

Laois County Council Housing Strategy 2005 to 2011

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1 Introduction

This Strategy sets out the objectives and policies which Laois County Council intends to follow over the period of County Development Plan (2006 to 2011¹) in order to realise the vision and corporate aims of the Council and to fulfil its statutory obligations in the area of housing provision.

The Strategy firstly establishes the context of housing in Laois in terms of:

- The Council's established Corporate Plan, insofar as it relates to housing;
- The Action Plan for Social and Affordable Housing 2004-2008, which determines The Council's housing activities;
- The four year Programme for the Accommodation of Travelling Families in County Laois 2005 – 2008;
- The broader land use settlement and zoning strategies which have been set out in the County Development Plan and;
- Linking these four items, the framework for the County Housing Strategy.

Secondly, the document summarises calculations of housing demand and supply, including the supply of serviced zoned land, which have been made in a detailed Working Paper which supports this Plan. The overall requirement for social and affordable housing is presented.

Thirdly, strategies to ensure an adequate supply of land for housing and necessary construction of social and affordable housing, are set out

Finally, policies which the Council will apply in pursuit of this strategy and other relevant housing aims, are stated.

This document, together with supporting documents, forms Laois County Council's Housing Strategy under Section V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, for the period 2006-2012, and replaces the existing Strategy adopted for the period 2001-2006.

The strategy should be read in conjunction with Chapter Three of the Draft County Development Plan, which sets out settlement strategy and housing policies.

¹ The six year period of the Plan and the Housing Strategy is expected to be from April 2006 to March 2012. Throughout this document, where years are indicated, they relate to the April to March period commencing in the year shown e.g. 2011 related to the period April 2011 to March 2012. Thus the six year period is shown as 2006 to 2011.

2 Context

2.1 *General Role of Laois County Council in Housing*

This housing strategy should be read in conjunction Chapter 3 of the County Development Plan, which sets out housing and settlement policy.

The role of the County Council in relation to housing is to formulate a planning policy for housing, consider planning applications for private housing; ensure that sufficient lands are zoned and serviced to meet the projected housing demand; provide houses or facilitate the provision of social and affordable housing for those unable to house themselves; and to promote sustainable development and heritage conservation.

All housing provided within the County should be to the highest standard and contribute positively to personal goals and community formation and development.

Whilst reflective of changing social and economic patterns, housing provision and location must aim at achieving sustainable development in well structured communities. It should maximise the use of infrastructural investment and facilitate human choice and aspiration.

The objectives of the Council are:

- To integrate social inclusion in all main policy areas;
- To provide for a diverse range of housing needs;
- To promote balanced communities;
- To promote sustainable development;
- To promote high quality living environments;
- To ensure provision of support services and community facilities;

2.2 *Housing in the Corporate Plan for Laois*

The Corporate Plan for Laois County Council affirms that the **aim** of Housing Programme is to ensure that every household can obtain a dwelling of good standard at a price or rent affordable and to encourage efficiency in, and the adoption of measures for, the general welfare of the building industry.

In terms of the availability of adequate accommodation at reasonable cost, the **objective** is to maximise the availability of accommodation to meet different categories of need and to promote the full range of housing options, through the following **strategies**:

- Statutory assessment of housing need
- Promotion of the full range of options as outlined in the plan for Social Housing – The Way Ahead 1995.
- Implementation of Housing Strategy (Part V of Planning & Development 2000)
- Regulation of the private rented sector.
- Implementation of the Scheme of Letting Priorities & Points Based Allocation System

2.3 Action Plan for Social and Affordable Housing 2004-2008

The Action Plan was approved by the Council in November 2004. Laois County Council's objective, with regard to the delivery of social and affordable housing measures over the period 2004-2008, is to meet the needs of the various categories identified in the Assessment of Housing Needs in an appropriate manner. This will be achieved through a variety of methods including, *inter alia*, direct provision of housing units, acquisition of Part V units, voluntary housing schemes, provision of private sites, loans & grants to improve current housing and providing for special need categories. The targets set out in the Plan are based on five year projections. It is proposed to review this Plan in two to three years to ensure that the level of provision remains adequate to meet the housing needs of housing applicants.

2.4 County Settlement Strategy

Housing strategy and policy will underpin/guide the vision and approach to physical planning in the Development Plan. This will include the zoning provisions of the Plan, aiming in particular to ensure that sufficient land and houses are available to facilitate the development of Growth Centres, that these settlements are balanced in their social composition and that they are grown in accordance with available infrastructure.

The overall pattern of demographic change in County Laois has been set out in Chapter 3 of the Draft County Development Plan, which indicates the likely scale of growth of population to 2011. The same Chapter sets out the settlement strategy for the County, within the parameters of the National Spatial Strategy and the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region.

The main towns of the County and their status in terms the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines, are as follows:

Status	Town
Principal Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portlaoise
Key Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portarlinton
Service Towns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abbeyleix • Graiguecullen • Mountmellick • Mountrath • Stradbally
Local Service Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rathdowney
Other Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Durrow

Some twenty-five villages with potential for development have also been identified and it is proposed that Local Area Plans will zone these villages for housing and other development. Together, these settlements and their projected growth form the basis around which assessment of the adequacy of overall housing provision may be assessed.

2.5 County Housing Strategy

Statutory Requirements

The preparation of a Housing Strategy is a requirement under the Planning and Development Act 2000, Part V and Part II of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2002. This Document sets out Laois's Housing Strategy for the period 2006 – 2012, which is the lifetime of the Development Plan.

The Housing Strategy must include an analysis of demand and supply for the different sectors of the housing market, forecast future needs and shortfalls, and propose objectives to balance demand with supply in a sustainable manner. The procedures for the preparation of a Housing Strategy are set down in the Act.

In particular, the Act specifies that the Housing Strategy will:-

- Estimate the existing and likely future need for housing in the area, and ensure that sufficient zoned and serviced land is made available to meet such needs.
- Provide that as a general policy a specific percentage (not exceeding 20%) of the land zoned in the Development Plan for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, shall be reserved for those in need of social or affordable housing in the area.
- Ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes is provided to meet the needs of different categories of households, including the special requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities.
- Counteract undue segregation between persons of different social background.

Thus the Housing Strategy encompasses both the role of the Authority as the provider of social and special housing and its broader land use planning responsibilities.

Laois County Council adopted its first Housing Strategy in 2001. This Housing Strategy replaces the existing strategy; its provisions have been framed in the light of a review of the previous Strategy, which is summarised below.

Review of the 2001-2006 Housing Strategy and Proposed Amendments

ELEMENTS OF THE 2001 STRATEGY

The 2001 Strategy set out the quantum of housing to be provided in County Laois.

- It estimated that a total of 755 housing units per annum would be required in the period to 2006
- It required private developers, with certain exceptions, to set aside 17.5 per cent of sites for social and affordable housing.
- It proposed that the Council should clear 40% of the existing waiting list, which equates to 647 households by the end of the strategy period.

- It was noted that a further 527 housing units would need to be provided by all sectors to meet prospective need for social and affordable housing to 2006. A varying proportion of these units would be provided as social units depending on local circumstances.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- House completions in the County have averaged nearly 1,173 units per annum since the adoption of the 2001 Strategy.
- The programme of social housing has provided 425 new units in total to the end of 2004. There were also 65 acquisitions in this period. There are 195 LA and 106 voluntary and co-operative sector dwellings in progress. The housing register has fallen from 611 assessed to be in need in 2002 to 500 in June of 2005.
- In the same period, 149 voluntary sector houses were completed and 112 affordable houses. Four houses were provided through Part V schemes.

It is evident from the above that satisfactory progress has been maintained in meeting needs in the social and affordable sector

VARIATIONS PROPOSED: SUMMARY

In the light of performance under the present Strategy, recent household growth trends, and using an updated analysis of requirements, the Housing Strategy 2006-2012:

- Increases the required overall level of housing delivery for the future plan period.
- Varies the mechanisms for social and affordable housing delivery in accordance with the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2002
- Maintains the percentage of social and affordable housing required from developers under Part V of the 2000 Planning and Development Act, at 17.5 per cent, based on the calculations contained in the Housing Working Paper which supports this Plan.

3 Housing Demand and Supply

In framing a Housing Strategy, the Authority is required to establish both the level of social housing need which exists at the commencement of the strategy period and the overall and particular housing requirements which are likely to arise during the currency of the Strategy.

3.1 Accumulated social housing need

Table 1 sets out the assessed overall social housing need within the County in 2005, as measured by housing register ² This need may arise from: inability to pay for alternative accommodation, unfitness of the existing dwelling; overcrowding; involuntary sharing; homelessness; and other special needs (including the needs of the elderly, disabled and persons with learning disability), as well as homelessness and housing needs of the Traveller community.

- The largest single category of need arises from inability to pay for alternative accommodation – 65 per cent. Approximately fourteen per cent of all needs relate to special needs or involuntary sharing.
- Measured social housing need in the County ,to a major extent, now therefore relates to inability to pay and/or special needs/involuntary sharing.

It is estimated that of those on the housing register who have been assessed, some 31 are eligible for an affordable housing solution. In addition, the Council have approximately 250 applications on hand for affordable housing, from those not on the housing register.

Table 1: Social Housing need by type, 2005

Category of Applicant	Number	Percent Breakdown
Grounds of Application		
Financial	221	65.0
Unfitness	6	1.8
Overcrowding	15	4.4
Medical/Disability/Special Needs	17	5.0
Involuntary Sharing	29	8.5
Homeless	2	0.6
Members of the travelling community	50	14.7
TOTAL	340	100.0

Source: Laois County Council Returns to the DEHLG, 2005

On average, five new applicants join the register each week. The number leaving the register on an annual basis is estimated at 120.

² There were approx. 500 on the housing register in June 2005, of whom 340 have been assessed and are deemed to be in need (based on an examination of the register relating to March 2005)

3.2 Housing Requirements in the period 2006-2012

Housing need over the period 2006 to 2012 will arise from:

1. Increase in the number of households³
2. Obsolescence of the existing stock (including existing habitable dwellings that become second homes)
3. Additional houses required to facilitate movement of persons within the stock of housing⁴

Of these, the first is the most significant in Laois, where the number of households is rising rapidly. The outlook for population growth in the County is set out in the Draft County Development Plan. For the purposes of projecting overall housing requirements, an annual growth rate in population over the period of 1.4 per cent is assumed. The expected increase in the number of persons in the County will give rise to changes in the numbers of households as indicated in Table 2.

In addition, calculations for the period 1996 to 2002, for the County of Laois, show that there were, on average, some 114 houses completed each year, whose construction could not be related directly to the growth in the number of households. If these houses were accounted for entirely by obsolescence of the existing stock of housing, it would indicate an annual attrition to the housing stock of about 0.8 per cent. This is a high figure, given the vintage of the stock, and indicates that, in fact, a significant proportion of this figure of 114 houses is accounted for, not by structural or locational obsolescence, road widening and other demolitions, but conversion of existing habitable dwellings to second homes and the construction of new such homes. Up to half of the total figure may be accounted for in this way.

Table 2: Projected population and households 2002 to 2011

Year	Population	Household Numbers	Average Household Size
2002	58,774	19,021	3.09
2003	59,597	19,669	3.03
2004	60,431	20,279	2.98
2005	61,277	20,914	2.93
2006	62,135	21,500	2.89
2007	63,005	22,107	2.85
2008	63,887	22,736	2.81
2009	64,781	23,387	2.77
2010	65,688	24,062	2.73
2011	66,608	24,761	2.69
2012	67,541	25,487	2.65

³ This embraces the overlapping concepts of housing need and housing demand

⁴ This refers to houses that are between occupiers at a given point in time, typically for a short period of time.

3.3 Land and Housing Supply

Housing Supply

The extent of housing requirements set out above, may be compared to the pattern of housing delivery observed in the recent past (Table 3).

Table 3: Housing completions, County Laois

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
660	839	1,027	862	1,031	1,626

Source: DoEHLG: Quarterly Bulletin of Housing Statistics

Housing completions in the County as a whole have averaged in the region of 1,000 over the last five years and 1,173 over the last three. The rapid increase in recent years may be seen as arising from overspill from Dublin, fuelled by lower prices than the Capital and enhanced communications. Most of the growth has been in the East of the County.

Assuming that obsolescence and second home construction remain at prevailing levels, and allowing for the required increase in dwellings to facilitate movement within the stock, it may be expected that a continuation of the present housing delivery performance would provide for an annual increase in the net number of households of around 875 – sufficient for the growth scenario for the County which suggests an annual average growth of around 800.

The capacity of the construction sector to deliver the required number of houses is therefore not in question.

Land Availability

Table 4 summarises the land availability position within the County as at September 2004. Detailed tabulations of land availability by settlement are contained in the working paper prepared in support of the Housing Strategy.

Table 4: Capacity of Zoned Housing Lands in County Laois 2005 to 2011

Name of Settlement	Total zoned undeveloped land which could be developed for residential use over the period 30 June 2005 to 30 June 2011: (Hectares)	Total zoned undeveloped land which could be developed for residential use over the period 30 June 2005 to 30 June 2011 (Units)
Portlaoise	260	10,400
Portarlinton	99	2,475
Service towns	478	11,950
Local service and other towns	109	2,725
Villages	294	7,350
Area under strong urban influence	733	22,225
Stronger rural areas	330	8,250
Structurally Weak areas	177	4,425
COUNTY	1,240	34,900

* This is the area of lands which are zoned or are expected to be zoned during the lifetime of the County Development Plan, which are currently not built on.

Source: Laois County Council Planning Section

Detailed tabulations of land availability, when compared with anticipated population growth in each settlement, indicates that there is sufficient land zoned in the County to accommodate anticipated development over the period to 2011, in each settlement.

3.4 Housing Market Trends

Nationally, the market for housing remains buoyant. In 2003, the ESRI⁵ projected required annual house completions nationally at 49,000 to 2006 and 42,000 thereafter. In fact, annual completions have far exceeded this figure. The ESRI also suggested that new house prices are likely to fall moderately in real terms over the period of the Strategy. In fact, there has been a tendency for house prices to rise to relatively high levels in relation to incomes and rents (This has happened in several European countries, most notably in Ireland, the UK, Netherlands and Spain.). One recently important issue is the rapid growth in the number of second dwellings in recent years - particularly striking in the Borders, Midlands, West (BMW) region. The counties where the biggest increase has occurred are those where special tax relief applied. The effect of the enhanced demand for dwellings for investment or holiday purposes has had a very significant impact on the cost of housing in the affected regions. There are other special factors which are likely to impact on the County of Laois. Chief amongst these is the demand arising from the development of the Dublin region. Department of the Environment data suggests that house prices rose by 39 per cent between 2000 and 2003; local auctioneers suggest that there may have been a further 20 per cent rise since then. There is now a considerable disparity between prices in different parts of the County.

For the purposes of this Strategy, a survey was conducted of house price change expectations amongst auctioneers in County Laois, in order to supplement data on anticipated national house price changes. The view of local auctioneers is that there will be an ongoing rapid rise in prices

However, taken together, national and local data indicate that some moderation of price increases is to be expected. For the purpose of assessing housing affordability, an annual rate of increase in the County taken as a whole is set, conservatively, at four per cent per annum, though sensitivity tests have been carried out to assess the impact of altering this rate of change.

The background working paper uses these data, together with locally adjusted data on projected national *per capita* income changes, to calculate housing affordability for Laois residents in each year to year 2011.

The following section summarises the results of these calculations and sets out the implications for the provision of social and affordable housing within the County.

3.5 Social and affordable housing requirements

Table 5 below summarises the position with regard to the annual rate of household formation and the numbers of households from these new formations who will meet the affordability criteria set out in Section 93(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, based on projections of changes in house prices and personal incomes.

⁵ Bergin et. Al. *Medium Term Review 2003-2010*, ESRI, July 2003

Table 5: Summary of Anticipated Social & Affordable Housing Need

Measure	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Household formations (1)	586	607	629	651	675	700
Number of households meeting affordability criteria S 93(1) (2)	159	159	158	157	156	147
(2) as a % of (1)	27.1%	26.1%	25.1%	24.1%	23.2%	21.1%

Source: Laois County Council

Requirement for social and affordable housing in private developments

In order to calculate the total requirement for social and affordable housing, the data presented in Table 5 must be adjusted and supplemented in ways which are set out below.

Firstly, The absolute numeric target for provision of social and affordable housing by private developers, is derived as follows:

ADD

- Number of new households requiring affordable or social housing (Table 5)
- Special needs cases not included in the social housing register ⁶
- All other cases being catered for by the voluntary sector

DEDUCT

- Private rented housing freed-up by waiting list clearance ⁷
- Surplus (if any) of programme of direct social and affordable housing provision by housing authorities or on an agency basis by others, over accumulated need measured by the waiting list, available to meet prospective social housing need
- Provision of subsidised sites and shared ownership schemes by the Housing Authority to facilitate single affordable housing
- Essential repairs, extensions, demountable dwellings and other improvement works in lieu of housing provision, which are all alternatives to new house provision.

Next, In order to fix the percentage allocation on each private sector site, the net amount derived above is **DIVIDED BY**:

ADD

- Total number of new households to be formed over the period (including those requiring social and affordable housing)
- Housing association projected completions - total

LESS

- All houses constructed on unzoned lands or on sites which fall below the threshold set by the Act

This equation may be established on a year-to-year basis, but for the purposes of this strategy, an average has been derived for the whole period of the plan and is to be applied in every year of the plan.

⁶ It should be noted that the accumulated social housing need which will not be dealt with by the voluntary sector is excluded from the overall calculation of need, since it is assumed to be dealt with by the Local Authority on sites already acquired, through its own building or acquisition programme.

⁷ Privately rented housing relinquished by those taking up social housing may be available for social housing purposes

The calculations are set out in the Working Paper prepared in support of this Strategy.

Two options are used to calculate the relevant percentage to be applied⁸. The average requirements over the life of the strategy under each of the options are set out below.

Table 6 Percentage Requirement for Social Affordable Housing

Option 1	22.3%
Option 2	17.5%

It should be stressed that in calculating the Option 2 percentage at 17.5, a number of assumptions have been used which are subject to some uncertainty in terms of 'up-side' risk – i.e. it could be argued that 20 per cent (the maximum permitted) could equally have been the outcome. Maintenance of 17.5 per cent as the requirement under this strategy is, however, reasonable and is consistent with existing policies and programmes.

⁸ **Option 1 is the basic calculation as set out in the text.** In Option 2, the figures are amended to take account of construction on non-zoned land and sites below the threshold (assumed to be 30% of total housing completions). These are deducted from the denominator, since they reduce the base to which the number of affordable houses must be added. At the same time, the number of local authority free or subsidised sites provided at such locations is deducted from the numerator, since this is a reduction in the required affordable housing solutions on zoned land above the threshold of affordable provision.

4 The Housing Strategy

The housing strategy to be employed by the Council over the period of this plan comprises three elements:

1. To ensure that sufficient zoned and serviced land is available in designated growth centres within the County to accommodate the estimated housing requirements of such centres during the currency of the Plan
2. To provide directly for social and affordable housing solutions through its own house building programme, assistance to other agencies and individuals, acquisition of dwellings and other special programmes
3. To further provide for social and affordable housing through Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000

4.1 Provision of zoned and serviced land in Development Centres

The settlement strategy which is proposed for County Laois is set out in Section 3.13 *et seq* of the Development Plan. This section of the Housing Strategy outlines the aims and objectives of the Local Authority in relation to proposed development within this zoned area of land.

Calculations summarised in Table 4 of this strategy are set out in full in the Working Paper which supports the Strategy. These calculations indicate that there is sufficient zoned land available to accommodate the scale of growth which is envisaged for the County as a whole⁹

The total required number of houses, including an overhead for obsolescence, second homes and an increase in the number of vacancies, is approximately 5,250. At an overall average density of 28 per hectare, this would require 187 hectares.

This compares favourably with the lands available, as set out in Table 4 above.

Calculations for the nine largest settlements of the County, as well as villages for which zoning is proposed, indicate that there is sufficient land for any reasonable proposed growth in each of these settlements.

4.2 Direct provision of social housing including special needs

Laois County Council will continue to endeavour to meet the needs of households through a range of social housing options, including the house building programme.

⁹ Even assuming all housing developments were on zoned land. In practice, up to 30 per cent will be houses on unzoned land

Laois County Council's Action Plan for Social and Affordable Housing was published in November 2004 and details the strategy for direct provision which the Council proposes to make over the period to 2008.

Laois County Council's objective is to meet the needs of the various categories identified in the Assessment of Housing Needs in an appropriate manner. This will be achieved through a variety of methods including direct provision of housing units, acquisition of Part V units, voluntary housing schemes, provision of private sites, loans and grants to improve current housing and provide for special need categories, etc. The targets set out in this Plan are based on estimated projections over the next 5 year period. (page 4)

The Council is committed to promoting and facilitating the use of the full range of social and affordable housing options, as set out below.

Provision of New Social Housing

It is estimated that there will be 338 social and affordable housing starts during 2005. Starts for 2006 are projected to be 313. Completions are assumed to average 82 dwellings per annum over the period of the Plan. Laois County Council currently owns 24 hectares of land for housing purposes (2004 data). Of this, four hectares would require the provision of services before housing development could commence. The land available will be used by Laois County Council or the Voluntary Housing organisations for social and affordable housing or offered to the private market. It is the policy of the Council to continue to source land for housing purposes throughout the county as demand dictates.

Housing Acquisition Programme

Each year as part of its Housing Programme, and where it proves economical to do so, the Council acquires dwellings at various locations throughout the County. Acquisitions are expected to be around ten per annum over the period of the Plan.

Private Sites Programme

To meet the growing demand and to supplement the traditional housing construction programme, Laois County Council will continue to operate a private sites programme, whereby subsidised sites will be made available to persons satisfying established income and other need criteria. It is anticipated that such provision will amount to some twelve sites per annum.

Affordable Housing Schemes¹⁰

These houses relate to the provisions of the 1999 legislation, and may be provided directly by the Housing Authority or by voluntary and co-operative bodies - on an agency basis or independently. This will comprise a very significant portion of the total social and affordable housing to be provided. In terms of starts, the number of units to be provided by the local authority under the 1999 Affordable Housing Scheme (including houses provided by voluntary or co-operative housing bodies on an agency basis to local authorities) is anticipated to be 150 over the period 2006 to 2008 (203 completions). The number of units to be delivered by voluntary or co-operative housing bodies under 1999 scheme is 40. There are currently some 250 applications on hands for affordable housing across the county.

Other Social Housing Options

¹⁰ The affordable housing scheme should not be confused with the term 'affordable housing' as used in Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

A number of other schemes are available to applicants on the Council's housing list (or to existing tenants) including:

- Provision of Extensions
- Improvement works in lieu of housing
- Sale of sites (Private sites scheme)
- Shared Ownership Scheme
- Essential Repairs Grants
- Disabled persons Grant

Table 7 summarises the proposed social and affordable housing provision (other than Part V provision from private developments) over the period 2006 to 2008. In calculating the requirement for Part V housing from the private sector, it has been assumed that this level of provision will be broadly of this order in the remaining years to 2011.

Table 7: Summary of the proposed direct provision of social and affordable housing 2006 to 2008

Type of Housing Provision	2006-2008
Local Authority new social housing	* 245
Housing Acquisition	30
Affordable housing (direct and agency) 1999 Act	203
Affordable Housing (voluntary/co-op), 1999 Act	40
Affordable Housing (voluntary/co-op), Part V	0
Provision of Extensions	27
Improvement works in lieu of housing incl demountable dwellings	35
Sale of sites (Private sites scheme)	36
Social Housing by voluntary/co-op	* 512
Shared Ownership Scheme	150
Essential Repairs Grants	240
Disabled persons Grant	270
Tenant Purchase Scheme	n.a.
Net change to stock as a result of regeneration/remedial work	2
TOTAL	1,790

* Starts

The Role of the Voluntary Housing and Co-operative Sector

It is expected that the role of the voluntary housing sector (voluntary housing associations, co-operative associations, and community associations) will feature strongly over the course of the development plan. This Housing Strategy has been based on the expectation that through the implementation of Part V of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, Planning Authorities can work more closely with the voluntary housing sector to expand significantly their contribution to construction capacity across the county. This expectation of an enhanced role for the voluntary housing sector is in turn based on a belief that the sector has remained somewhat under-developed to date.

Specifically, voluntary housing bodies are assisted under the Capital Assistance Scheme with non repayment capital funding and Rental Subsidy Scheme to provide accommodation to meet the special Housing needs such as those of the elderly, people with disabilities, homeless persons or small families. Laois County Council recognises the potential role of the voluntary sector in the provision of housing for these special needs categories.

Special needs Accommodation

This includes Traveller accommodation, the needs of the elderly and of people with disabilities and the homeless.

- In terms of Traveller accommodation, 20 new group housing units are planned in the period 2005 to 2008, in addition to which there will be 5 new single instance houses and 25 traveller households to be housed under the main Local Authority housing programme or voluntary and co-operative housing programme (these are already accounted for elsewhere). Details of this programme are contained in the The four year Programme for the Accommodation of Travelling Families in County Laois 2005 – 2008.
- Provision of new emergency accommodation for homeless people is planned, and 100 long-term independent accommodation units will be provided as part of the housing capital programme.
- Provision for the elderly and people with disabilities is included in the figures set out above:
- Policies regarding the provision of housing for members of the Travelling community, the elderly, people with disabilities and the homeless are set out in brief in section 5.2 below and in section 3.44 *et seq* of the Draft County Development Plan.

Revitalisation of existing areas of social housing

In addition to the provision of new housing or other housing solutions as set out above, Laois County Council is committed to a high standard of maintenance of its existing stock of dwellings.

The aims of the Council are to ensure that the rented housing stock is managed in an effective and efficient manner that will enhance the quality of life enjoyed by its tenants; to introduce special projects/initiatives to improve tenant participation; to enforce measures to counteract anti-social behaviour; to carry out improvements to the appearance of the environment of estates; to implement effective letting arrangements and implement an appropriate rents scheme, while working within budgetary constraints.

In an effort to ensure value for money, Laois Co. Co. adopted a policy of carrying out programmed maintenance with the aim of extending the life of its housing stock. It endeavours to ensure maximum tenant involvement in the management of their estates and facilitate the formation of new residents associations through its estate management programme.

4.3 Provision of social and affordable housing through Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000

In addition to the direct provision of social and affordable housing, and assistance to voluntary housing agencies for such direct provision, the Authority proposes vigorously to pursue the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, in order to facilitate the provision of such housing alongside private sector developments throughout the County. The policy for implementation of the Part V provisions is set out in Section 5.1 below.

As at May 2005, there were 204 applications for affordable Part V houses. More than three quarters of these units are located in Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Graiguecullen and Portarlinton.

5 Housing Policy

In pursuit of its housing strategy, Laois County Council will, in the execution of its own programmes as well as in considering the planning applications and programmes of other agencies, developers and individuals, apply the policies and guidelines set out in this section.

5.1 Planning Permissions and Part V of the Planning and Development Act, 2000

Section 96 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides that the objectives of the Housing Strategy in relation to social and affordable housing shall be implemented by means of conditions attached to planning permissions for residential development.

Laois County Council will require a 17.5 per cent quota of social/affordable housing to be provided on each housing development within the County, and this requirement will be included as a condition of development, with the exception of application for development of 4 or less houses, or for housing on land of 0.2 hectares or less.

The Council will operate Part V of the Act in a way that encourages and facilitates a level of supply, which will meet the demands of all sectors of the market. It would frustrate the objectives of the housing strategy if its implementation were to result in any undue slow-down, interruption of housing supply, or disruption of the housing market.

Conditions attached to planning permissions for residential development to which the social/affordable quota applies will require developers to enter into an agreement with the Council to transfer what?? to the Council in accordance with the implementation guidelines adopted by the Council in December 2003. These guidelines are included in Appendix 1.

The ratio of social to affordable houses to be provided, will normally be on a 50:50 basis, having regard to local housing needs, but at all times the 17.5 per cent requirement will be met. The maximum of social Part V provision is to be 50 per cent in any one application.

In so far as it is known at the time of the agreement, the Council will indicate to the developer its intentions in relation to the provision of social/affordable housing, including a description of the proposed houses, on the land or sites to be transferred, where such lands form part or parts of the lands which are subject to the application for permission as is, or are specified by the agreement as being parts required to be reserved for the provision of housing.

The Council, in making such agreements, will have regard to:

- The Development Plan and any relevant local area plan
- the need to ensure the overall coherence of the development to which the planning application relates;
- The views of the developer in relation to the impact of the agreement on the economic viability of proposed development, and
- The need for social integration.

The Council's Planning & Housing Sections will encourage housing developers to whom the 17.5 per cent quota will apply to discuss the likely terms of the Part V agreements at such consultations. Both the Council and the developer should thus have a common understanding of the nature of the likely agreement before a decision to grant planning permission is made.

It will be the Council's objective to finalise the agreement within two months at the latest of the grant of permission, in order to avoid delaying the start of Housing Development. All social housing provided under Part V of the Planning & Development Act 2000 in accordance with this strategy shall be allocated to persons on the Waiting List for that allocation area in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Letting Priorities., All affordable housing provided under Part V of the Act in accordance with the terms of this Housing Strategy shall be allocated in accordance with a Scheme of Priorities for affordable housing as adopted by the Council.

5.2 Meeting the needs of persons with special requirements

Traveller Accommodation

The Traveller Accommodation Act, 1998 requires housing authorities in consultation with Travellers and the general public to prepare and adopt a five year construction programme to meet the existing and projected accommodation needs of Travellers in their area. Such a programme has been drawn up and adopted. The Council is committed by Policy H9 on Traveller Accommodation in the Draft County Development Plan to implementing this programme.

Laois County Council proposes to provide a range of accommodation for members of the travelling community to meet the identified needs as follows:

- Standard Local Authority Housing, Laois County Council will continue to allocate at least 10% and where appropriate a higher portion of newly constructed houses to the travelling community in accordance with the Scheme of Letting Priorities and Points System.
- Members of the travelling community will also be considered for casual vacancies that may arise in established housing schemes.
- Consideration where deemed appropriate, will be given to the purchase and/or construction of rural/single instance houses for members of the travelling community.
- Group Housing Scheme for Travellers - Prospective Traveller tenants of the identified three group schemes will be invited to engage in meaningful consultation, with regard to the design, site selection, planning, environmental, technical and social aspects of the proposed respective group schemes.
- Laois County Council will continue to work in close co-operation with the various Housing Agencies/Associations. The Voluntary Sector, through the use of Capital Assistance Scheme and the Loan Subsidy Scheme, will be requested to consider the needs of Traveller families in their allocation of accommodation.
- Residential caravan parks at Portarlinton and Portlaoise will continue to provide facilities to meet needs. It is proposed to carry out refurbishment work at the Woodlands Park with a view to improving and updating the facilities.

Homeless Persons

Section 3.44 of the County Development Plan indicates that where possible Laois County Council will actively promote integrated social solutions, including accommodation provision, to the problem of homelessness (as defined in the Housing Act 1988) and will promote the provisions of the Laois Housing Strategy with regard to aspects for housing for homeless persons.

Policy H8 of the Plan commits the Council:

- To provide financial resources to the voluntary sector for the effective management of homeless accommodation;
- To promote targeted provision of accommodation for homeless persons

Elderly persons

Emphasis is placed on the provision of lifetime adaptable housing, the provision of housing units in centrally located areas whereby there is access to all amenities such as shops, medical facilities, churches, etc. Provision through sheltered housing schemes is also an option that is encouraged. Policies are set out to this effect in the Draft County Development Plan

People with disabilities

The Voluntary Housing sector and other agencies are active in the County in terms of identifying and meeting the needs of those with disabilities. The County Council is working in partnership with various voluntary sector groups and associations to facilitate further identification of needs and provision of housing for those with disabilities. The housing needs of those on waiting lists and existing tenants with disabilities are generally being met through the Disabled Persons Grants Scheme which provides financial assistance for the adaptation of accommodation. The Voluntary sector also caters for these needs. The concept of Lifetime adaptable housing will be applied to all new housing so that all new housing is easily adaptable without undue expense and works to the original house design. Laois County Council recognises the need to promote better awareness of people with disabilities. These principles are enshrined in the Declaration “The City and the Disabled” in Barcelona in March 1995. Policies designed to implement these principles are set out in the Draft County Development Plan.

5.3 Countering social segregation

In the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS), access to housing is one of the key elements for fighting social exclusion and marginalisation and thereby assisting in the fight against poverty. The Council recognise the aims of NAPS and in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sectors and through their function as a housing authority are committed to the development of a sustainable housing policy which will counter social exclusion and marginalisation. The following instruments will be used to achieve the desired ends:

- In accordance with Laois County Council’s Scheme of Letting Priorities, all assessments for housing are based on need. In order to counteract undue social segregation, and to protect vulnerable categories, special specified categories are provided for in the Scheme.
- The Traveller Accommodation Programme 2000-2004
- The Strategy for Homelessness 2002-2004

- The implementation of Part V requirements (this will assist in addressing social segregation in private housing schemes)
- The provision of a range of house types & sizes in social, voluntary and Part V developments
- With regard to inter-culturalism this is addressed in the four year Accommodation Programme for Travellers, 2004-2008, the provision of anti-racism awareness training for staff, and the implementation of the DEHLG policies for the provision of housing for non-nationals.

Laois County Council's Anti-Poverty Committee will assess the implementation of various policies to ensure equitable application of these policies to all customers of the Authority and to ensure that they are inclusive.

5.4 Promoting the role of housing agencies

There are currently twelve voluntary and cooperative agencies working in the County: Respond Housing Association; Cluid Housing Association; Monaclear Housing Association; Clonaslee Social Services; Durrow Housing Association; O.H.A.I.D (Owenass Housing Association for the Intellectually Disabled); Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association; Clonenagh Housing Association; Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary; SIMON, Sue Ryder, and Rathdowney Social services. In total these agencies have completed 502 units.

Laois County Council, as the Housing Authority, manages and oversees the provision of all social, voluntary and affordable housing in the County and all voluntary bodies are expected to liaise with the Council at all stages of development. The Council takes an enabling and administrative role in the operation of the Capital Funding Schemes to assist approved housing bodies. From time to time, the Council invites Voluntary Housing bodies to carry out developments in the county, having regard to DEHLG policy to ensure social integration in housing developments, i.e., to ensure that all schemes have a Social, Voluntary and Affordable mix of tenures where practicable. Laois County Council may also consider provision of Part V units by a Voluntary housing agency. A Liaison/Contact person for the Voluntary agencies has been appointed within the Housing Department of the Council. The Voluntary agencies must submit all requests for funding through Laois County Council and these submissions are assessed by the relevant technical staff prior to issue to DEHLG for approval. At all stages of the project the Voluntary agency is required to keep the Authority advised of progress on the scheme.

5.5 Housing Design and Housing Mix

Section 3.42 of the Draft Development Plan indicates that it is an objective of the County Council to ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes are provided in each residential development. House design and layout reflect the requirements of different categories of households around the County- particularly those with special needs. An indication of house types required for social housing is available with the triennial "assessment of need" undertaken by the Housing Section of Laois County Council.