

**TUAIRISC CHUIG CRUINNÍÚ NA COMHAIRLE A REÁCHTÁLADH AR AN:  
REPORT TO COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON:  
20<sup>th</sup> July, 2020**

**UIMHIR NA MÍRE AR AN CHLÁR / AGENDA ITEM NO: \_\_\_\_\_**

**ACHOIMRE AR AN TUAIRISC / SUMMARY OF REPORT  
County Development Plan 2018-2024: Chief Executive's Two Year Report**

The Donegal County Development Plan 2018–2024 was formally made on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2018, and came into effect from 5<sup>th</sup> June 2018. In accordance with the requirements of Section 15(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the Chief Executive must (not more than 2 years after the plan was made) submit a report to the Members setting out the progress made in securing the objectives of the Development Plan. Furthermore, under Section 95(3)(a) of the Act, the Chief Executive is also required to include a review of the progress achieved in implementing the Housing Strategy in this report.

This report fulfils the statutory requirement as set out above.

**CINNEADH ATÁ DE DHÍTH / DECISION REQUIRED:-**

Report is for noting.

*Leam Ward.*

**STIÚRTHÓIR SEIRBHÍSE**  
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE

14<sup>th</sup> July 2020  
**DÁTA**  
DATE

## **Chief Executive's Foreword:**

The Donegal County Development Plan came into effect in June 2018. It sets out the objectives which the Council will endeavour to achieve over the six year life of the Plan (to 2024). Preparation of this report is a statutory obligation under Section 15 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (As Amended) and is concerned with the 'progress achieved in securing' the Plan's objectives over the first two years of the CDP and therefore is produced at a relatively early stage in this process. It should also be noted that many of the strategic objectives of the Plan have notably longer time horizons (many up to 2038) and so although significant progress may not have been made on these to date, the Council is still working towards implementing the Plan to achieve these objectives.

In addition to the core statutory requirement of the report as set out above, the report also reviews the significance of the major changes to the national and regional statutory planning policy framework in the context of the CDP. Most notable amongst these are the publication of the National Planning Framework (February, 2018) and the work to implement it, and the adoption of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) in January 2020. Members will note that a separate report is included on the agenda for the July Plenary Council meeting and that report deals specifically with the post-RSES adoption obligations on the Council as per Section 11(1)(b) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (As Amended) . Looking forward, this report is also designed to provide a sound basis for the next statutory review of the CDP (due to commence May 2022).

The Plan was produced at a time of uncertainty when many issues relating to Brexit had not been resolved and the potential social and economic impacts were not fully known. In a similar vein this progress report is produced at a time when the consequences of the national health emergency Covid-19 restrictions on our wider society and the economy of Donegal are not yet fully known. In organisational terms the priorities of the Council, as well as our partner organisations, may need to be adjusted to meet both short and long term needs of our community as a result of Covid-19 It is also noted that additional funding streams have become available including the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2020 and the CLÁR Programme and the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme which include accelerated measures in response to Covid-19.

There have been a number of changes across the organisation since the CDP was made and which are relevant to achieving the Plan objectives. In particular, the Economic Development directorate has been formed and this now enables a specific focus on economic activity, and with a view to developing a strong, competitive economy in Donegal.

Within the Planning Service the Development Management team has recently been strengthened to best meet the anticipated growth in applications across the County. Furthermore, in March 2019, a new Regeneration and Development team was formed. This team places the Council in a strong position to submit competitive bids for new funding streams and to help realise many of the regeneration and growth objectives for Letterkenny and the network of supporting towns. The work programme for this team is focused on two delivery areas, firstly Letterkenny and the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and secondly, the Phase 1 and 2<sup>1</sup> strategic tier 2 towns and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF). The team has started work on a number of regeneration strategies and action plans for towns in the County which has included a number of consultation events.

The CDP includes a Core Strategy which comprises of a written statement and quantitative assessment for the growth of the County and our network of settlements, over the life of the plan and beyond. Ultimately, working towards the targets of the core strategy has been a central pillar of the work undertaken by the Council. Growth targets were set in the Core Strategy which sought first to reverse the earlier trend for Donegal where there was a fall in population (2011 to 2016), and then for an accelerated period of growth (2024 to 2038). In the absence of updated census data it is difficult to fully determine progress to date on this metric<sup>2</sup>. What is clear, through a qualitative review of progress, is that the collaborative nature of the work undertaken by the Council with partner agencies and adjoining councils, for example through the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, has borne success through project delivery and attracting funding to the County and region. The Council, alongside its partner organisations, has progressed a number of workstreams and infrastructure projects which focus on meeting the objectives of the Plan, and a summary of the key achievements is provided in the table below. These projects have been led by a number of teams and directorates in the Council, are often multi-agency, involve various tiers of government and include examples of private sector or 3<sup>rd</sup> sector investment. What is also evident, and a likely indicator of a particular trend is that the quantum of vacant homes is now much less than it was when the latest Census was taken in 2016.

As recognised in both the Core Strategy, the NPF and the RSES the growth of Letterkenny and the North West City Region has been prioritised as an important economic driver for the whole county, and objectives also outline how this should be assisted by the regeneration and rejuvenation of our towns and villages to attract new businesses/inhabitants to the county. Examples given in the report of progress towards securing these objectives includes the on-going work to establish the Letterkenny Enterprise Quarter, including the development of the Alpha Building, a

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<sup>1</sup> The work programme of the Regeneration and Development team was agreed at the Plenary Meeting of the Council in January 2019. Phase 1 towns are: Ballybofey/Stranorlar, Ballyshannon, An Clochán Liath (Dungloe), Buncrana, Ramelton.

<sup>2</sup> The next Census is 2021 and data from this would provide a further opportunity to review progress.

high-tech facility for innovation which will support both new start-ups and established business across Donegal. This is complemented by the development of a network of digital hubs across the County.

The report also details progress in delivering the housing strategy as contained in the CDP. The overall profile of social housing need remains relatively unchanged and there has not been a significant demand for affordable housing as was originally envisaged in the plan. In excess of 500 households on the social housing waiting list have had their need met since July 2018 across a range of options, including new build and acquisitions etc. There are projects on-going which will provide another 200 houses, with potential for another 500 houses to be delivered in the medium-to-longer-term.

As part of an overall strategy for tourism the *Donegal brand* has grown alongside the promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way. Tourism has however, as an essential economic component of the County, been significantly impacted by Covid-19 travel restrictions in 2020. This will be addressed through various initiatives which look to improve the outlook for tourism as lockdown restrictions are eased including the 'Make a Break for It' campaign (with Fáilte Ireland) and a new campaign, with NI Tourism / Derry City and Strabane District Council, for launch in 2021.

In terms of road infrastructure significant progress has been made on the TEN-T Improvement Project, with preferred alignment published in January 2020, and this has the potential to be delivered over the latter phases of the Plan. The N56 An Clochan Liath (Dungloe) to Glenties and N56 Mountcharles to Inver are also under construction and will achieve improvements to journey times and highway safety while also providing cycling and walking facilities. There are also a number of large scale infrastructure projects being undertaken by Irish Water in the County (including: the Letterkenny & Ballyshannon Regional Water Supply Schemes; and, the Milford, Ramelton and Rathmullan WWTP provision) alongside a continued programme of sewerage improvement schemes and replacement of ageing water mains.

This report has also led to some recommendations for the next statutory plan review including reducing the number of objectives, ensuring they can be measured and ensuring a monitoring and evaluation framework is developed which aligns with priorities across the Council including those of the Local and Economic Community Plan. A further recommendation is an update of progress in achieving the Core Strategy targets at the point data from the Census 2021 is available.

In conclusion, while acknowledging that this review is at the earlier stages of the plan period, it is evident that significant progress has been made in achieving the broad core objectives of the plan and the housing strategy. Notwithstanding this, it is noted that Members of the Council have regularly raised concerns around a number of specific policies of the Plan and how they are being implemented.. There is a

commitment to address these concerns (which are identified in this report) and these issues will be dealt with in more detail over a number of workshops in the period ahead.

## Summary Table – Plan and Projects:

The table below provides a summary of plans and projects recently completed (since 2018), on-going or planned and which contribute towards achieving one or more of the Objectives of the County Development Plan 2018-2024. Further details of these plans and projects are provided within the main part of the report.

<b>Plans and Projects</b>	
<b>Growth / Regeneration and Renewal / Economic Development / Tourism / Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North West Strategic Growth Partnership – the North West City Region;</li> <li>• Letterkenny 2040;</li> <li>• Letterkenny Enterprise Quarter (LEQ) / Alpha Innovation Building</li> <li>• Ramelton Action Plan (launched July 2020)</li> <li>• Regeneration and Action Plans in progress for: Dungloe, Killybegs, Ballybofey/Stranorlar, and, Ballyshannon;</li> <li>• ‘Atlas for a North West City Region’ project;</li> <li>• Town &amp; Village Renewal Programme 2018 &amp; 2019,</li> <li>• Riverine Project – Strabane and Lifford;</li> <li>• Digital Hubs network</li> <li>• Killybegs ‘Smooth Point’ project;</li> <li>• Heritage-led Regeneration of Church Lane, Letterkenny;</li> <li>• Malin Head Visitor Experience and Management Plan;</li> <li>• North West Greenways Network – Derry to Bunrana, Derry to Muff and Lifford to Strabane;</li> <li>• ‘Donegal Connect’ (September 2019);</li> <li>• Sliab Liag Transportation Hub and Visitor Centre (Completed May 2019);</li> <li>• New Public Convenience, Changing Rooms and Information Hub in Rathmullen (Opened June 2018);</li> <li>• Ballyshannon Design Guide (Launched April 2019);</li> <li>• Habitat Restoration and Sustainable Access at Errigal Mountain, ASCENT Project;</li> <li>• Atlantic Area Trail Gazers Project;</li> <li>• South Donegal Collaborative Town Centre Health Checks (October 2019) and Letterkenny Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (October 2018);</li> <li>• Donegal Culture and Creativity Strategy (Launched September 2018)</li> </ul>
<b>Local Area Plans</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seven Strategic Towns LAP 2018-2024 (August 2018)</li> <li>• Letterkenny Plan – consultation and preparatory work undertaken;</li> <li>• Bunrana Plan – Social and economic study by ICRLD</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Road Network</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TEN-T Improvement Project, Donegal;</li> <li>• N56 An Clochán Liath (Dungloe) to Glenties road improvements &amp; footpath/cycleway;</li> <li>• N56 Mountcharles to Inver road improvements &amp; footpath/cycleway;</li> <li>• N56 Coolboy to Kilmacrennan road improvements &amp;</li> </ul>

<b>Plans and Projects</b>	
	<p>footpath/cycleway (Completed October 2019);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letterkenny Strategic Road Network – Southern Bypass and Swilly Relief Road.</li> </ul>
<b>Water Supply / Waste Water Schemes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letterkenny Regional Water Supply Project including Cresslough Wastewater Treatment Plant;</li> <li>• Ballyshannon Regional Water Supply Scheme – Water Treatment Plant and Network;</li> <li>• Milford, Ramelton and Rathmullan WWTP;</li> <li>• Donegal (Group B- Killybegs, Bundoran, Glencolumbkille and Convoy) Sewerage Schemes Wastewater Treatment Plants (Completed Sept 2018);</li> <li>• Various WWTP improvement schemes, Sewerage improvement schemes and leakage reduction schemes across the county.</li> </ul>
<b>Flood Relief Schemes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At consultation stage: Lifford and Raphoe;</li> <li>• At tender stage: Burnfoot, Castlefin, Glenties, Downings and Keerykeel</li> <li>• Announced 2019: Buncrana, Rathmelton and Ballybofey/Stranorlar.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donegal 110Kv Project (Completed Q3 2019);</li> <li>• Mhálainn Bhig (Malinbeg) – mobile phone coverage improvement pilot scheme(Completed Q4 2019)</li> </ul>

## Contents

1.0	Legislative Background.....	1
2.0	Planning Context Update.....	1
	Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (NPF) and National Development Plan (NDP) .....	1
	The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) .....	3
	Ministerial Guidelines .....	3
3.0	Overview and Structure of the Report.....	4
4.0	Review of the County Development Plan 2018-2024 Objectives.....	6
Part A:	The Strategic Plan .....	6
4.1	Chapter 1: Introduction and Vision .....	6
4.2	Chapter 2A: Core Strategy .....	7
4.3	Chapter 2B: The Border Dimension.....	11
4.4	Chapter 3: Towns and Villages.....	11
Part B:	Objectives and Policies of the Plan.....	12
4.5	Chapter 4: Economic Development .....	12
4.6	Chapter 5: Infrastructure.....	15
4.7	Chapter 6: Housing.....	18
4.8	Chapter 7: The Natural and Built Heritage.....	22
4.9	Chapter 8: Natural Resource Development.....	24
4.10	Chapter 9: Tourism.....	26
4.11	Chapter 10: The Marine Resource and Coastal Management .....	27
4.12	Chapter 11: Community Culture and the Gaeltacht.....	27
Part C:	Objectives and Policies of the Towns .....	28
5.0	Planning Permissions and Dwellings approved .....	28



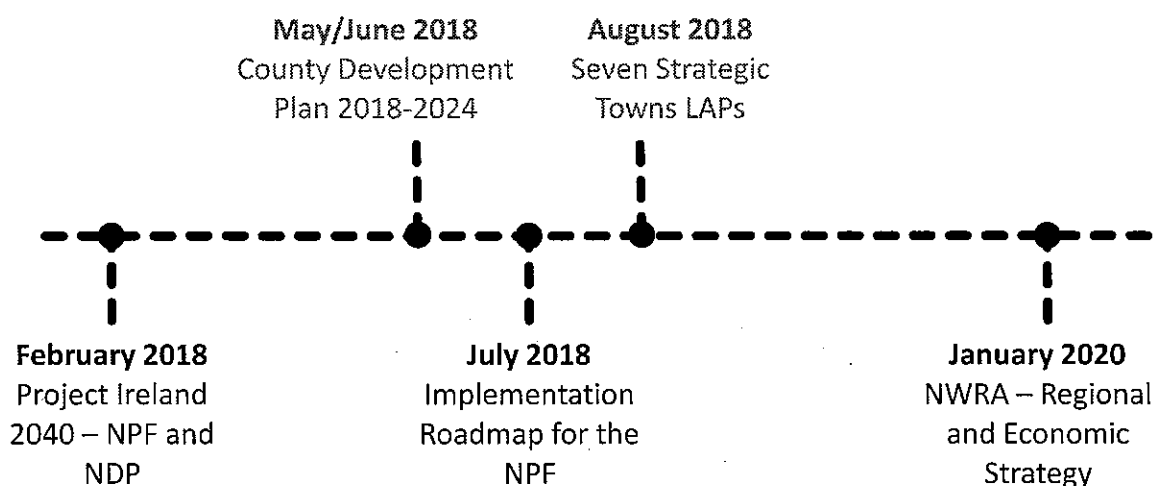
## 1.0 Legislative Background

The Donegal County Development Plan 2018– 2024 (the CDP, the Plan) was formally made on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2018, and came into effect from 5<sup>th</sup> June 2018. In accordance with the requirements of Section 15(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), this report of the Chief Executive sets out the progress made in securing the objectives of the Development Plan (not more than 2 years after the plan was made<sup>3</sup>). Furthermore, under Section 95(3) (a) of the Act, the Chief Executive is also required to include a review of the progress achieved in implementing the Housing Strategy in this report.

## 2.0 Planning Context Update

This section of the report highlights changes to the wider planning context since the CDP came into effect. Figure 2.1 below shows a timeline of these key changes and how they relate to the CDP.

**Figure 2.1 - Planning Context – Timeline**



### *Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (NPF) and National Development Plan (NDP)*

Project Ireland 2040 is the Government’s overarching policy and brings together the NPF 2040 and the NDP 2018-2027. It was published in February 2018. It aims to ensure a consistent approach between planning objectives (detailed in the NPF) and investment commitments (detailed in the NDP). The NPF seeks to provide accommodation for an additional 1 million persons living in Ireland and two-thirds of

<sup>3</sup> Orders (S.I. 100/2020 and S.I. 129/2020) made under S251A of the Planning and Development Act (as amended) resulted in the extension of time limits as contained in the Act and as a necessary suspension due to national health emergency Covid-19 restrictions. This in effect changes the “2 year” date from 9<sup>th</sup> May to 4<sup>th</sup> July.

a million additional workers by 2040. A key aim is to curb excessive population growth in Dublin (currently 75% of all growth) so that the combined level of growth in the Northern and Western and Southern regions at least matches that for the East and Midland Region.

The NPF recognises the strategic importance of the North West City Region (focused on Derry City, Letterkenny and Strabane) for the economy of the region and all island. The NPF also identifies Letterkenny as one of five Regional centres in the country.

The CDP sets out, at Part A, Section 1.2, the status of the NPF at the time the CDP was being prepared and published. Essentially there was some overlap between the two. The NPF was published in February 2018 and therefore pre-dates the CDP, however the early stages of the CDP were prepared while the NPF was still only at its 'Issues Consultation' stage. As such, it is noted in the CDP that its objectives are strongly aligned with the NPF<sup>4</sup>.

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 sets out the long-term (10 year) strategic approach to public capital investment to support the 10 national strategic outcomes in the NPF. Aligned to the NDP is funding allocated competitively to projects which best meet the aims of the NPF and this includes the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF).

#### *Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework (July 2018)*

This was published one month after the CDP came into effect. Broadly, this document serves two purposes.

Firstly, it provides a commentary on how the NPF, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and County/City Development Plans are to be aligned. The roadmap explains that this is necessary as County/City Development Plans, (while all regularly reviewed every 6 years) will be at different stages in the review process. At the point the NPF was adopted some Councils were due to commence a review, some may even have already commenced a review and some may only have recently adopted their CDP (as in the case with Donegal). The aim therefore is to ensure all CDPs are 'reviewed' – be that as a complete review (either brought forward or delayed) or possibly as a 'variation' - after the adoption of the relevant RSES, and to ensure that the CDP is aligned to the NPF and RSES. The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 introduced the legislative mechanism to ensure the review would take place.

Secondly, the roadmap provides updated 'transitional' population projections for the regions, and the metropolitan areas and counties within them. These are derived as a mid-point between the combined total of all Development Plans if projected

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<sup>4</sup> At Page 3 Footnote 2

forwarded to 2031, and nationally projected scenarios to 2031. The Roadmap explains that these adjusted transitional figures will therefore apply to 2026 and also inform the period to 2031.

*The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA)*

The RSES was made on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and came into effect immediately. The aim of the RSES is to provide the link between the NPF/NDP, the County Development Plans and the Local Economic and Community Plans. The policies of the assembly are therefore geared towards achieving the key priorities of the NPF for the region, which includes the dispersal of economic growth throughout the region.

The RSES provides a spatial planning framework for the North West City Region, which is aligned to the objectives of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, and which gives the following specific outcomes:

- Building inclusive and Compact Places;
- Investing in Connected and Accessible Places;
- Planning for a Vibrant Economy and Nurturing Communities; and
- Creating Resilient Places and Low-Carbon Infrastructure.

The RSES also includes the Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan (LRGCSP) as well as strategic plans for the other regional growth centres of Sligo and Athlone, and a Strategic Plan for the Galway Metropolitan Area. This LRGCSPP recognises the lead role Letterkenny has in the wider-region and provides a high level strategic approach for the future growth of Letterkenny. This in turn will influence the Letterkenny 2040 regeneration strategy and detailed policies contained in the Letterkenny Plan.

As per S.11 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), within 26 weeks<sup>5</sup> of the making of the RSES, the planning authority must give notice of either a variation to the development plan or give notice of a development plan review. A separate report on this matter is included with the July Plenary Council agenda.

*Ministerial Guidelines*

The Minister may, at any time, issue guidelines to planning authorities regarding their functions under S.28 the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Since the making of the CDP two guidelines have been published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government including:

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<sup>5</sup> Orders (S.I. 100/2020 and S.I. 129/2020) made under S251A of the Planning and Development Act (as amended) resulted in the extension of time limits as contained in the Act and as a necessary suspension due to national health emergency Covid-19 restrictions. This in effect changes the "26 week" date from 23<sup>rd</sup> July to 18<sup>th</sup> September.

- Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines (December 2018)
- Guidance Note for Local Authorities for Regulating Short Term Letting (July 2019).

In line with the S28 of the Act, the planning authority must have regard to any specific planning policy requirements detailed in these guidelines when undertaking any of its planning functions. On review it is considered that these two recently published guidelines are not so strategically important to Donegal so as to require the variation of any CDP objectives.

Since the CDP was made draft guidelines have been published, for consultation purposes, notably those relating to Marine Planning and Wind Energy. These are addressed in later sections of the report where relevant.

### *Conclusion*

Notwithstanding the need for a fuller review of the CDP Objectives in light of the recently adopted RSES, it is considered that the changes to the planning framework since the CDP are not so strategically significant, so as to result in the need to vary the objectives of the CDP. As noted above the CDP was adopted by Donegal CC after the NPF/NDP and is broadly aligned to its key objectives.

## **3.0 Overview and Structure of the Report**

The County Development Plan is arranged into three Parts (A, B and C), with 15 chapters and a total of 231 objectives.

Part A is “The Strategic Plan” and this includes the Vision for the county, the Core Strategy for growth particularly in Letterkenny and the strategic towns, as well as setting the strategy for the renewal and regeneration of the County’s other towns and villages. There are 35 objectives within Part A. Part B contains the “Objectives and Policies of the Plan”, and is organised over eight topics including economic development, retail, housing and tourism (there are 136 objectives within Part B). Part C, contains the “Objectives and Policies of the Towns” and contains specific and detailed objectives and policies for Letterkenny, Buncrana and Bundoran, as well as maps showing the Settlement Frameworks for all other towns (there are 60 objectives in Part C).

Many of the objectives of the CDP are aspirational, setting out the preferred strategy/direction of travel to manage development in the longer-term, or are rooted in the need to ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of the County. For example, CS-O-8 states the Council should *pursue opportunities for innovation* and CS-O-12 requires *growth in a sequential manner outwards from the core*. It should also be noted that a number of objectives are either specifically required by section 10 (2) of the Planning and Development Act (as amended) or are

derived from European legislation as enacted at the national level (e.g. the Water Framework Directive or Habitats Directive). For example, objective WES-O-5 *“To maintain, protect, improve and enhance the quality of surface waters and ground waters in accordance with the Programme of Measures contained within the relevant River Basin Management Plan”* is exactly as prescribed from the Act and the River Basin Management Plan is the chosen method for implementing the Water Framework Directive in Ireland.

Some of the objectives can not be easily measured at an individual level and would normally only become effective when considered in combination. Also, the timeline for the implementation of many of the objectives will be on-going over the life of the plan or may even have a longer time horizon which goes well beyond for the life of the plan. Objective CS-O-1 provides for population growth to 2038, as an example. This progress report therefore gives general information on aspects which are under the Council’s control and can be measured (such as number of houses built and number of planning permissions) which will allow an appraisal of the effectiveness of these objectives as a whole even at this earlier stage of the plan (only ‘year two’ out of six).

There are, however, several objectives which provide clear targets, for example, the completion of a project or task. There are also objectives which can be easily measured, for examples, an objective that sets an absolute requirement such as ensuring all water quality standards are maintained. As such, these types of objectives are a particular focus of this progress report.

A general observation, at this stage, is that there are many examples where there are overlap between objectives and as a result there may be too many objectives. The total number makes it difficult to monitor objectives and therefore to assess their effectiveness. As such, an aim of the next statutory review may be to reduce the number of objectives and to ensure that they can be more readily measured and monitored.

Otherwise, given the above, the structure of the report from this point on is as follows:

- Section 4 will include an overview of progress towards achieving objectives for each part and chapter of the CDP. This will include a discussion of the objectives and, where relevant, an update on achieving specific targets detailed in the objectives as well as any other pertinent updates on the chapter topic. This section will also provide a review of the Housing Strategy (as contained at 2A.6 of the Core Strategy and Chapter 6.1 of Part B of the CDP).
- Section 5 will provide a review of relevant information in terms of planning permissions and residential development. This will help to

create a baseline which further progress can be measured against particularly when it comes to the next statutory review of the plan.

In addition to the above it is noted that Members of the Council have raised concerns on a regular basis with certain policies of the Plan and how they are being implemented. Members have a strong view that these policies are overly restrictive particularly in the context of supporting Rural Ireland. There is a commitment to address these concerns and these issues will be dealt with in more detail over a number of workshops in the period ahead. Particular issues include:

- Policy ED-P-13 – This policy is permissive of small businesses in rural areas. The policy identifies the type of businesses and sectors that would be appropriate and sub criteria are contained in the policy which seek to limit the impact of development on the urban areas as identified within the Settlement Frameworks. However there is a concern that ‘retail’ is not clearly defined, and this may impede the development of businesses which would combine to rural areas. There is also a concern that a further limitation is that the policy only applies to home-based businesses “within the curtilage of an existing dwelling”.
- Policy T-P-4 - This policy seeks to limit new accesses onto National Roads unless certain circumstances are met. The main concern of Members is that the restrictive nature of the policy limits the potential for development along these routes (such as the N56) and in particular opportunities for rural housing.
- Policy RH-P-5 – This policy relates to the parts of the County identified as Areas Under Strong Urban influence, and a perception that the policy is too restrictive in terms of the need for the application site to be in the “vicinity” of where the applicant (or their parent, grandparent) have resided.
- Policy RH-P-7 - There is a concern with the application of this policy, which deals with replacement houses, where it will relate to houses affected by MICA to the extent they cannot be retained.
- TOU-P-19 – This policy prevents the development of camping/caravan sites in areas of Especially High Scenic Amenity. This ‘blanket-ban’ approach is a concern for some Members as it is felt that there are certain locations, which are designated as EHSA, where such a limitation is not appropriate.

## **4.0 Review of the County Development Plan 2018-2024 Objectives**

### **Part A: The Strategic Plan**

#### **4.1 Chapter 1: Introduction and Vision**

This chapter sets out the vision for the County as well as the Key Strategic Objectives of the CDP from which all other objectives and policies flow. The vision of the Development Plan is as follows:

*By 2038, County Donegal will be a connected place with a strong, competitive and innovative economy that is attracting and sustaining a population of 200,000 people, offering a quality of life ranked highest in the country and asserting a key role in the context of the North West City Region and within the area of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly.*

The chapter sets the scene with particular regard to population projections across the county, the role of the county in the wider region (including as part of the North West City Region and as a border county) and the current economic climate.

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2A 'Core Strategy' contain a similar suite of objectives and there is some duplication. This is a legacy from earlier versions of the Plan, where it was not a statutory requirement for a Core Strategy to be incorporated into the Plan. This may need to be examined as part of the next statutory review and an option may be to combine these chapters and objectives.

## **4.2 Chapter 2A: Core Strategy**

The Core Strategy sets out the medium to longer term quantitative based strategy for the spatial development of the county. In doing so it also demonstrates how the plan is consistent with the higher level planning framework set at the national and regional level. The Core Strategy sets out the Settlement Structure and provides a summary of characteristics as follows:

- Layer 1: Letterkenny
- Layer 2: The Strategic Towns
  - 2A: settlements identified as in the context of population/housing supply and due to their 'special economic function'; and,
  - 2B: settlements identified predominantly due to their 'special economic function'
- Layer 3: Rural Towns and Countryside.

The Core Strategy also sets population targets and housing requirements across the settlement structure as follows: 30% (of the uplift) in Letterkenny (layer 1); 34% in Strategic Towns (layer 2) and 36% in Rural Towns and Open Countryside (layer 3).

As well as a written explanation of the Core Strategy, a series of tables draws together quantitative information, which culminates in Table 2A.6, The Core Strategy Table. This provides a further break down of population targets, housing requirements, housing land requirements and identifies the shortfall or excess of housing units for Layer 1 and 2A settlements.

Several of the Core Strategy objectives outline population projections across the County, Letterkenny, the strategic towns and rural towns and the countryside to 2024. CS-O-1 also gives a population growth projection for the County beyond the end of the plan period to 2038. These projections were based on population estimate in 2016<sup>6</sup> and a true measure of progress towards achieving these targets will only be available following the 2021 Census. These objectives are summarised in table 4.1 below:

**Table 4.1 – Summary of Population Projection Objectives**

	<b>Summary of objective</b>	<b>Target % increase over 2016 population</b>
CS-O-1:	Growth of County Donegal's population by 14,000 persons to 2024 and accelerated growth of 36,000 people by 2038.	8.8% increase by 2024 31.6% increase by 2038
CS-O-4:	Growth of Letterkenny (Layer 1) - approximately 4,200 persons by 2024.	22% increase by 2024
CS-O-5	Growth of 'Strategic' towns (Layer 2) – approximately 4,500 persons by 2024.	12.6% increase by 2024
CS-O-6	Support growth of vibrant 'Rural Towns and Open Countryside (Later 3) – approximately 5,000 persons by 2024.	4.8% increase by 2024

The NPF includes a predicted growth level nationally of approximately 1 million persons by 2040 (from 4.7 million at 2016 towards 5.7 million). This would equate to a long-term increase in population of approximately 21%. The Implementation Roadmap for the NPF includes transitional population projections for County Donegal of a range between 173,500 – 176,500 by 2026 and 179,500 – 183,500 by 2031. The upper range would be broadly in line with the CDP growth target up to 2024 (i.e. the end of the Plan period). However, after this the population projections in the NPF Roadmap would increase at a much slower rate and not align with the longer term growth ambitions of the CDP.

The NWRA RSES also provides population targets for Letterkenny which are a minimum 40% increase in population above the Census 2016 level by 2040 (to 28,300) and details an interim population of a minimum of 23,700 by 2026 (22.8%) and a minimum of 25,900 by 2031 (34.2%). The population growth projections for Letterkenny are more ambitious in the CDP than the RSES (although it must be noted that they are expressed as minimum in the RSES).

The Core Strategy table also identifies housing requirement for the plan period. In total the housing requirement for the county over the plan period is 5,174 units,

<sup>6</sup> At the time the estimates were based on an equal decline of 1.5% in population since the 2011 census.



which would be an annualised total of 862 units. Table 4.2 and 4.3 below identify housing completions by quarter since Q3 2018, and annual totals since 2011.

**Table 4.2 – Housing Completions in County Donegal since Q3 2018**

Year/Quarter	Total Housing Completions
2018 Q3	126
2018 Q4	131
2019 Q1	85
2019 Q2	111
2019 Q3	133
2019 Q4	102
2020 Q1	116

Source: www.cso.ie

**Table 4.3 – Housing Completions in County Donegal 2011-2019**

Year	Total Housing Completions
2011	460
2012	358
2013	250
2014	256
2015	245
2016	290
2017	364
2018	435
2019	431

Source: www.cso.ie

There has been a notable increase in housing completions over the last few years (2018 and 2019) when compared to the immediately preceding years (2013 to 2017). However, over the first seven quarters of the plan period the level of completions would only equate to approximately 50% of the housing requirement that would be expected over that time. It should be noted that housing developments can take many months or years to be realised from the grant of permission and, given this lag, it is difficult to fully assess the effectiveness of the objectives of this CDP on meeting the housing requirement at this stage. Planning permission for 641 residential units were granted in 2019 (see Table 5.3 below) and this provides a notable increase on previous years and therefore potential for an uplift in delivery. It is anticipated that there will be a significant downturn in housing completions within Q2 and Q3 2020 on account of the restrictions placed on construction due to the Covid-19 health emergency.

Future analysis may be required on both new dwelling completions and planning permissions to determine if their spatial distribution (across the 'Layers') is in line with the Core Strategy and this picture will develop over the remainder of the plan period. Headline analysis of Table 5.2 and 5.3, and using a broad assumption that 'one-off houses' tend to be in rural locations whereas 'multi development units' and

'apartments' tend to be in urban locations, shows a mixed picture in recent years. The approximate split over 2018 and 2019 for planning permissions is 33.5% multi development units/apartments (urban) and 66.5% one-off houses (rural). In terms of multi unit schemes there is significant variation in delivery and as this is very much dependent on the scale of the development scheme submitted and when planning permission granted. In respect of one-off houses it is more consistent (an average of 347 units per year between 2017 and 2019).

As well as these growth ambitions, the Core Strategy objectives also seek to assert County Donegal as having a key role in the context of the North West City Region and within the area of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (CS-O-2). As noted in Section 2.0 above, the NWRA RSES includes a detailed spatial framework for the North West City Region which aligns with the objectives of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership (led by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council) and this provides a solid basis to build on and achieve this objective which is now provided for at national, regional and local level.

The growth of Letterkenny as a driver of population and economic growth is a further key objective contained in both CS-O-4 and CS-O-11. Tangible progress is being made towards the achievement of these objectives. Whilst there has been slippage in the programme for delivery of the Letterkenny Plan, it is anticipated that robust and coherent proposals will be presented to Members before the end of 2020. In addition, the Regeneration and Development Section has secured significant funding under the URDF programme and is progressing implementation of the various items for which funding was secured under Call 1 of the URDF programme. The section also recently submitted a comprehensive application for additional funding under Call 2 of the URDF following several engagements with Members. In addition, the Council continues to work on a number of areas including the TEN-T Priority Routes Project (Section 2 of which directly affects Letterkenny), and is also continuing its partnership with fellow key stakeholders including LYIT, LUH, Donegal ETB and the Town Chamber.

CS-O-14 seeks an effective resolution to unfinished residential development. Since the CDP came in to effect progress has been made in respect of completion of a number of Unfinished Housing Estates. Works are well underway or already complete, with a view to having the Taking in Charge process complete in 2020 in the following estates: Cois na hAbhainn, Malin, Ard Aoibhinn, Donegal Town, Crest of the Wave, Bundoran, Ceannan View, Letterkenny, Killylastin Heights & Glerann Rua, Letterkenny, Gleann Eadaoin Letterkenny and Sessiagh Park, Castlefin. The unfinished developments at Lisnennan Court, Letterkenny, Blue Cedars, Ballybofey, Admiran Park, Stranorlar, and Blackrock Drive, Ballybofey have all been taken in charge.

Significant progress has been made by the Taking in Charge team in advancing a number of estates to taken in charge status with seven estates having been taken

over in the latter half of 2019 and plans for up to 30 estates to be taken in charge in 2020. Tenders have been sought to have major works carried out in a number of estates and discussions advanced with Irish Water around the resolution plans for estates which have been significant issues in the past number of years. This is substantial progress in terms of taking in charge and meeting the objective of seeking the effective resolution of unfinished residential development within the County.

CS-O-15, seeks the preparation of LAPs for Letterkenny and Layer 2A towns. The Seven Strategic Towns LAP 2018-2024 was published in August 2018 and therefore represents a significant step forward in meeting this objective. Work is progressing on the other LAPs, albeit behind the timetable originally envisaged in the Plan.

The Letterkenny Plan (LAP) project is a key priority of the Planning Division. Whilst good progress has been made, this project is proving to be complex and therefore challenging and has experienced slippage in the programme as a result. The revised programme will see the Draft Plan published in Spring, 2021.

There has also been progress in preparatory works for the Bunrana LAP. ICLRD (The International Centre for Local and Regional Development) were procured by Planning to undertake a comprehensive strategic study on the future direction and economic positioning of the town. This is almost complete and was presented to the Inishowen Members on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020. The work on the Bunrana Local Area Plan is anticipated to be hugely assisted and influenced by this Strategic report.

CS-O-18 requires a review of the location and extent of lands zoned for Strategic Residential Reserve. Strategic Residential Reserve are currently shown in the CDP for Letterkenny, Bunrana and Bundoran and these will be reviewed as part of the LAP programme. The Seven Strategic Towns Area Plan also included a review of the strategic residential reserve for Ballybofey/Stranorlar.

### **4.3 Chapter 2B: The Border Dimension**

This chapter highlights key cross cutting themes of the development plan, including restating relevant objectives and policies contained elsewhere in the Plan, which are important for the social and economic relationship of the County with Northern Ireland. The uncertainty of Brexit and the potential impacts, challenges and opportunities are discussed in this chapter. There are many examples of cross-border collaboration work which are detailed elsewhere in the report and which, in combination, demonstrate that objectives are being secured.

### **4.4 Chapter 3: Towns and Villages**

The objectives of this chapter seek to support the renewal and regeneration of County Donegal's towns and villages. This includes realising their economic potential, strengthening their physical environment, and addressing infrastructure

constraints. The objectives outline the need to support and collaborate with public, private and community and voluntary sectors.

This represents a significant area of work for the Council and includes work progressed by the Council's Regeneration and Development team in line with their agreed work programmes. This includes work on a number of Regeneration Strategies and Action Plans for the towns of: Ramelton, Killybegs, An Clochán Liath (Dungloe), Ballybofey / Stranorlar and Ballyshannon. The Ramelton Action Plan 'A Study of Heritage Led Actions for Renewal and Regeneration' was launched on 3 July 2020. It includes a number of actions developed in consultation with the local community and which will support the renewal and regeneration of Ramelton, and will also assist and support a number of businesses . The Dungloe Regeneration Strategy has reached first draft stage and internal review in advance of public notice and consultation arrangements being considered. In Killybegs the team is collaborating with the Killybegs Regeneration Group in the preparation of a Regeneration Strategy (Killybegs 2040). Pasparakis Friel architects have recently been procured to deliver this work and the process has commenced. Work to advance Ballybofey/Stranorlar and Ballyshannon to first draft stage continues to progress.

In many cases these will build on successful bids under the Rural RDF (first and second calls) including: the Town Centre Regeneration project, Killybegs (€3.63m) for the redevelopment of existing buildings in the harbour to house a Tourism Information Centre and Digital Hub along with civic space improvements; and, Ailt an Chorráin (Burtonport)/ Oileán Árinn Mhór (Arranmore Island) - Harbour to Island Regeneration (€3.09m) for improved infrastructure at the harbour in Burtonpoint and shorefront amenity infrastructure on Arranmore (NB: These projects are now at procurement strategy and detailed project brief stage and, subject to approval by DRCD/contracts).

Two further successful bids were announced in June 2020 including:

- Ballyshannon - 'Back to Ballyshannon' is a transformation project to re-energise, re-imagine and sustain the social, cultural, historical, physical and economic fabric of Ballyshannon's historic town centre. This is a Category 2 project (project development stage) with a project value is €0.25m.
- Ramelton Historic Town centre – A restorative and transformation Public Realm Scheme. This is a Category 2 project (project development stage) with a project value is €0.25m.

## **Part B: Objectives and Policies of the Plan**

### **4.5 Chapter 4: Economic Development**

#### **General Economic Development**

The objectives seek to facilitate cross-border collaboration and to enable regional economic, cultural and social development opportunities. There is a focus on

directing employment generating uses to Letterkenny and the strategic support towns, supporting the economic development of smaller towns and villages as well as appropriate rural economic development (ED-0-03). Linked objectives include continued support to third level education and research and development, and facilitating appropriate sustainable tourism development.

There have been a number of developments of relevance realised since the Plan came into effect which demonstrate progress towards achieving these objectives. An Economic Development directorate is now in place and this enables a focus on economic activity with a view to developing a strong, competitive and innovative economy in Donegal. They provide a 'Business Concierge Service', a dedicated point of contact for existing businesses, potential start-ups or businesses looking to relocate or expand, providing advice and connecting with key personnel across the Council services. They also provide expert data analysis and research, and support other parts of the Council by exploring EU and National funding opportunities.

A key strategic intervention for the Council is the development of the Letterkenny Enterprise Quarter (LEQ). . The LEQ will include the €6m Alpha Innovation Centre which will be a 17,500sq.ft purpose built, high-tech workspace which will focus on supporting new start-ups and established businesses by enhancing and developing their innovation capabilities for Donegal and the north west region. In May 2020 funding of €3.7m was announced towards this as one of the successful projects under the Border Enterprise Development Fund. In addition substantial investment has been planned for the development of a network of Digital Hubs across the County, which will create jobs and encourage remote working opportunities (including partnership working with the Atlantic Economic Corridor).

There have been a significant number of initiatives undertaken by the Council, often alongside its partners including LYIT, IDA Ireland, Udaras na Gaeltachta, Enterprise Ireland and where appropriate under the umbrella of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership. These actions and efforts have sought to promote the County and region for future economic development. This includes the 'Atlas for a North West City Region' project undertaken by Harvard University (jointly commissioned by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council) which seeks to 'map' the cross-border region and see how it might develop in years to come. There has also been proactive targeting of specific markets to promote Donegal and the North West as an excellent choice for second site locations for businesses (including trade missions to the US in 2018 and 2019 and to Dublin) and the promotion of Donegal Place Brand and the County's reputation as a great place to live, work, invest, study and visit (extensive marketing and communications strategy including the 'Donegal Connect' events in 2019). Other successes include the commitment by Amazon Web Services to invest in the renewable energy project, developed by Invis Energy, at Meenbog and increased employment by Abbots at the IDA Ireland Letterkenny Business Park. In October 2019, Government funding of

€2.5 million was awarded to LYIT to assist its ambition to achieve university status and to improve cross-border links.

Another significant cross-border initiative is the 'Riverine project' in Lifford-Strabane. This was awarded Special EU Programme Body funding under the Peace IV Programme in June 2019 (of €9m). These plans include a 12 Ha park that will cross the border between Strabane and Lifford, and as part of a parkland setting, will include pavilion buildings, wetlands, pathways and a pedestrian footbridge. Finally a relevant rural RDF funding success includes the DigiWest (for €645k) which seeks to establish four digital working hubs including one at Stranorlar.

Presently, the Council is formulating a Remote Working Strategy for Business to help capitalise on the opportunities that exist to secure and deliver on the demand arising in Donegal as an ideal remote working destination.

### **County Retail Strategy 2018-2024**

The objectives of the retail strategy seek to promote diversity in retail types, support a strong independent sector, consolidate retail development within town centres, and promote a higher density of development and regeneration of derelict land and buildings in town centres for retail use. This is all within the context of maintaining the established hierarchy of town and local centres, and preventing inappropriate retail development to the edge or outside of town centres of a size and scale which may be detrimental to the vitality and viability of the main town centre. There will be crossover with many of the aims of the various regeneration strategies and action plans for towns.

Since the Plan came into effect town centre health checks have been undertaken for Donegal Town, Ballyshannon and Bundoran (in October 2019) and Letterkenny (in October 2018). These were part of the Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme, which has been developed by the Heritage Council and included input from Queens University Belfast students. The reports highlight how town centres can adapt to the challenges that many towns across Ireland are facing through the decline of the traditional High Street, falling residential occupancy rates and poor-quality environment often dominated by vehicular traffic.

Vacancy rates, which are often a measure of the success of town centres, have increased in County Donegal from 15.0% in Q2 2018 to 15.8% in Q2 2019 (source: Geoview Commercial Vacancy rate reports 2019). This is above the national increase over the same period (0.2%) and above the overall national average in Q2 2019 (of 13.3%). Ballybofey has the second highest vacancy rate in the country (28.0% in Q2 2019) although this is a slight improvement from the previous year (28.8% in Q2 2020). This underlines the significant threats and challenges faced by our town centre in a changing retail market.

## 4.6 Chapter 5: Infrastructure

### Transportation

Objectives of this section seek to safeguard existing transport corridors, such as national and regional roads, and support the delivery of key pieces of infrastructure, including improvements to the TEN-T network, the Strategic Road Network, and walkways, greenways and cycleways.

At the time the CDP came into effect it was noted that the development plan would need to be varied once the preferred route corridors for the TEN-T Priority Route Improvement Project, Donegal were known. The Option Selection Report and Option Corridors for the project were published in January 2020. Discussions are now progressing with potentially effected land owners and design and evaluation work is continuing (ahead of any statutory processes). As the requisite stage of the process has now been reached, the Central Planning Unit is progressing work on the preparation of a variation to the County Development Plan.

Objective T-O-7 requires protection of corridors and routes and acquisition of land necessary for transportation improvement projects (as identified in Table 5.1 of the CDP). Table 5.1 lists other transport improvements projects on the Strategic Road Network as follows:

- *Letterkenny Strategic Road Network– Southern Bypass, Swilly Relief Road, Northern Bypass, Western Bypass,*
- *National Roads*
  - *N56 Mountcharles to Inver*
  - *N56 An Clochan Liath (Dungloe) to Glenties*
  - *N56 Inver to Killybegs*
  - *N15 Lifford to Ballybofey/Stranorlar*
- *Other Strategic Roads*
  - *Buncrana Inner and Outer Relief Roads*
  - *Muff Bypass*
  - *Ballybofey Link Road*
  - *Burnfoot Bypass*
  - *Killybegs Bypass*

Notable updates in achieving this objective are:

- Southern Relief Road and Swilly Relief Road – Consultation on an emerging preferred route occurred in June 2018. The preliminary appraisal for funding approval of €73m was submitted to DTTAS in 2019.
- N56 An Clochan Liath (Dungloe) to Glenties – In total this comprises 27km of construction and realignment of the national secondary road and cycleway, with the aim to improve safety and reduce travel times. It is split into five phases and has a total estimated value of between €100 and €250m. Phase 2

and 3 are complete (totalling 8.8km). Phase 4 is under construction, a contract was awarded for Phase 1 (An Clochán Liath to An Chlochbhuaile) in May 2020 and Phase 5 (Letterilly to Kilraine) is subject to tender. The anticipated completion date is 2022.

- N56 Mountcharles to Inver – Realignment and construction of approximately 5km of national secondary road with the aim to improve safety and reduce travel times. The first phase (Mountcharles to Drumbeigh) has been substantially complete and construction has commenced on the second phase (Drumbeigh to Inver). The estimated value is €50m to €100m.

Realising all of these projects identified in objective T-O-7 over the plan period is unlikely given the scale of development and the need to secure funding. The above examples however do illustrate progress over the earliest part of the plan period.

### Water and Environmental Services

Objectives outline partnership working with Irish Water to implement their own strategic objectives and to facilitate delivery of water services required for development. In addition there are objectives relating to the water supply and waste water, ensuring compliance with the Water Framework Directive and maintaining, protecting, improving and enhancing the quality of surface waters and ground waters as per relevant Basin Management Plan.

The main issue to note is that since the CDP came into effect is that the Government has published the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021. This sets out the actions that will be taken to improve water quality and achieve 'good' ecological status in all water bodies (rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters) by 2027. Table 5.5 shows the most recent data (2013-2018) for water quality in all water bodies in the county and previous data (2010-2015). While there has been some improvement, with more water bodies recognised as being of 'High' or 'Good' status (increase from 89 to 94), there is also one more water body in 'Bad' status categories (increase from 1 to 2).

**Table 5.5 – Water Quality in all water bodies in County Donegal**

2013-2018	High	Good	Moderate	Poor	Bad
River	21	73	21	67	2
Lake	0	22	6	1	0
Transitional	0	3	2	1	0
Coastal	2	4	0	0	0

2010-2015	High	Good	Moderate	Poor	Bad
River	15	74	36	58	1
Lake	4	17	7	1	0
Transitional	0	2	2	2	0
Coastal	2	2	2	0	0



There are currently a number of water and waste water projects in progress in the County by Irish Water, and a number that have been recently completed. These seek to address both water supply issues and increase the capacity of the wastewater collection network to cater for residential and commercial developments and therefore in combination demonstrate that the overall ethos of the objectives in this section are being secured. These include:

- Letterkenny Regional Water Supply Scheme – this will provide clean safe water for businesses and residents in Letterkenny, and improve water security and water pressure. This includes new and rehabilitated water mains, additional links and three pumping stations. The total investment is €44m.
- Ballyshannon Regional Water Supply Scheme - Water Treatment Plant and Network – this has been developed to address drinking water issues in Ballyshannon, Rossnowlagh, Ballintra and areas currently supplied by Cashelard WSS and Ballymagroarty WSS. It commenced in 2019 and is due for completion in 2020.
- Milford, Ramelton and Rathmullan - WWTP Provision. Detailed design has progressed and is subject to planning. At present these towns have no or substandard wastewater treatment. This project will rectify the situation and therefore protect the environment and quality of receiving waters, increase capacity and facilitate future growth. This is due to commence in 2020 and be completed in 2022.
- A recently completed project (November 2019) includes the Greencastle Water Supply scheme (€6m investment) which included the construction of 10km of water mains and a new reservoir and associated booster station.
- The Donegal (Group B- Killybegs, Bundoran, Glencolumbkille and Convoy) Sewerage Schemes Wastewater Treatment Plants was completed in September 2018. This was a total investment of €25m.

Other planned projects, which may be realised other the remainder of the plan period, include: Sewerage Improvement Schemes at Ballybofey-Stranorlor, Buncrana, Merville, Burtonpoint, Kilcar, Kerrykeel, and Falcarragh, and upgrades to WWTPs in Newtowncunningham, Cresslough, Clonmany, Castlefinn.

There are also numerous examples of Irish Water replacing ageing water mains etc as part of their national improvement programme. This will ensure an efficient and clean water supply and reduce leakages and therefore help to secure the objectives of the Plan.

### **Telecommunications**

Objectives balance the need for improved connectivity across the county, being improvements in the telecommunications network and delivery of high speed broadband, against the need to have due regard to natural and built heritage and

environmental considerations. The main change since the Plan was made has been progression on the National Broadband plan and subvention measures.

In July 2019, a new pilot project in Mhálainn Bhig was set-up to tackle mobile phone blackspot coverage. The lack of mobile phone coverage had been identified as a key hindrance to the quality of life and development in this part of Donegal. Funding was secured through DRCDs Digital Innovation Programme and the project was delivered in partnership with the local community and Vodafone.

## **Flooding**

Broadly the objectives seek to prevent development in areas liable to flooding (with some exceptions). The undertaking of Strategic Flood Risk Assessments (SFRA's) in accordance with national guidelines is now an established element of work in the preparation of statutory plans. SFRA's have been already prepared for the CDP 2018-2024 and the Seven Strategic Towns LAP. A SFRA has been procured as part of the preparatory works for the Letterkenny Plan. In addition, there are a number of Flood Relief Schemes being implemented in the County in collaboration with Irish Water. These include:

Lifford and Raphoe– significant work has been completed on these projects including cost-benefit analysis and appropriate surveys. The Lifford project was recently subject to consultation with local residents.

Burnfoot, Castlefin, Glenties, Downings and Keerykeel - these are currently subject to tender to appoint consultants.

- Buncrana, Rathmelton and Ballybofey/Stranorlar – funding to progress these was announced in November 2019.

## **4.7 Chapter 6: Housing**

### **Housing Strategy**

This section incorporates a review of progress in implementing the Housing Strategy (and as required by s.95 (3) (a) of the Act). The review firstly outlines the position with regard to the social housing need profile, and how this compares to the profile which informed the objectives and policies contained within the Strategy.

From the perspective of social housing need, the overall profile remains relatively unchanged over the last two years with 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation still the predominant type / size of accommodation required. There has been no significant change therefore in this regard, over the two year period.

In overall terms, there are 941 households on the waiting list with 1,716 on the transfer list, many of which are on Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Given the economic challenges in recent years, and the availability and price of houses for sale

in the private market, there has not been a significant demand for affordable housing, as was envisaged in the Plan.

From the perspective of housing supply, in excess of 500 households on the Council's social housing list have had their housing need met since July 2018, either directly from the Council or via nominations made by the Council to Approved Housing Bodies. This accommodation has been provided from a range of options including new build on Council landbank, turnkey developments, acquisition and refurbishment of houses, re-letting of vacancies arising within Council Stock, houses sourced via the Leasing and other similar schemes. In addition, a number of housing projects are either on site already, or close to commencement throughout the County. These will provide an additional 200 houses when completed. Other housing projects with potential for over 500 houses, are either being designed in-house, or are being progressed as turnkey projects.

A significant element of the supply over the last two years has involved the acquisition of mainly single houses that were offered for sale. The houses acquired were generally vacant and the Council has been able to acquire and refurbish them for social housing. This has helped with another key objective of bringing vacant private houses back into use.

Since the adoption of the County Development Plan the Council has also adopted a new Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 - 2024, and is currently pursuing the implementation of same. We also continue to engage with statutory and non-statutory organisations with a view to meeting the housing needs of Older People and People with a Disability.

In conclusion, there has been no significant change to the social housing need profile, as outlined within the Housing Strategy, and the Council continues to work with other agencies and the private sector in order to deliver appropriate supply solutions. Actual activity in terms of these supply solutions is outlined in the tables that follow.

## **Social Housing Activity 2015-2020 (position at July 2020)**

### **1. Social Housing Developments**

Donegal County Council has completed or is in the process of designing and constructing the below social housing developments with the aim of addressing the social housing need in the County.

Location	Status	No. of
<b>Construction Stage</b>		
Malin	Substantially complete	8
Killybegs	Substantially complete	9
Donegal Town	Under construction	24
St. Johnston	Under construction	6
Long Lane, Letterkenny	Under construction	29
Rockytown, Buncrana	Under construction	21
Raphoe	Contract Award Stage	11
Dunfanaghy	Contract Award Stage	4
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>112</b>
<b>Preliminary Design Stage (No. of units to be confirmed)</b>		
Donegal Town (Phase 3)	Preliminary Design Stage (Part 8 approved)	24
Bundoran (Phase 1)	Preliminary Design Stage	45
Buncrana (Phase 2)	Preliminary Design Stage	78
Crana Crescent, Buncrana	Preliminary Design Stage	16
Ballybofey	Preliminary Design Stage	19
Lifford	Preliminary Design Stage	29
Kilmacrennan Rd,	Preliminary Design Stage	37
Carrigart	Preliminary Design Stage	8
Dungloe	Preliminary Design Stage	44
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>300</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>412</b>

## 2. Social Housing through Turnkey Acquisition

(a) Donegal County Council's turnkey acquisition process is continuing throughout the County. This competitive dialogue procurement process will result in a major capital investment in social housing, with the initial projects due for completion in quarter 2 2020. This is a very effective mechanism enabling the Council to feed into the design of the proposal so as to ensure that the end product is suitable for the needs of social housing tenants. Proposals are subject to meeting the requirements of the procurement process; planning; departmental approval and; contract.

To date, 67 units have been delivered under the turnkey model in Stranorlar (21 units) & Letterkenny (36 units) and Newtowncunningham (10 units). Three turnkey developments are at advanced construction stage on-site in: Letterkenny (30 units) and Falcarragh (12 units) and Newtowncunningham (9 units) which will provide an additional 51 housing units by the end of the year, subject to contract. Departmental approval has been received for proposals in the towns of Convoy (24 units) and Ballyshannon (5 units) and construction is due to commence on these developments

in the near future. Further proposals are at planning & pre-planning stages and present viable projects in Gweedore, Carndonagh, Donegal Town, Carrigart, Letterkenny, Ballybofey, Milford, Falcarragh, Buncrana & Moville.

This process has the potential to deliver a substantial number of social housing units and will make a significant impact in terms of addressing the current social housing waiting list.

## **(b) House Acquisition Programme**

Donegal County Council has acquired, or is in the process of acquiring properties under the House Acquisition Programme. Since 2015, 232 properties have been acquired under this Programme throughout the county. A further 18 properties are currently at conveyance stage.

### **Urban Housing**

The main thrust of the objectives within the section lead from the Core Strategy spatial distribution aims and the need to ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. Thus, these objectives address such matters as the distribution of urban housing in a sequential manner (outwards from town centres), and in locations which already benefit from physical infrastructure. Furthermore, objectives promote quality urban design, the provision of mix tenures, and the reuse of vacant and derelict properties in town centres for new residential development. The objectives are also supported by a number of detailed policies which seek to ensure high quality development in terms of development, density, detailed layout, provision of public open space etc.

The section 4.2 Core Strategy above, and tables 5.2 and 5.3 below, provides details on the delivery of planning permissions for multiple houses over recent years and since the CDP came into effect. The various regeneration and renewal projects being progressed in the County, as well as the granular review of housing development opportunities currently being undertaken as part Letterkenny Plan work, will also help to secure many of the objectives in this chapter. Otherwise, in the main, objectives in this section will be realised through the development management process, particular when ensuring high quality housing development of a good design and in the right location.

### **Rural Housing**

The objectives seek a balanced approach for housing in rural areas, to ensure the vibrancy of rural areas and the sustainability of rural communities is maintained, while having regard to relevant environmental considerations and the spatial

distribution of housing across the county (as outline in the Core Strategy). In particular, objectives seek to protect rural areas immediately outside towns from over-development and sprawl, and the need to locate rural housing sensitively and of a design and construction that is sustainable. However, the main control for the spatial distribution of housing in open countryside is set out in the policies of this section of the plan and as it relates to Map 6.2.1. The policies provide for existing members of the rural community to continue to contribute to those communities including in areas which are under pressure from the larger urban areas. The general experience is that rural housing application from members of the rural community are approved where a genuine rural housing need is met.

## **4.8 Chapter 7: The Natural and Built Heritage**

### **Natural Heritage**

Many of the objectives of this chapter refer to the need to comply with and implement legislation and strategies mainly derived from the European level which relate to conserving and protecting the county's natural heritage. This includes the EU Habitats directive, EU Birds Directive, the EU Landscape Convention, EU Biodiversity Study as well the Wildlife Acts. Relevant designations include SACs, SPAs, NHAs and Ramsar sites as well as Designated Shellfish Waters and Freshwater Pearl Mussels. Other objectives of this chapter require: consideration and protection of the landscape character, with specific reference to the scenic amenity plan (as per Map 7.1.1); protection of areas of Especially High Scenic Amenity from intrusive and/or unsympathetic development; protection and conservation of hedgerows, stone walls and traditional field boundaries; sustainable management of forests; and conservation of peatlands.

The application of many of these objectives, and associated policies, will be through the development management process and this will be an on-going process over the remainder of the plan period. There is no indication that these objectives are not been secured as part this process.

A particular project of note includes the Habitat Restoration and Sustainable Access at Errigal Mountain. This included a Part 8 application prepared as part of the EU funded ASCENT project. This included repair and restoration plan to the areas most effected. This project involved the local community and drew on expertise and experience of other members of the ASCENT group. Funding of €625,000 was secured under the 2019 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme to develop the pathway on Errigal as a consequence of the output from the Ascent Project. This is one example of how these objectives are being secured and of how a balance can be achieved between protecting a natural asset while improving the visitor experience and the economy of the area.

## **Built Heritage**

Objective BH-O-1 confirms the need to preserve, protect, enhance and record the architectural heritage of the County. This is a difficult objective to measure, as it is a subjective assessment and is mainly reliant on the successful implementation on the accompanying Built Heritage policies through development management practice. Continued review of best practice and increased knowledge base as it relates to Built Heritage would assist in securing this objective over the remainder of the plan period.

In addition, there are specific objectives relating to promoting economic growth through ongoing regeneration, and recognising the economic benefits of the historic environment including promoting tourism. The reuse of built heritage, including vernacular and/or historic industrial and maritime buildings using best conservation practice is also encouraged.

There are a number of projects, completed and on-going, which when considered in combination, would demonstrate some progress towards securing these objectives. As an example this includes the heritage-led regeneration of Church Lane in Letterkenny. This saw conservation works completed to seven historic properties including roof and chimney repairs, installation of cast iron rainwater goods, reinstating timber sash windows, application of lime render/pointing, and repair of shopfronts using traditional materials and informed by best conservation practice. (This project also included best practice demonstration, for example, a hot lime demonstration, and as a programme to 'up skill' local contractors). Work of a similar nature is now being progressed within Ramelton, which as part of the Wild Atlantic Way, has the potential to improve the tourism offer of the town (the Heritage Council have awarded €200,000 under the Heritage Council's Historic Towns Initiative in July 2020). The conservation Planning Services in conjunction with the Heritage Office set up a thatch repair grant scheme which assisted 12 thatch properties in 2019 and 29 properties in 2020. This grant scheme helps protect these vulnerable buildings whilst ensuring their tourism contribution to the County's landscape.

The Ballyshannon Design Guide, which launched in April 2019, is another example. This was commissioned by Donegal County Council and funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The Guide provides assistance to a wide range of public and private stakeholders such as landowners, business owners, local community groups, technical practitioners, statutory bodies and public authorities. Where the advice contained in this Guide can be applied, it will reap long term benefits for the conservation of the character of the town.

The Planning Services has successfully administered the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) 2019 and 2020 fund (€120,000 in total) and the Historic Structures Fund 2019 and 2020 grants (€32,000) which has resulted in conservation works to

24 historic structures on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) (many of these buildings are important County tourism assets including Bunrana Castle, The Laurels, Rathmullan Abbey, Lifford Courthouse and Donegal Town Church of Ireland). Over the two years €152,000 was awarded

Objective BH-O-2 requires a systematic programme of additions to the Record of Protected Structures (having regard to ministerial recommendations) arising from the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) of Donegal.

Since the Plan came into effect 11 buildings have been added to the RPS (eight in September 2018, and three in January 2020). This has increased the total RPS in the County from 466 in May 2018 to 477. In total this means only 0.4% of the total number of buildings/structures on the NIAH (2228 structures) have been added to the RPS since the plan came into effect. The NIAH was completed some time ago, and not all buildings and structures on the NIAH will have (retained) significance at the regional or national level so as to justify being added to the RPS, but nevertheless this represents only a small step-change.

Objective BH-O-2 also requires a programme of additions to the Architectural Conservation Areas, the safeguarding of Historic Gardens, and the preparation of Village Design Statements for the County's five Heritage Towns.

There have been no additions to the Architectural Conservation Areas in the County since the plan came into to effect and there is currently no on-going work to move towards identifying or designating new ACAs in the County. A review of the Letterkenny ACA is under consideration and this may result in an extension to the boundary of this existing ACA. Design Statements have not yet been progressed for the Heritage Towns, but the Ballyshannon Design Guide, April 2019, and the work on the Ramelton Action Plan (draft published in January 2020) would provide a useful starting point for these two Heritage Towns.

To allow for improved monitoring and assessment against BH-O-02, an update of existing surveys of the County, for example, historic gardens, thatched cottages, clachan and industrial and maritime built heritage would be needed.

Finally, a significant recent development in this sector has been the publication, by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, of "Heritage 2030" for consultation purposes (in November 2019). When adopted this will provide a comprehensive framework of principles, strategic priorities and actions to guide and inform the heritage sector.

## **4.9 Chapter 8: Natural Resource Development**

### **Extractive Industries and Geology**

The objectives seek to minimise the impacts of extractive industry development on the environment, the landscape character, and water quality. There have been no



significant developments in the planning policy framework since the CDP came into effect and therefore, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, these objectives remain fit-for-purpose. The recent restructure of the planning service now allows for a dedicated resource, a Quarry Liaison Officer, within the planning enforcement unit to address historic planning matters at existing quarries in the County. This will assist in securing these objectives as more quarries and regularised.

## **Energy**

The objectives of this section of the CDP are generally two-fold. Firstly, the development of a diverse renewable energy portfolio to ensure a secure electricity supply (including, for example develop, Killybegs as a centre of excellence for wind energy) and, secondly, to ensure that adverse impacts associated with wind energy development is minimised.

Objective E-O-6 sought to minimise adverse impacts on existing residential amenity (and similar sensitive premises) from wind energy development. This was linked to specific development guidelines and technical standards contained in section 6.5 of Part B: Appendix 3 of the plan. However, following judicial review proceedings<sup>7</sup> certain provisions of the CDP, namely section 6.5 (c) and (f) of Part B: Appendix 3 and Map 8.2.1, were deleted or removed.

The absence of these technical standards/Map 8.2.1 has had the effect of removing the spatial designation of areas where, in summary, wind farms would not be acceptable or they might be considered acceptable, as well as a requirement that wind turbines are set back a distance of ten times their tip height from residential properties (or similar e.g. hospitals or schools). Ultimately, this has limited the ability of the Council to secure this objective as originally envisaged. This represents a significant gap in the policy framework and therefore a Variation to the CDP is required in this respect. Preparatory work on this Variation has commenced. However, the contents of the Variation will be dependent on the anticipated revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines. The draft revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines were published in December 2019 by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. In summary, this proposed a set back distance (for visual amenity purposes) of four times the tip height, increased operational timelines (30 years compared to normal 25 years), noise limits in line with current international best practice, and a policy of zero shadow flicker. The consultation has now closed however there is no timetable for the adoption of a final version.

In terms of secure energy provision, the final part of the Donegal 110kV was completed in Q1 2019. This project comprised a new 110 kV transmission line from Binbane to Letterkenny and a new 110 kV distribution line from Ardnagappary to

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<sup>7</sup> 2018/533JR between Planree Limited, Applicant and Donegal County Council, Respondent - Order dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

Tievebrack. This represents a significant step-forward in terms of ensuring more reliable energy provision across the county.

#### **4.10 Chapter 9: Tourism**

These objectives give comprehensive support to maintaining and improving tourism in the County, recognising the importance of this sector to the economy and society of the County and wider region. Objectives refer to the protection of scenic landscapes, historic environment, cultural heritage, and enhancing local character (e.g. vernacular character) that are tourist attractions. Specific reference is made to enhancing the visitor experience along the Wild Atlantic Corridor as well as supporting tourism accommodation and other ancillary tourism attractions (e.g. pubs, restaurants, cafes etc). The objectives also link to wider objectives of improving key tourism access infrastructure such as the regions airports, ports and key roads.

Objective TOU-O-9 gives support to the protection and development of greenways, as well as other walking and cycling routes, in the County. This has been realised with the development of the network of Greenways with the County, notably the work of the North West Greenway Network to provide connections from Buncrana to Derry, Muff to Derry and Lifford to Strabane. The Council have also committed to prepare an 'Outdoor Recreation Strategy' for the County to include Greenways, Walks, Trails, Blueways etc. This work will be commenced later in 2020 and will involve extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders. The EU Trail Gazers project is also developing new and innovative ways to invest in walking and recreational routes throughout the county and which can act as catalyst for sustainable economic growth of rural communities.

There have been a number of on-going and recently completed projects in the that contribute to the tourism industry in the County, including along the WAW. This includes the multimillion flagship visitor attraction at Fort Dunree, Buncrana and with the potential to attract 100K+ visitors per year. This includes significant work alongside partner organisations such as Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland and includes, as examples: the publication of the Bundoran Visitor map in January 2019 and the Donegal Tourism Brochure in February 2019; the opening of Sliabh Liag visitor centre in May 2019; and, the opening of the Rathmullen information hub, public conveniences and changing facilities in June 2018. There has also been recent consultation (February 2020) to deliver a Visitor Management Plan for Malin Head.

Looking forward, tourism is a particular industry that has been significantly impacted by Covid-19 and associated travel restrictions. There are a number of initiatives and measures that are currently being worked up by Donegal Tourism, working closely with Fáilte Ireland, in marketing the County and its facilities through the reopening phases of Covid-19 lockdown. As part of the national campaign of 'Make A Break for It' there is a Donegal focused local campaign. There is also cross border marketing

planned for 2021 with Derry City and Strabane District Council and the NI Tourism Board to promote the region as a destination when market conditions prevail. The Council has been supporting businesses by the reallocation of outdoor spaces for dining experiences.

#### **4.11 Chapter 10: The Marine Resource and Coastal Management**

The objectives of this chapter seek to maximise the social and economic potential of Donegal's marine sector whilst safeguarding and improving the marine ecosystem. As such the management of the coastal environment in a sustainable manner is key. Some of the specific objectives include safeguarding and enhancing the role of Killybegs, Greencaste and Burtonpoint in the seafood industry, and maintaining and enhancing the sustainable development on the islands.

In terms of securing these objectives, there is significant overlap with the regeneration and renewal work for our coastal towns and villages (for example Killybegs 2040) as well as the natural heritage policies. Notable successes, include A capital works programme for a 120m long quay development (€14.7m) in Killybegs (2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Smooth Point project) was agreed in August 2019 along with a successful bid under the Rural RDF was by LYIT (for €293k) to develop a blue economy hub of enterprise, innovation, applied research and learning called the Ocean Innovation Centre, Ireland.

In November 2019 the Draft National Marine Planning Framework was published for consultation purposes. This will be Ireland's first marine planning framework and will apply to a broad range of marine activities including aquaculture, offshore renewable energy, sea fisheries and tourism. It will provide a long-term framework for management of these marine activities in a sustainable way. There is currently no timetable for finalising the framework.

#### **4.12 Chapter 11: Community Culture and the Gaeltacht**

Objectives relate to integrating planning and sustainable development with the social, community and cultural requirements of the population. There are specific objectives relating to improving quality of life, provision of education and childcare facilities, co-ordinated /inter-agency approach to delivery of services, improvement of recreational amenity, and to promote, protect, and harness the Culture of Donegal. There is also a detailed objective (CGG-O-8) with associated actions, to sustain the Irish Language as a living community language in the strongest Gaeltacht area and to strengthen the use of the language elsewhere. The objective also requires the preparation and implementation of a Countywide Irish Language Plans and Community Language Plans.

In September 2018 the Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018-2022 for Donegal was launched. This was developed alongside Creative Ireland in consultation with local

artists, cultural and heritage organisations, community groups, the creative industries, and centres of education and schools. The Strategy aims to provide meaningful opportunities for citizens and local communities, to nurture, sustain and facilitate participation in cultural and creative activities. This will assist in securing objectives as presented in the CDP.

In October 2018, a Language Plan was approved for Tuaisceart Dhún na nGall (in addition to the three language plans already approved in Donegal). A draft community language plan for Letterkenny was published in March 2020. As there has now been substantial progress with the Gaeltacht Language Planning in Donegal work has now recommenced on a draft Donegal County Language Plan. In combination, this demonstrates progress in achieving this objective and it is likely this will be achieved over the life of the Plan.

### **Part C: Objectives and Policies of the Towns**

This part of the Plan sets out policy framework and associated land use zoning maps, objectives and policies for Letterkenny (Chapter 12), Buncrana (Chapter 13) and Bundoran (Chapter 14). It is noted in the CDP that the objectives and policies for these are updated iterations of the development plans for these towns and will be replaced by the Local Area Plans (updates on the progress on these LAPs are given in table 5.1 above). There are a number of updates of projects and plans above for these settlements which are an indication of how these objectives are being achieved.

Chapter 15 (Settlement Frameworks) provides maps showing the settlement framework, with zonings, for 60 settlements (which are all of the other Layer 2 and all Layer 3 settlements). The objectives of this chapter are broad, relating to the protection and/or reservation of land as per the zoning maps. There has been no indication that the settlement frameworks are not fit-for-purpose; however this will be kept under review for the life of the plan.

The adoption of the Seven Strategic Towns LAP in August 2018 superseded the settlement frameworks contained in this chapter for the seven towns of Ballybofey/Stranorlar, Ballyshannon, Bridgend, Carndonagh, Donegal Town, An Clochán Liath (Dungloe) and Killybegs. The Seven Strategic Towns LAP provides a further level of detail and analysis of the issues and opportunities for these towns and includes objectives and policies to guide regeneration and development. The Seven Strategic Towns LAP will assist in securing many of the objectives of the CDP in the coming years realised at the local level.

## **5.0 Planning Permissions and Dwellings approved**

Table 5.1 to 5.3 provide key information from development management on the total number of planning permissions and the total number of new dwellings approved.

**Table 5.1 – Total Planning Permissions – Donegal 2018 and 2019**

	Relating to Dwellings	Other	Extension	Alteration and Conversion	Total
2018	338	227	251	78	894
2019	400	269	270	100	1039

Source: [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)

**Table 5.2 – Planning Permissions granted for New Houses and Apartments in Donegal – Q1 2018 to Q4 2019**

	2018 Q3	2018 Q4	2019 Q1	2019 Q2	2019 Q3	2019 Q4	2020 Q1
<b>Multi Development Houses</b>							
- planning permission granted	5	5	3	3	4	2	6
- units for which permission granted	15	23	33	17	123	63	53
-Average floor area per unit (sq.m)	135.2	121.7	100.6	102.2	108.4	130.4	106.0
<b>One Off Houses</b>							
- planning permission granted	71	91	93	82	114	85	92
-Average floor area per unit (sq.m)	240.9	245.8	236.9	248.6	238.4	244.8	248.9
<b>Private flats/ apartments</b>							
- planning permission granted	3	6	1	4	6	3	5
- units for which permission granted	7	13	1	8	18	4	13
-Average floor area per unit (sq.m)	76	83.7	98	85.8	81.3	86.3	82.4
<b>TOTAL UNITS</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>158</b>

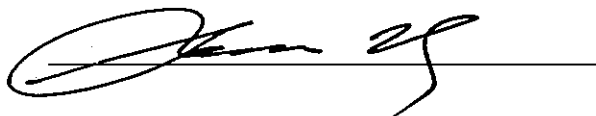
Source: [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)

**Table 5.3 – Planning Permissions granted for New Houses and Apartments in Donegal – 2008 to 2019**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Multi Development Houses</b>												
- planning permission granted	94	35	20	13	8	8	4	7	17	6	13	12
- units for which permission granted	1923	567	534	324	139	40	58	45	282	44	50	236
<b>One Off Houses</b>												
- planning permission granted	1389	649	420	326	266	262	165	205	74	358	309	374

Private flats/ apartments												
- planning permission granted	78	38	16	6	8	7	5	2	9	18	14	14
- units for which permission granted	1142	317	336	17	10	9	16	9	14	47	27	31
<b>TOTAL UNITS</b>	<b>4454</b>	<b>1533</b>	<b>1290</b>	<b>667</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>641</b>

Source: [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)



**Seamus Neely**

**Chief Executive**

**14<sup>th</sup> July 2020**