

(B) Rural Building Tradition

22.2 Rural Building tradition

22.2.1 Introduction

The rural traditions of building in County Kildare are influenced by history, climate and local geology, which determined in the past the local availability of materials for building.

22.2.2 Medieval

The earliest and most dramatic domestic buildings were the fortified tower houses and castles of the Anglo-Norman nobility. Their medieval origins are expressed through the gothic style of the openings. Few of these buildings remain in their original form, mostly in ruins or attached to later houses, from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Kilkea Castle - fortified tower-house from Anglo-Norman times



Carbury Castle - Commanding position on Carbury Hill



22.2.3 Vernacular Cottages

Traditional cottages have a timeless quality, but would mainly survive from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, typically as single-storey, long buildings with central kitchen and bedrooms at either end. Often, they would be located fronting and close to the roadside; alternatively they fronted onto a large courtyard known as a bawn, with outbuildings on either side. They would have been thatched originally, but few thatched roofs survive, having been replaced with slate as an easier to maintain material.

Traditional cottage outside Ballitore



Traditional cottage near Suncroft,



Traditional cottage and doorway, Nurney



Substantial thatched cottage near Kildangan/Monasterevin



22.2.4 Classical Farmhouses

More ambitious farmhouses adopted a classical style, usually in a very simply proportioned, two-storey form, with stone and slate outbuildings.

Classical proportions on a nineteenth century farmhouse, near Leixlip



Simple Georgian farmhouse, near Castledermot



Stone walls and stone outbuildings, near Castledermot



Farm within the village at Carbury



Farm and outbuildings, near Punchestown



22.2.5 Country Estates

Unlike medieval times where the estates were centred on the fortified house, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the relative wealth of the County saw the development of the 'big house', an adaptation of ideas deriving from Palladian architecture in Italy; ideas, which travelled through England, to find sublime expression in the Irish countryside.

Lyons Demesne, late eighteenth, early nineteenth century, by Oliver Grace and Richard Morrison



The architecture of Castletown and Lyons House demonstrate the sophistication of the Irish versions of classical architecture. There were over 60 estates in Kildare with landscaped parks of more than 20 hectares and countless country houses operating as studs, or farmhouses and substantial farms. The integral quality of park and house is often threatened by proposals to develop the lands. Building was not confined to the house, as the requirements of the estate, included manager's houses and lodges as well as the stables, sheds and outbuildings for the agricultural needs of the estate.

Vistas across the lake to Lyons Hill



Castletown - detail of one of the connecting wings



Lodge to a house near Kilcullen



22.2.6 Land Commission and County Council Housing

These buildings may be found throughout Ireland as they were constructed from standard plans. Their simple, robust forms have weathered well over the years and they have become part of the traditional housing in the County. The Land Commission houses are very prevalent in the Northwest, whereas the County Council houses are dispersed throughout the County.

County Council house from the 1930's



Gable view of County Council cottage



County Council housing near Derrinturn



22.2.7 Modern One-off Houses from the 1960s onwards

Modern one-off houses built around towns and villages and throughout the countryside comprise a plethora of styles and ideas.

Bungalows, open plan gardens and timber fencing seem alien to this upland setting



The scale of these buildings reflects a gradual growth in expectation and wealth; many, if not most are single-storey, or one-and-a-half storey, (known as dormer bungalows). Planning practice over the years has tended to favour such low buildings as a model, referring perhaps to the cottage types of traditional houses.

The materials, from which they are built, reflect the availability of almost any currently produced building products in Europe. Many houses are designed using or with reference to standard plans, which in turn come from a wide range of sources. The impact is diverse, and sometimes disorientating as the sense of place can be lost where the patterns do not belong or fit in.

Thus, whilst it is possible to find recent, well-designed houses in the County, it is difficult to use many examples as pointers to an appropriate approach to single house design.

Gable fronted two-storey near Killeel – this suburban form is obtrusive in a rural location



Skilful design in upland setting



Suburban bungalow types do not fit into an upland setting near Killeel



One-off large house in village



(C) Design Guidelines

22.3.1 Design Guidelines Village Clusters

23.3.1 Introduction

This section provides guidelines for the design of village clusters. They are proposed as a response to the need to make available affordable and social housing in rural areas of County Kildare and to deal with local housing need. They are also a response to the pressure from urban-generated housing demand in the rural areas.

The unrestrained growth of single houses in the countryside is recognised to be a threat even where there may be demonstrated social need. A pro-active policy towards building clusters in rural villages, will help to shift the balance of desirability from the isolated one-off house towards the more socially and environmentally satisfactory alternative of a dwelling in a cluster with ready-made neighbours, a good social mix and the prospect of sustainable services.

Village cluster, Calverstown



22.3.2 Encouragement of Grouped Development to Improve Rural Sustainability

The following sections provide an interpretation of the policies, which are aimed at securing and enhancing the rural environment through careful, sensitive and sustainable development.

It sets out an explanation of the options available within the Development Plan for grouped development, which is intended to reduce the pressure for single dwellings. The County Council wishes to promote the benefits of grouped housing in order to facilitate rural need, where 'centralisation' to a larger settlement, may not always provide a location-sensitive solution.

Kildare County Council, in partnership with other organisations, contributes pro-actively towards rural development in the following ways;

- Acquisition of land in appropriate locations for grouped housing schemes
- Provision of grouped serviced sites for affordable and low-cost single unit housing
- Provision of housing groups by the County Council, preferably mixing social housing with affordable and private categories, according to locational suitability
- Partnership with developer in generating grouped development/partnership with an approved Housing Organisation to provide groups of housing.

Possible options for creating housing clusters attached to rural nodes, and in rural villages, are described as Village Clusters to emphasise the distinctive quality and intention of clustered development at a rural level, recollecting the tradition of cooperation in the provision of new houses in rural settlements.

22.3.3 Strengthening the Settlement Network - Village Clusters

Chapter 6 in volume 1 has identified the desirability of building in designated villages within rural areas to minimise the impact of one-off development. However, sporadic, suburban-style development around existing villages should be avoided. The pressure for single houses on the edge of villages is no less great than in the open countryside, yet the very nature of the village is to create a node or a nucleus with a concentration of residential and service activity.

The guidelines which follow are seen as generic ways of dealing with new development to provide for local need, assuming that single house proliferation of development around villages is not sustainable, and that land should be used efficiently to maintain the

particular sense of place of each village. It is proposed that a 'cluster' should be the normal unit of development for villages. The proposal is illustrated with what may be considered as the smallest scale of a cluster, not less than about four and up to about 15 dwellings.

New village cluster of affordable housing in Jersey, with St Mary's village church in background



In Medieval Kildare, there was a proliferation of rural boroughs, groups of about four or five houses, built together for self-protection and relying on communal effort to survive and flourish. These were the Norman version of a small clustered settlement. The clachan farm settlement is another clustered form, although it was not common in Kildare. The proposition to use a cluster has good antecedents in the landscape in Kildare; in association with, and attached to existing small settlements they will define and limit the inhabited area of the countryside, create the opportunity for shelter within and help to strengthen the sense of place of these rural nodes.

In this report we have named these as Meitheal Clusters; recollecting the tradition of cooperation in the provision of new houses in rural settlements and emphasising the social potential for small groups of houses.

22.3.4 Sustainability

Meitheal Clusters are an opportunity to develop innovative solutions for self-sustaining groups of dwellings, which will have a minimal effect on the surrounding environment and generate cost efficiencies from energy conservation measures in their design and construction.

22.3.5 Waste water and Ground water

In some village locations, Meitheal Clusters may need to be developed with their own on-site sewerage system, and also a water supply. Schemes will be considered only if they meet the highest standards of treatment and protection of groundwater. In some situations, the use of reed beds for water treatment may be suitable as an alternative to percolation areas. Thus, sites without access to mains sewerage need to be large enough to accept a shared treatment plant and to be able to provide adequate space for reed beds or percolation areas, as well as having the capacity to provide a water supply to the site.

22.3.6 An alternative to single house development

To be a suitable response to the problem of dispersed one-off houses, the Meitheal Cluster concept needs to be a convincing alternative, which will help to shift the perception of single houses as the preferred choice and create a new, attractive lifestyle option.

The Meitheal Cluster is proposed as a dynamic, innovative, ecologically sound and socially inclusive initiative, in touch with present needs and sensitive to its local environment and seen as a convincing alternative to single house development.

Shop and pub in rural area may be a suitable node for the location of a Meitheal Cluster



New village cluster in Donegal



23.3.7 Improving existing village structure - by infill or attachment to designated villages

Encouragement for groups of houses, either as infill, or which are attached to designated villages, is a positive policy of the County Development Plan.

The design should be context driven. Many of the villages in Kildare have unique character and quality and new development needs to be sensitive to place. Many sites around village centres have been developed already; there is abundant opportunity for more. However, some of the new schemes suggest caution about over-scaled buildings and plots, which are more suburban in character than rural. It is likely that schemes in the designated villages will benefit from mains sewerage and local water supply schemes, allowing the sites and plots to be smaller and more densely developed.

