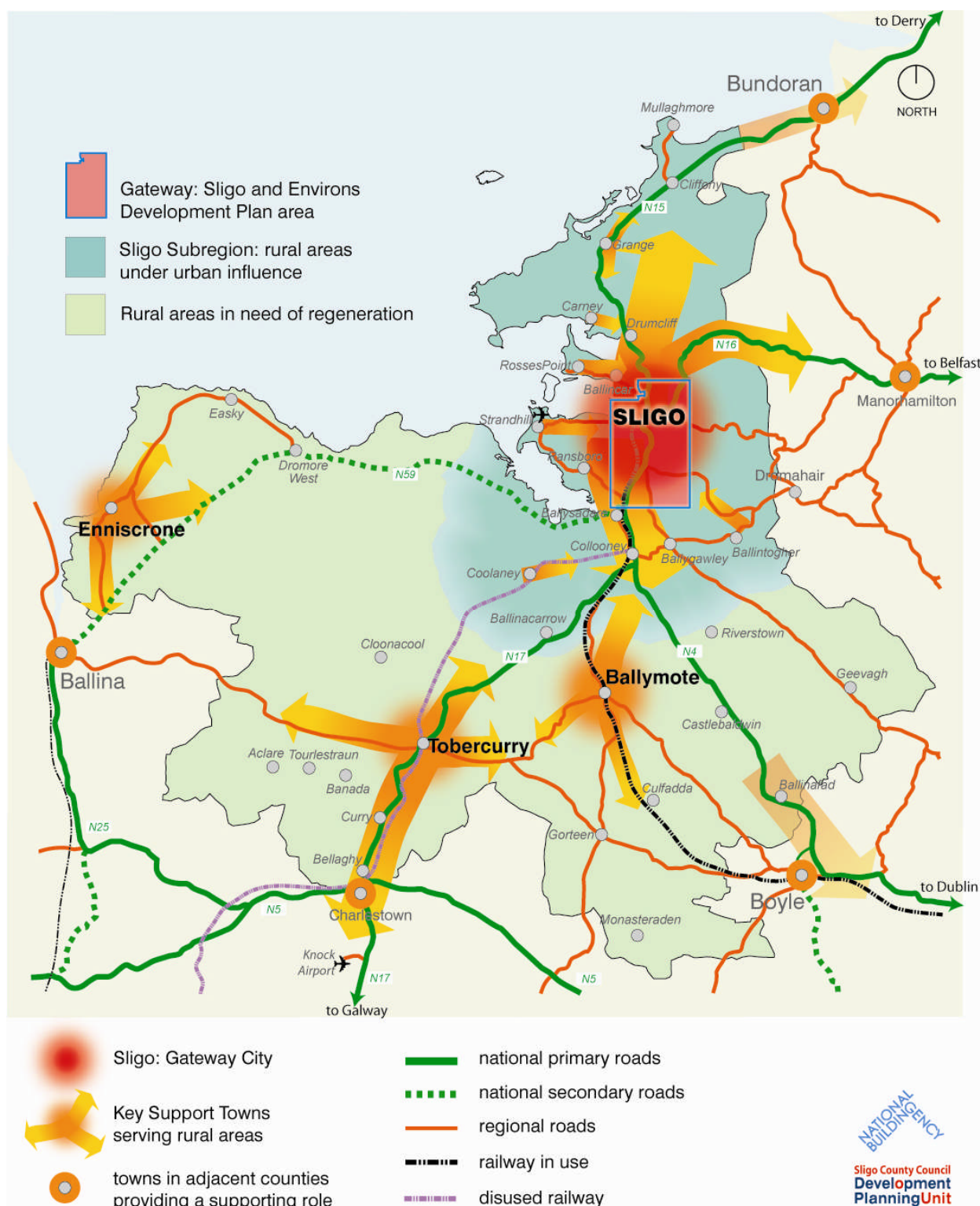
<sup>9</sup> With a population of 1500 persons or more at the last census

<sup>10</sup> An aggregate population will suffice, lands identified for development over the plan period in subsidiary local area plans must in total be in line with this figure

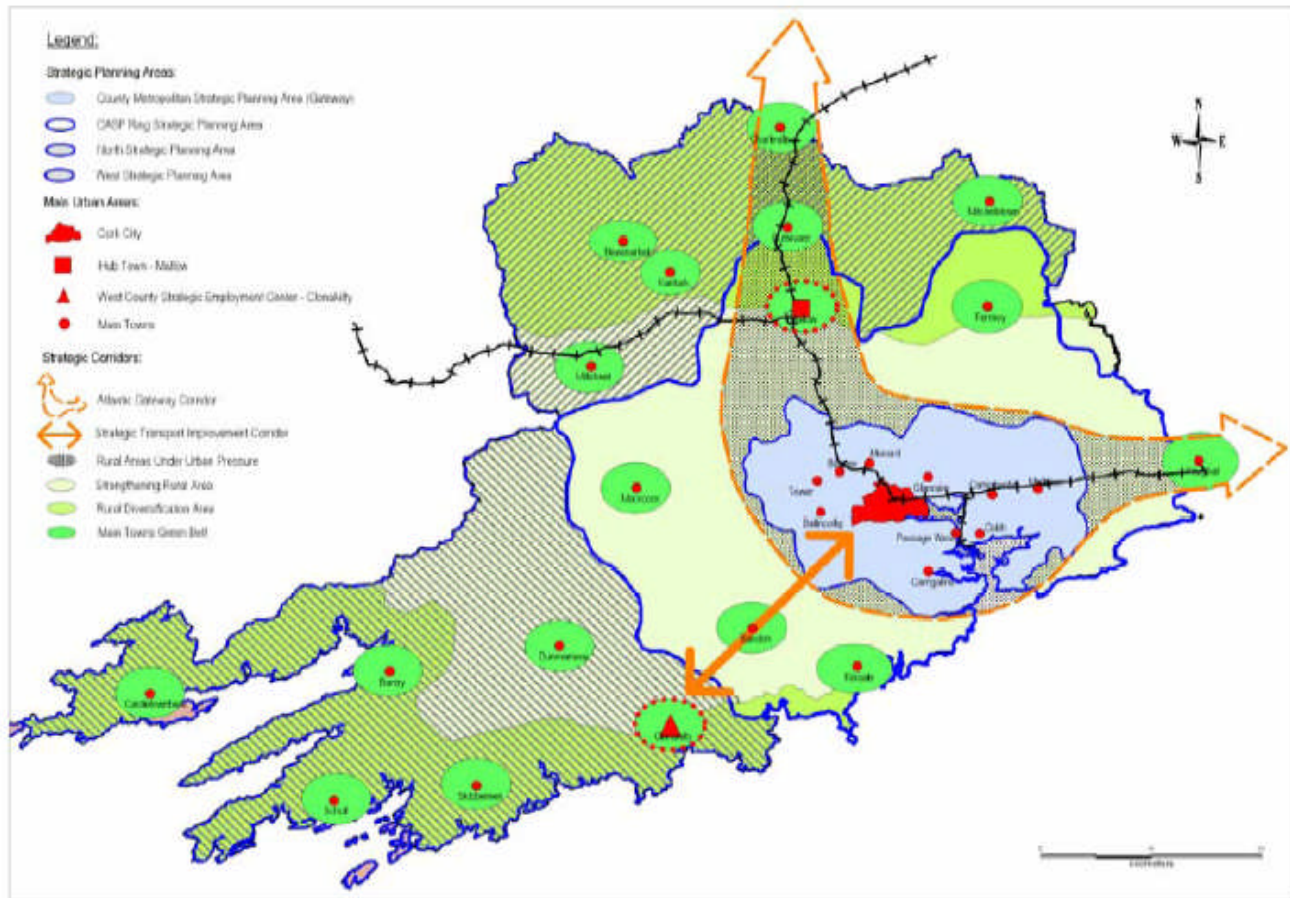
<sup>11</sup> County and total figures will be the same

## Appendix 3: Examples of Core Strategy Mapping

# Sligo County Development Plan

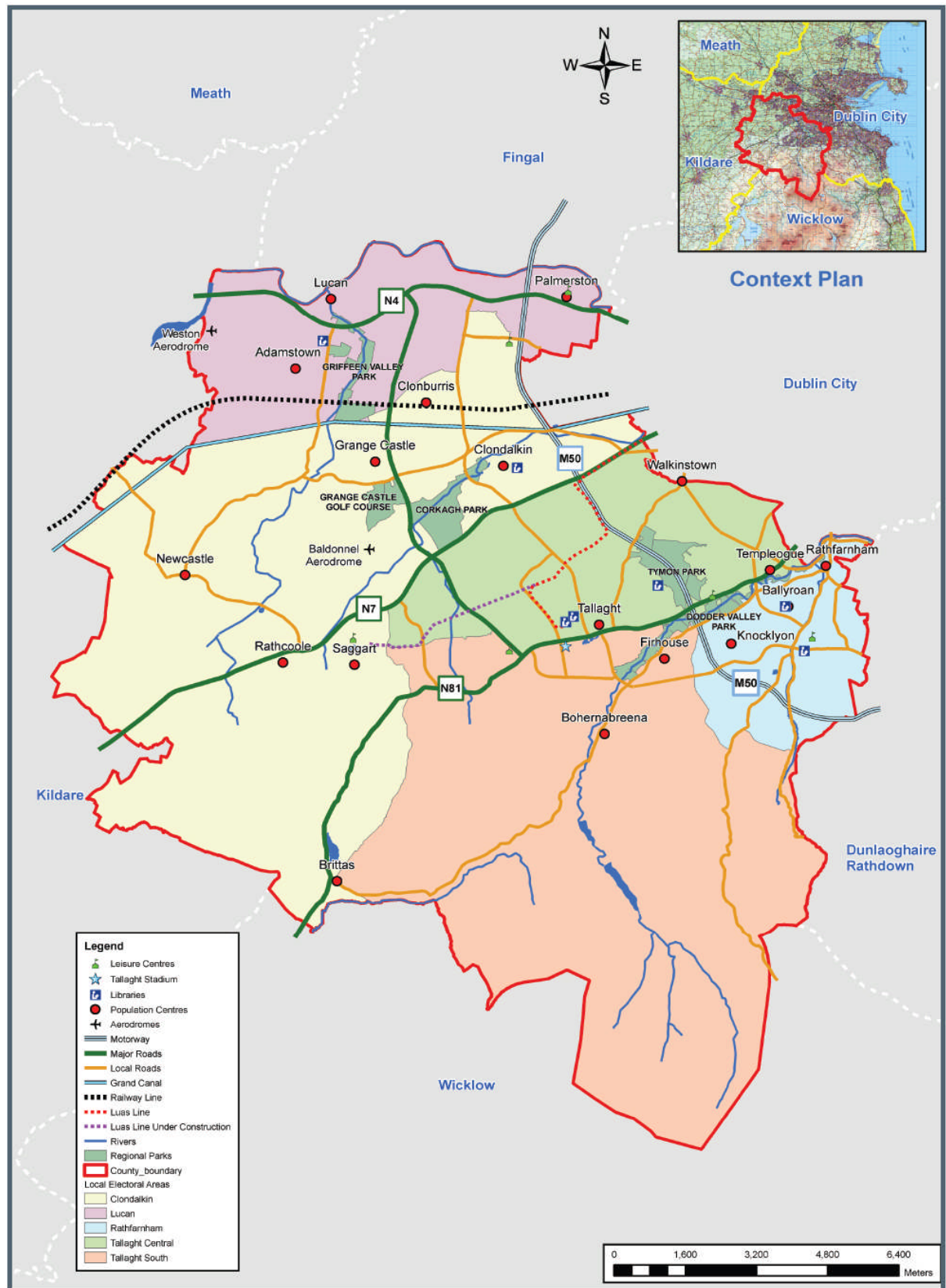


## Cork County Development Plan





## South Dublin County Development Plan



## South Dublin County Development Plan

