



**Comhairle Contae  
Dhún na nGall**  
Donegal County Council



**Comhairle Baile  
Bhun Cranncha**  
Buncrana Town Council

# **Draft Buncrana & Environs Development Plan 2014–2020**

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**Appendix 1  
Housing Strategy**

**July 2013**

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## Section I Introduction

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### 1.0 Introduction

The adoption of the Buncrana & Environs Development Plan 2014-2020 will provide a new policy framework for the delivery of social housing in Buncrana. It will be essential for the Councils to work jointly in the implementation of the Housing Strategy having regard to the area of new land zoned for residential purposes.

This Housing Strategy has been prepared at a period of great uncertainty for the economy and the housing market. The factors that influence housing demand, namely income, demographics, tax system, and credit conditions are all in a state of flux. For demographics the rate of population growth has been strongly linked to immigration during the boom and there is now evidence that emigration is returning. The trend for household sizes to fall may continue but it will likely be balanced between some people delaying buying a house due to economic circumstances and first time buyers seeing the lower house prices as an opportunity to buy.

### 1.1 Legislative background

This Strategy is prepared under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). The purpose of the Strategy is to ensure that the proper planning and sustainable development of the area provides for the housing of the existing and future population of the area. The strategy shall take into account the likely future need for housing, the need to ensure that housing is available for persons who have different levels of income, the need to ensure an appropriate mixture of house types and sizes and the need to counteract undue segregation in housing between different persons or different social backgrounds.

### 1.2 Policy context

The Housing Strategy, is prepared within the context of the following policy frameworks set out at a national and regional level:

- National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020.
- Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2020. Within the County Donegal Development Plan 2012-2018, Buncrana has been identified as a Tier 2 Town for Urban Strengthening within the Urban Settlement Hierarchy.
- Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities 2007, which is a government Statement on Housing Policy. It builds upon the Government's housing policy framework that sets out a vision aimed at building sustainable communities. These communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future.
- Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas 2009, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, which supersedes the 1999 Residential Density Guidelines. They continue to promote increased residential density where appropriate, especially where close to public transport nodes. They emphasise the need for high quality, design and layout and good quality living environment including the availability of adequate shopping, social, childcare, transport and leisure infrastructure.
- Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009-2013.
- Guidelines on the Implementation of Part V, 2004.
- Housing (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 2009, which provides the statutory basis for the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and long-term leasing schemes. The RAS was designed to assist approved voluntary bodies to provide accommodation for persons

in need of housing. The scheme is intended primarily to encourage the provision of family type accommodation. The financing of accommodation under this scheme is by way of a loan or subsidy.

### **1.3 Development Plan Core Strategy relationship with Housing Strategy**

The Core Strategy (Chapter 2) significantly reduces the amount of Residential zoned land from that of earlier Plans. Lands identified for housing are servicable and located closer to the Town Centre.

### **1.4 Part V Principal Options for Housing Authorities**

Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that the Housing Strategy make provision for social housing. This strategy defines social housing as rented housing provided either by the Local Authority, or by a voluntary operative housing body or accommodation provided through the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

The principal options for the delivery of Social Housing include:

- Construction of new accommodation.
- Purchase of new/second-hand dwellings.
- Accommodation being returned to the Council for re-letting – Casual Vacancies.
- Provision of social housing in partnership with approved voluntary housing bodies.
- Provision of social houses under Part V.
- Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).
- Long-term leasing.

### **1.5 Part V Preferred Options for Housing Authorities**

The focus of social housing delivery has shifted, over this past number of years. The DECLG have indicated that "own-build" newly constructed units and acquisition will only be approved if all other housing supports are not possible e.g. the use of RAS and long-term leasing will have a first-call on available funding and there will be a greater reliance on these social housing supports as a feature of future social housing provision.

It is envisaged that the focus of future housing supply will lie with the expanded suite of non-construction supply options including:

- Social Housing Leasing Initiative.
- Rental Accommodation Scheme.
- Expanded Role of Voluntary and Cooperative Sector.
- Loans and Grants to purchase/improve dwellings.

There will be very limited capital investment in local authority construction or acquisition and what capital funding is available will be prioritised to meet special needs, to support regeneration and to maintain and improve the housing stock. The majority of accommodation to be provided for Travellers will also come through these mechanisms. Future new build projects in respect of standard social housing will be primarily delivered by the Voluntary and Co-operative sector through build to lease and other innovative financial mechanisms. The Councils have been and will continue to progress the voluntary schemes, particularly the Capital Assistance Scheme, through interagency meetings with the Health Service Executive. The Councils will be targeting special needs cases where it is clear that the Council's existing social housing programme of direct build, leasing/rental accommodation scheme is unable to cater for the needs of these clients.

The change in social housing policy particularly with regard to the severely curtailed construction programme has resulted in the local authorities having to review its policy on

the acquisition of suitable landbanks for the supply of social housing. It is not intended to acquire any additional landbanks in the short to medium term and it is further intended to maintain its existing landbank rather than dispose of same in anticipation of future demands for social housing supply not being capable of being delivered through the suite of non construction options.

Housing provided in accordance with Part V can only be delivered on lands zoned for 'Residential' use or lands zoned for other uses which could accommodate some residential use, i.e.) 'Mixed Use'. Within the Inishowen Electoral area, excluding Buncrana Town Council, 77 social housing units have been delivered under Part V. To date, no Part V units have been delivered within Buncrana Town Council area.

### **1.6 Meeting Needs**

The response to meeting the housing need will involve a range of allocation of tenancies under the Council's own Social Housing Programme and the Voluntary Housing Programme, the Rental Accommodation Scheme, the provision of assistance in the form of loan schemes and the Traveller accommodation programme.

In meeting this need, guidance in relation to the availability of various activation measures for the provision of social housing support will be essential. While the implementation of Part V of the Planning and Development Act will be an important feature in meeting need, it will not play as significant a role as previously envisaged given the substantial downturn in the construction industry. In this regard, Part V should continue to be implemented in terms of 15% reservation for Social housing.

The Council's social housing programme will focus mainly on housing supply through the Social Housing Leasing Initiative and Rental Accommodation Scheme. All of the measures proposed, coupled with the development of the 'life cycle' approach in the assessment of housing need at a particular point in time will serve to meet the social housing need on a sustainable basis over the next 5 to 10 years.

### **1.7 Social Housing**

Proposals for residential development on lands zoned residential and for mixed use purposes shall be required to comply with the policies set out in this 'Housing Strategy' so as to make adequate provision for social housing under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). It will be the objective of the Councils to rehabilitate/refurbish their own housing stock where necessary and encourage and facilitate similar rehabilitation of private housing.

### **1.8 Elderly Persons and People with Disabilities**

The Council recognise the importance of providing houses for the elderly and people with special needs in their areas of choice. In this regard, in any proposals for social housing schemes consideration will be given to the requirements of the elderly and special needs applicants in the area.

The Council is working in partnership with various voluntary sector groups and associations to facilitate further identification of needs and provision of housing for those with disabilities.

The concept of 'Lifetime Adaptable Housing' will be applied to all new housing, so that all new housing is easily adaptable without undue expense and works to the original house design.

## Section II Statistical Analysis

### 2.0 Introduction

A statistical analysis is carried out in this section in respect of the factors that will have implications for the policies contained in this Housing Strategy. In doing so, the comprehensiveness of the statistical analysis is restricted by the extent of the area to which statistics relate i.e. statistics are available at (a) a Buncrana Town Council administrative area level (b) an Inishowen Electoral Area level or (c) a county level but are not available specifically at the development plan area level.

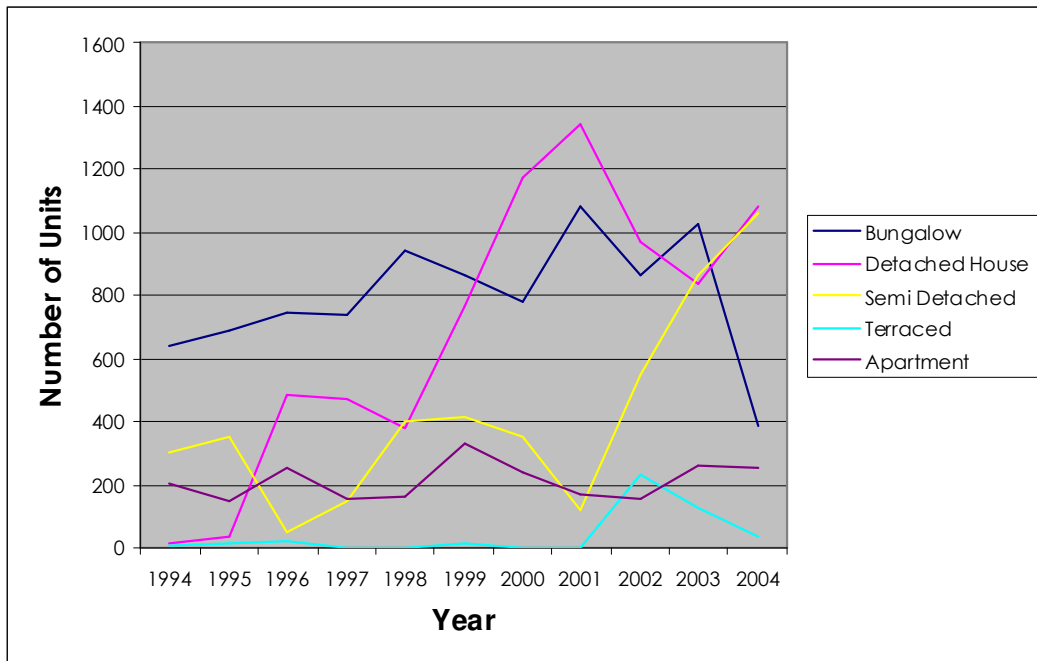
### 2.1 House Completions

Between 1981 and 2011 there were 731 house completions in Buncrana. The proposed Core Strategy for this Plan will accommodate approximately 525 units. NB. This figure does not include proposals for single rural houses around the town's environs or indeed the large volume of extant permissions (448 units in April 2013).

**Table 1: Buncrana House Completions**

Year	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2005	2006+
House Completions (Buncrana)	181	221	223	106
House Completions (Donegal)	7,335	9,179	10,718	7,732

**Figure 1: County Donegal House Completions**



### 2.2 Spatial distribution of Housing Units Granted

The rural environs have experienced significant pressure for residential development, as the census figures show a surge in the population of the environs. An analysis of the spatial

distribution of planning permissions granted for residential units within the environs shows a concentration of multiple residential developments to the lands located just outside the Buncrana Town Council area and along the key arterial routes that serve the town. In relation to the Buncrana Town Council area the restricted supply of land has encouraged the development of town centre sites at high densities so as to make provision of apartment complexes mixed with retail and commercial units at ground floor.

### 2.3 Urban/Rural Housing Distribution

Tables 2 and 3 clearly illustrate the massive imbalance between urban and rural residential growth rates since 1996. To accord with government guidance and proper planning and sustainable development, the majority of residential growth should have occurred in the urban area. Throughout previous plan periods there were substantial lands zoned for residential use. While some of this land was developed, rural housing grew at a faster rate.

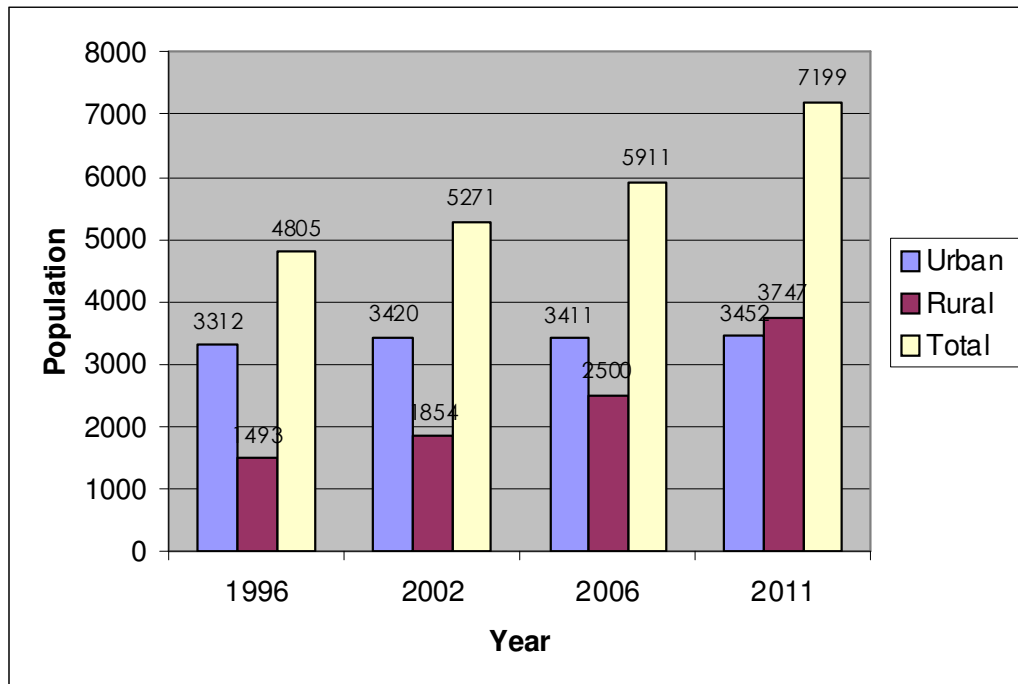
**Table 2: Buncrana Urban/Rural Population Change**

Population	Year			
	1996	2002	2006	2011
Urban	3,312	3,420	3,411	3,452
Rural	1,493	1,854	2,500	3,747
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,805</b>	<b>5,271</b>	<b>5,911</b>	<b>7,199</b>

**Table 3: Buncrana Urban/Rural Percentage Population Growth**

	Percentage Growth			
	1996-2002	2002-2006	2006-2011	1996-2011
Urban	3.3	0.27	1.2	4
Rural	26	35	50	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>50</b>

**Figure 2: Buncrana Population Change**

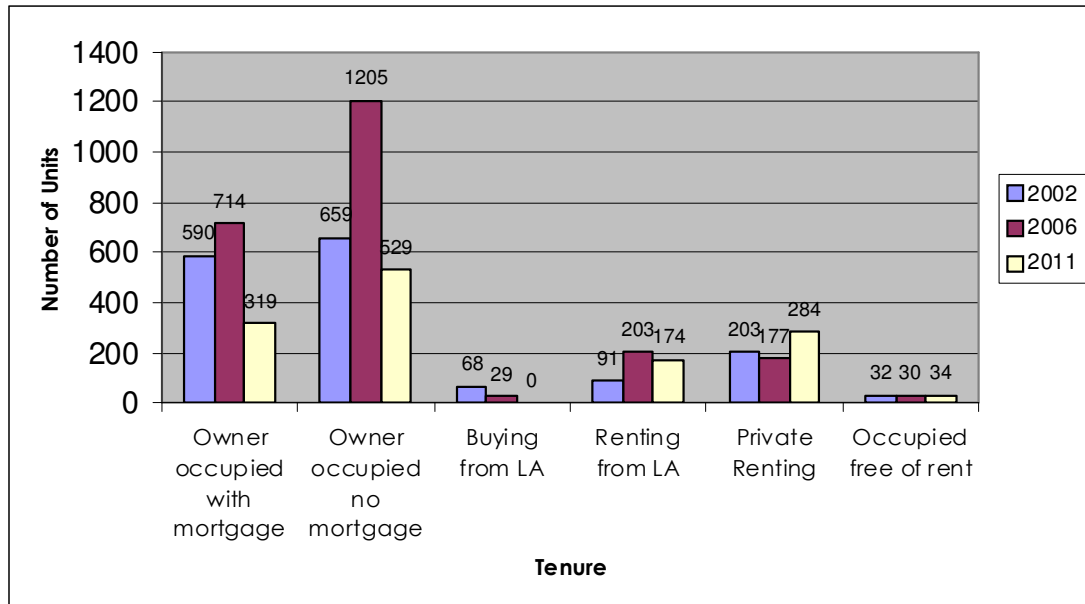




**Table 4: Buncrana Housing Ownership/Tenure**

	2002	2006	2011
Owner occupied with mortgage	590	714	319
Owner occupied no mortgage	659	1205	529
Buying from Local Authority	68	29	N/A
Renting from Local authority	91	203	174
Private Renting	203	177	284
Occupied free of rent	32	30	34

**Figure 3: Buncrana Housing Ownership/Tenure**



## Section III Traveller Accommodation

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### 3.0 Introduction

The Donegal Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009-2013 was prepared in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998. It deals with all issues pertaining to Traveller Accommodation. The needs of indigenous families will be met through a range of accommodation options, including Permanent Halts, Specific Instance/Individual Housing, Group Housing & Standard Scheme Housing. The Programme also sets out proposals to meet the needs of Transient families wishing to visit the County for short periods of time.

It is recognised that the travelling community have specific housing requirements. The Council will seek to provide suitable accommodation in order to remove the need for unauthorised, unsanitary, unsuitable and roadside encampments that have an impact on the amenities of adjoining properties and developments. Accordingly, the Council will seek to continue to identify suitable locations for the provision of traveller accommodation in consultation with Travellers, Travellers Organisations, Local Traveller Consultative Committee, Public Representatives, the wider community and other statutory bodies in order to implement the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009-2015 and any subsequent updates.

In 2011, 96.5% of travellers in the County were in some form of housing accommodation. The remaining 3.5% resided on the road or within halting sites.

**Table 5: Ethnic or Cultural Population in Buncrana, 2011**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>%</b>
White Irish	5,827	86.45
<b>White Irish Traveller</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>0.77</b>
Other White	700	10.38
Black or Black Irish	17	0.25
Asian or Asian Irish	38	0.56
Other	48	0.71
Not Stated	58	0.86
Total	6,740	

At present, there remains a Temporary Emergency site located at Lisfannon, (10 bay Transient site). It is unoccupied at present with the majority of travellers housed in the town. It is intended that this be replaced by a permanent transient halting site at an alternative location within the Plan area.

## Section IV Housing Need/Demand in Buncrana

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### 4.0 Introduction

Population projections outlined in the Core Strategy, predict that the population of the plan area could reach 8,588 by 2020. The Core Strategy in this plan provides for a population increase of 1,391 persons. Based on an average household size of 2.63 persons per household, this could give rise to a housing need of 525 units within the plan area over the plan period.

The decrease in the average household size from 2.8 to 2.63 has been influenced by a number of factors, including the general increase in divorce/separation, people living longer, availability of credit for first time buyers and the growing trend among young adults to live alone and have children at a later age. Culture can also play a role in family size and therefore, household size. The overall implication of decreasing household size is that more houses will be needed for the same number of people. It is important that residential developments cater for the different demographics through mixed tenure and mixed house type.

### 4.1 Principal Reason for Housing Need

Information arising from applications for social housing (Table: 6) for both Buncrana Town Council and Donegal County Council would indicate changing housing needs emerging, from these areas.

**Table 6: Principal Reason for Housing Need**

Category Principal Reason for Housing Need	2000-2004	2011
Not reasonably able to meet the cost of accommodation or obtain suitable alternative	50%	76%
Overcrowded Accommodation (or Involuntary Sharing 2011)	11%	10%
Unfit or materially unsuitable Accommodation	16%	8%
Involuntary Sharing (2006)	5%	N/A
Medical or Compassionate Reasons	13.5%	5%
Elderly	1.8%	1.8%
Travellers	0.9%	0.9%
Disabled	0.6%	0.6%
Leaving Institutional Care	0.5%	0.5%
Homeless	0.5%	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 4.2 Housing Mix and Housing Types

The Councils will seek the provision of a wider range of dwelling types to cater for changing demographics. Emphasis on potential for in-built adaptability in design of housing is also important in allowing for long life buildings, examples of how this might be achieved are set out in the DEHLG Urban Design Manual, May 2009.

The statistics show that in County Donegal, the principal reason for housing need is 'not reasonably able to meet the cost of accommodation'. During the period 1996-2000, the main reason indicated for housing need was that applicants were living in unfit, or unsuitable or in overcrowded accommodation. These statistics would indicate that the

nature of housing need is changing, due at least in part to rising house prices and changing economics.

The breakdown of house types that are being provided responds to changing demographics in terms of those who are in need of social housing.

**Table 7: Buncrana Town Council House Type Requirements 2012**

Size	No. of Units	Percentage
1 Bedroom	36	15
2 Bedroom	121	49
3 Bedroom	82	33
4 Bedroom	8	3
	Total of 247 units	100

### 4.3 Land Supply

This Plan has identified 19.4 Ha in Residential (Phase 1). In addition to this, there is additional potential for residential development on some Mixed Use sites (33.33 Ha) and single dwellings in the Agricultural/Rural areas.

**Table 8: Existing Buncrana Town Council Social Housing 2012**

BTC Owned	BTC Leased	Total
240 units	38 units	278 units

In addition to existing supply of social housing, the 2011 Census indicated that there are currently 752 vacant units<sup>1</sup> (22.8% of housing stock) in the town.

### 4.4 Housing Demands/Meeting Needs

Under Section 9 of the Housing Act, 1988, each Local Authority is required to carry out an Assessment of Housing Need every three years, to assess the need for the provision of adequate and suitable housing accommodation for persons who are:

- Homeless.
- Travellers.
- Living in accommodation that is unfit for human habitation or is materially unsuitable for their adequate housing.
- Living in overcrowded accommodation.
- Sharing accommodation with another person or persons and who, in the opinion of the housing authority, have a reasonable requirement for separate accommodation.
- Young person's leaving institutional care or without family accommodation.
- In need of accommodation for medical or compassionate reasons.
- Elderly.
- Disabled or handicapped or are, in the opinion of the housing authority, not reasonably able to meet the cost of accommodation which they are occupying or to obtain suitable alternative accommodation.

Accordingly an assessment in 2012, indicated that there were 253 applicants on the waiting list. In 2007 there were 293 applicants (NB; - excludes the environs area of the plan).

<sup>1</sup> Unoccupied on Census night.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Meeting the housing need for social housing shall involve a range of allocation of tenancies under the Councils own social housing programme and the voluntary housing programme, the provision of assistance in the form of loans scheme, Affordable Housing Scheme and Traveller Accommodation Programme, and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). The implementation of Part V is essential in order for the Councils to ensure the appropriate output of social housing that can be achieved in the context of the legislative framework that is set out for delivery of such housing. In particular, having regard to the changing categories of need for applicants on the housing list.

## Section V Housing Strategy Goal, Objectives and Policies

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### 5.0 Goal

To facilitate and support the provision of an appropriate standard of accommodation for the people of Buncrana and its Environs.

### 5.1 Objectives

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- HS-O-1:** The Council will promote and develop the concept of lifetime adaptable housing to meet the needs of people with disabilities, the elderly, single persons and changing family situations. Priority will be placed on the early identification of needs in terms of lifetime adaptable housing together with appropriate tailoring of mix of house types to meet the identified needs.
- HS-O-2:** To provide advice to applicants in relation to the range of housing assistance available in accordance with all current schemes. This service shall ensure applicants are aware of the range of options available and the most appropriate option identified. This is considered to be integral to the delivery of adequate supply to meet need ensuring the most efficient use of resources and schemes available.
- HS-O-3:** The Councils will promote an appropriate mix of housing by engaging in wide consultation with various agencies within the County and through the Donegal County Council Electoral Area Committees and the Housing/Corporate Strategic Policy Committee. Standards to be set and achieved in this activity to meet the accepted practice as set out in all relevant guidelines, including the childcare guidelines, as issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.
- HS-O-4:** The Council propose to further bridge the gap between the housing waiting list and the various supply mechanisms through the continued active promotion of voluntary housing, particularly in the case of persons with special needs.
- HS-O-5:** The Council will seek to allocate an adequate measure of funding through the annual Budget process and otherwise to maintain all of its rented stock to an acceptable standard and specifically to upgrade older stock using all available funding sources.
- HS-O-6:** The Council will strive to achieve appropriate house type mixes within developments that respond to the changing demographics of persons on the housing list.
- HS-O-7:** The Council will encourage the use of existing material assets such as unfinished housing estates, vacant properties and extant planning permissions for the provision of social and affordable housing where appropriate and feasible, subject to compliance with other policy provisions of this plan.

## 5.2 Policies

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**HS-P-1:** The Councils will require as a condition of a grant of permission that the applicant or any other person with an interest in the land to which a relevant application relates, enter into an agreement with the Planning Authority under Section 96(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (As amended) concerning the development for housing on land and this agreement shall provide for the appropriate provision of social housing.

**HS-P-2:** It is the policy of the Councils to reserve 15% of land zoned for residential use or a mixture of residential and other uses for the provision of social housing. Exact percentages shall be subject to negotiation to meet the needs as determined.

Buncrana Town Council and Donegal County Council shall continue to impose the following condition on all planning applications for housing on the relevant zoned lands:-

Prior to commencement of development, the applicant/developer shall enter into an agreement with the Council under Section 92(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended by Section 3 of the Planning and Development Act 2002 for: -

- (a) Transfer of part of lands within application site; or
- (b) The building and transfer of houses within application site; or
- (c) The transfer of fully or partially serviced site with application site; or
- (d) Transfer of other lands; or
- (e) The building and transfer of housing on other lands; or
- (f) The transfer of fully or partially serviced sites on other lands; or
- (g) The payment of an agreed sum of money; or
- (h) A combination of (a) and any one or more of other options (i.e. (b)–(g)).

Reason: To comply with the Council housing strategy. Where the agreed option is to provide houses, the Council will require that at least 60% of the overall development is fully complete prior to transfer.

**HS-P-3:** It is the policy of the Councils to require applicants for multiple house applications to liaise with the Councils Housing Departments to agree the number, size, type, and locations of housing units to be provided in accordance with Part V to meet the needs of the disabled and elderly. Agreements under Section 96(2) may allow for both to be provided or suitably offset as a contribution to social housing.

**HS-P-4:** It is the policy of the Councils to implement the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009–2013 and any subsequent amendments.