Design Guidelines for Meitheal Clusters and groups of dwellings attached to designated villages

22.3.8 Design Guidelines for Meitheal Clusters and groups of dwellings attached to designated villages

The Meitheal Cluster may be designed and provided by an agent such as developer, County Council, or Housing Association; or by a group of people building their own houses on serviced sites.

It is most important to maintain coherence in the appearance, of individual dwelling units whilst enjoying the individuality that householders bring to their property.

Common rules about materials, boundary design and treatment, frontages, common landscaped areas and site entrances are needed to produce results of the highest quality without sacrificing individuality in the house design.

The following generalised brief, based on a cluster scale of six to 15 units, addresses these questions. It should be used as a basis for decision at design stage, and will help to bring on board sustainability issues at an early stage. Smaller clusters than these may be limited in the range of dwelling mix and shared space.
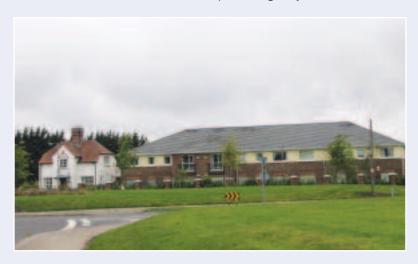
Brief – General
- Establish, where possible, a mixed use of dwelling-types and diversity of occupation

- Provide sheltered accommodation, perhaps two/one-bedroom units, for older people

- Consider apartments or small houses, perhaps two-bedroom units, for couples without children

- Provide family houses - of three or four bedrooms according to need

- Consider inclusion of non-dwelling units, about 50 m sq., which could be used as a shop, a workshop, a childcare facility

- Provide adequate storage at ground floor for each unit, for bicycles, bins, recycling materials, fuel storage and outdoor family goods (4 m sq suggested)

- Dwellings should take account of social housing standards

Brief - Site Appraisal
- Identify any structures of significant heritage merit, including Protected Structures or archaeological sites either on site or close to the site

- Identify vegetation and landscape features

- Establish the suitability of the site for surface water drainage, grey water collection from rain-water pipes

- Make a contour survey, to be able to appropriately treat the topography gently when building

- Ensure that the site is suitable to accommodate all expected uses including house and garden plots, open space requirements and where appropriate, treatment plant and percolation area/reed bed

- Note where the sun travels from morning to evening relative to the site

- Establish where sheltered areas on site may be and how shelter planting may be a factor in determining layout

- Establish, where appropriate, whether on-site water supply and wastewater treatment can be accommodated without risk on site and explore off-site alternatives if necessary (see EPA guidelines)

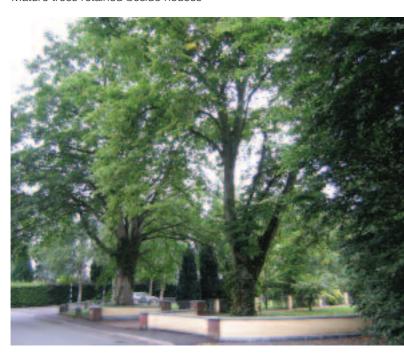*Protected structure retained - however poor design adjacent*

Brief - Sustainability Issues
- Reduce energy consumption by insulation, passive solar design and energy-efficient components

- Use environmentally-friendly materials; renewable timber sources, natural materials and re-cyclable materials

- Reduce water consumption - use grey water from roofs for washing and toilets

- Conserve vegetation and landscapes - mature hedges and trees on site will maintain biodiversity

- Outside areas - avoid concrete, use self-draining surfaces such as gravel

- Design an adaptable house for lifetime cycle use, with easy access for people with disability

Brief - Landscape and Open Space

- Create a soft landscape which is comfortable in its rural surroundings, with trees, shrubs, ground cover, screening, shelterbelts and mounding for shelter.

- Use an agreed, compatible range of materials and products for lighting, kerbs, railings etc.

- Public lighting should not cause light pollution - it can help to create a beautiful environment.

- Consider reed bed percolation for effluent if the site is suitable.

- Make or retain a wildlife landscape area to encourage biodiversity.

- Create a shared space for the cluster, which may be a landscaped court in the front, a garden with access for everyone, or a shared meadow or green space if the site is suitable. Shared spaces at the front may be pedestrian priority shared surfaces where cars and pedestrians share the routes. In small-scale development this is a safe option.

Mature trees retained beside houses

Simple landscape elements

Brief - House and Garden

- Garden size to be adequate for rural use, secure and private at the rear, with, preferably, a front garden, but not where adjacent street frontages are on the street.
- Allow space in the garden for composting and vegetable growing.

Shared space – meeting space

New houses nearing completion behind the Main Street in Kilmeague, Co Kildare with frontage directly onto the side street with gardens to the rear

Hard shared surface landscaping in village cluster at Aughrim, Co Wicklow

Classical design for a modern, crescent-shaped cluster at Headfort House, Co Meath

Case Studies; Generic Meitheal Clusters

22.3.9 (i) Case Studies, Generic Meitheal Clusters

The case studies, that follow, serve as an illustration of the idea of Meitheal and village clusters and the application of the suggested brief.

The layouts are designed at the level of ideas and feasibility. They are not a ready-to-apply, developed model for a cluster, as many issues of specific locational significance, such as housing mix, must be taken into account. To fully achieve the aspirations of sustainability, energy efficiency and eco-friendly design takes a more developed process, which is beyond the scope of this study.

Three Meitheal clusters are illustrated to show how different solutions may be applicable to different locations.

Courtyard farm building cluster in East Uplands area

Generic Form: Courtyard Cluster

Fig 22.3.1 Three-dimensional View of Courtyard Cluster

Traditional court-yard restored as housing cluster at Headfort House

Fig 23.3.2 Plan of Courtyard Cluster; Access from Road Frontage

Courtyard Cluster

Farm settlement clusters in rural areas are well established. Courtyards of farm buildings act as working areas for the farm rather than residential areas. The scale of farm courtyards is an inspiration for an inward looking court surrounded by houses.

Fig 22.3.3 Frontage to the street in a village cluster

Generic Form: Cul-de-Sac Cluster

Cul-de-Sac Cluster

The cul-de-sac cluster is a well-established form for a cluster, using a two-sided street with vehicle turning at the end, creating more of a linear layout than the courtyard plan.

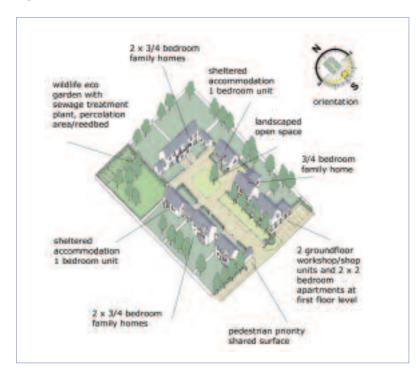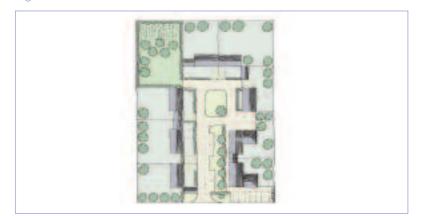Fig 22.3.4 Three-dimensional View of Cul-de-sac Cluster

Fig 22.3.5 Plan of Cul-de-sac Cluster

Generic Form: Country Roadside Cluster

Country Roadside Cluster

Orientation or position beside other buildings, may suggest that development alongside the road is the most appropriate. This cluster is designed with a single entrance and a shared public open space.

Fig 22.3.6 Three-dimensional view of Country Roadside Cluster
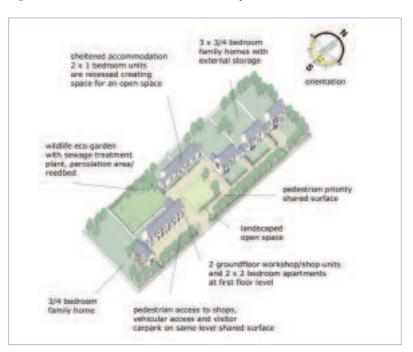

Fig 22.3.7 Plan of Country Roadside Cluster

Fig 22.3.8 Ground surface shared by pedestrians, cyclists and drivers in the courtyard of a village cluster

Fig 22.3.9 Shared green space in the courtyard of village cluster

Fig 22.3.10 Sense of enclosure in the courtyard