

5. Supporting Balanced Economic Development



5.1 Overall approach

The promotion of economic development in general, and industry and enterprise in particular, depends heavily on the policies, objectives and guidelines set out in other Sections of this Development Plan. The promotion of economic development requires a multi-pronged approach, the key components of which are:

- earmarking key settlements for focused growth (Section 3);
- providing and supporting the provision of essential infrastructure (Section 8);
- reserving sufficient land in suitable locations for industry and enterprise uses (Sections 3 and 11);
- availability of high-speed telecommunications, especially for enterprise (Section 8);
- availability of clean and reliable sources of energy (Section 8);
- promoting and facilitating appropriate educational/training measures to ensure a suitably skilled local workforce (Section 4);
- encouraging research and development linkages between industry/business and local third-level institutions (Section 4);
- forging mutually-beneficial linkages and partnerships – e.g. with regional and cross-border bodies;
- securing high standards of landscape and environmental protection/enhancement (Sections 2, 3, 6, 7 and 9);
- ensuring that towns and villages remain attractive to investment (Sections 2, 3, 7, 9 and 11);
- offering a good quality of life to those who live and work in the County.

As a result of its location, regional and cross-border activities will continue to play a vital role in the economic development of County Sligo. This Development Plan supports the objectives of the key regional development bodies, including:

- the BMW Regional Assembly
- the Border Regional Authority
- the Western Development Commission.
- the Omagh-Sligo Partnership¹
- the Irish Central Border Areas Network²

The Plan draws on the principles for developing the economy of the Border Region outlined in the RPGs.

The economic development measures outlined in this Section need to be paralleled by initiatives in education, training and physical infrastructure. County Sligo's ability to attract investment is currently restricted by its relatively weak infrastructure, including under-provision of broadband services, a lack of high-voltage electricity supply and deficiencies in road infrastructure. These barriers to the economic development of the County are addressed in the Development Plan by policies on energy, infrastructure, telecommunications and transport.

5.2 Economic overview

According to Census 2002 data, employment grew by over 18% (+3,723) between 1996 and 2002. The unemployment rate in County Sligo was 4.96% in 2002, marginally lower than that of the State and nearly 2% lower than that of the Border region.

Table 5.A **Persons aged 15 years and over in County Sligo, the Border region and the State, classified by principal economic status, 2002**

Area	At work	Unemployed (including first-time job seekers)	Student	Retired	Looking after home/family	Other*	Total
County Sligo	23,927 (51.89%)	2,286 (4.96%)	5,788 (12.55%)	5,590 (12.12%)	5,927 (12.85%)	2,593 (5.62%)	46,111 (100%)
Border Region	165,587 (49.42%)	22,503 (6.72%)	35,380 (10.56%)	40,180 (11.99%)	50,560 (15.09%)	20,818 (6.21%)	335,028 (100%)
State	1,641,587 (53.13%)	159,346 (5.16%)	350,774 (11.35%)	333,255 (10.79%)	438,986 (14.21%)	165,827 (5.37%)	3,089,775 (100%)

* 'Other' includes those unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability, and other reasons.

A lack of local employment in County Sligo is highlighted by the Census 2002 survey of distances travelled to work. This showed that over 20% of workers in the south-west of the County travelled in excess of twenty miles to work, with the highest percentage (+30%) of these living in peripheral and upland areas.

A breakdown of those employed in each broad industrial group reveals the importance of the services sector, where over 60% of Sligo's labour force was employed in 2002. The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector, which has experienced increasingly difficult economic conditions, engages 8%

¹The Sligo-Omagh Partnership is a cross-border partnership between the Sligo and Omagh local authorities, enterprise and economic development agencies and community/voluntary sector organisations. The Partnership was set up in 1995 and works with relevant agencies and bodies to identify a series of interventions to address barriers to cross-border business, enterprise, community and cultural initiatives.

²The Irish Central Border Areas Network (ICBAN) is a cross-border network of locally-elected representatives from ten local authorities, aimed at promoting co-operation between its member councils on a variety of economic and infra-structural issues.

of the labour force. In the eleven-year period 1991–2002, there was a 46% reduction in the number of persons employed in agriculture and nearly half of the 4,504 agricultural holdings in the County were part-time ventures in 2000. It is interesting to note that the decline in agriculture-related employment between 1991 and 2002, which amounts to 12% (see Table 5.B below), is almost matched by the increased employment in services – 13% during the same period.

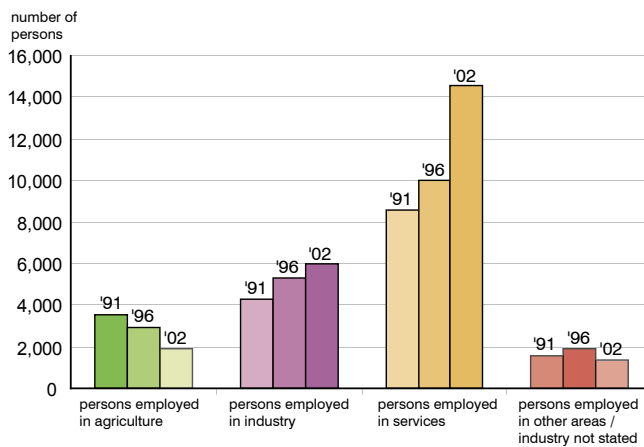
Table 5.B Number of persons employed in County Sligo by broad industrial group in census years 1991, 1996 and 2002

Broad industrial group	persons employed in 1991	persons employed in 1996	persons employed in 2002
Agriculture	3,568 (20%)	2,934 (15%)	1,928 (8%)
Industry	4,310 (24%)	5,339 (26%)	6,023 (25%)
Services	8,547 (47%)	10,021 (50%)	14,589 (61%)
Other industries/ industry not stated	1,567 (9%)	1,910 (9%)	1387 (6%)
Total employed	17,992	20,204	23,927

Source: *Small Area Population Statistics 1996 and Census 2002 – Principal Economic Status and Industries*

Opportunities for alternative and supplementary employment for farm families, such as off-farm employment, pluri-activity and agri-tourism, will be crucial to the survival of many rural communi-

Fig. 5.a Number of persons employed, by industrial group in 1991, 1996, 2002



ties in County Sligo. The growth in part-time farming has a positive effect on rural development, in that it maintains a rural population, alleviates poverty and provides stability in rural areas (refer to 6.1 Rural Development and Enterprise).

The Industrial Development Agency (IDA) has identified County Sligo’s strengths in attracting industry and multinational companies, as the availability of a skilled local labour force, guaranteed by the appropriate educational and training facilities, in addition to ease of access via air, road and rail.

The capacity of Sligo Institute of Technology (Sligo IT) is expected to rise each year by 5% to 5,200 full-time students by 2007. The Institute provides undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the following core areas:

- languages, finance and computing;
- precision engineering and quality engineering;
- environmental and pharmaceutical science.

St Angela’s College is undergoing a period of rapid expansion. In 2004, it provided training and education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels to approximately 750 full- and part-time students. This is expected to rise to over 1,000 over the coming years. The College is the sole provider of Home Economics teacher training in the country¹. Other specialist areas of education and training include nursing, special education needs and learning support, and arts and humanities. St Angela’s College also runs a number of outreach educational programmes in the North-West Region.

¹This role has emerged following a ministerial decision to close St Catherine’s College in Dublin in 2003 and having regard to Sligo’s Gateway status in the National Spatial Strategy.

5.2.1 Industry

Industry – including manufacturing and distribution – employed a quarter of the labour force in County Sligo in 2002. The most important industries in the County are in the areas of pharmaceuticals, medi-care, food processing, precision engineering, toolmaking and plastics manufacturing. Further employment is provided by the indigenous value-added businesses that support these industries (e.g. sub-supply, processing).

In 2004, there were 47 companies located in four IDA business parks in County Sligo, and 60% of these were Irish-owned. Manufacturing units in the County are predominately small, with 75% of companies employing less than 20 people and only 6% employing in excess of 100 people.

Fig. 5.b Sector employment in IDA client companies in the North-West Region, 2002

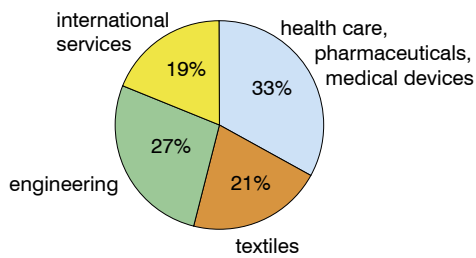
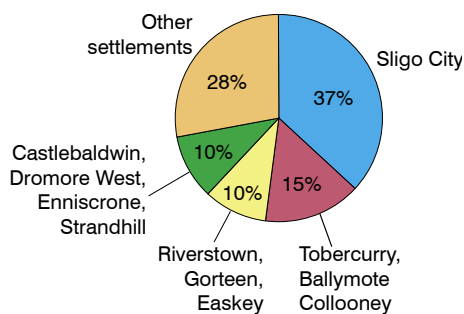


Table 5.C Sligo County Enterprise Board: projects approved by local electoral area, 1993-2003

Sligo-Drumcliff	51
Sligo-Strandhill	222
Tobercurry	80
Dromore	60
Ballymote	91
Total	504

Fig. 5.c Location of County Enterprise Board-assisted companies



5.2.2 Enterprise

Enterprise refers to any business engaged for profit in the supply or distribution of goods or the provision of services. The location of enterprise is dependent upon the availability of a large skilled workforce and high-quality communications and infrastructure. This sector of the economy includes office development, services, micro-enterprises and new types of working, such as teleworking.

Sligo County Enterprise Board provided grant assistance to 504 projects in the ten years to end 2003. There were 730 full-time and 367 part-time jobs in these businesses at the end of 2003. Further jobs were sustained and created through the Board's training and mentoring programmes (involving 1,262 participants) and through its involvement in cross-border programmes.

5.2.3 Supporting organisations for industry and enterprise

Industry and enterprise in County Sligo are supported by the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and Sligo County Enterprise Board, who assist in all aspects of industrial promotion, including the provision of financial support, securing international trade and creating new partnerships.

FÁS Ireland seeks to maximise the development of enterprises tailored to meet the regeneration needs of local economies within disadvantaged communities.

Business co-operation and trade between County Sligo and Northern Ireland is fostered through cross-border initiatives such as the Sligo-Omagh Partnership and the Sligo County Council-led Taskforce.

Research and development initiatives in local third-level institutions provide further support. There are two such units in County Sligo: a Business Innovation Centre in Sligo IT and a Food Centre at St Angela's College.



Enterprise and Technology Centre
at Sligo Airport Business Park
Strandhill

5.3 Spatial policy

Sligo City, Tobercurry and Grange are the primary locations for manufacturing industry in the County. Sligo City has become the main centre for industry and enterprise, due to its large pool of skilled workers, ease of access and availability of high-quality telecommunications infrastructure. The availability of labour, transport facilities and infrastructure attracts enterprise and stimulates agglomeration effects in the local economy. Due to the spatial concentration of production in Sligo City, cost savings are made by companies locating there, rather than in rural areas. Economies of scale help to explain why growth is unevenly distributed between Sligo County and City.

Tobercurry and Grange have developed a variety of smaller industries, due to their location along national transport corridors and the availability of a local workforce. Strandhill is growing its potential as a centre for enterprise, with the development of a Business Park adjacent to the Sligo Regional Airport.

As the shift from manufacturing to market services occurs, smaller-scale enterprise centres should be fostered and expanded in the Key Support Towns of Tobercurry, Ballymote and Enniscrone, in addition to Collooney. This is needed to offset the loss of employment in other sectors, such as agriculture, and to fuel economic growth in the south and west of the County.

5.3.1 Assumptions for the future



Community enterprise units
in Ballintogher

According to the Economic and Social Research Institute's *Medium Term Review 2003-2010*, the move up the 'value-added chain' may see a movement away from labour-intensive manufacturing industry to the skilled service sector of the economy.

The *Census of Industrial Production 2000* indicated that the industrial output of County Sligo was the second lowest in the Border Region and made up only 10% of the region's total industrial output.

Although growth in the manufacturing sector will continue to slow nationally, it will remain important to the success of Sligo's local economy. This changing role for the local manufacturing sector will require a gradual change in industrial policy towards the promotion of skills and processes that marry skilled labour with profitable employment. This has major policy implications for industrial development, training, infrastructural provision, and research and development.

5.4 Economic development objectives

5.4.1 Industry and enterprise objectives

- A. Ensure that sufficient and suitable land is reserved for new enterprise development at key locations throughout the County, particularly in the Key Support Towns of Tobercurry, Ballymote and Enniscrone, and at Collooney and Strandhill.
- B. Promote new industrial development in other centres with existing infrastructural facilities, services and good communications, or where these can be provided at a reasonable cost.
- C. Provide a flexible approach to start-up businesses and small-scale industrial/enterprise activities. Where a proposed development needs to locate near an existing natural resource, it will be necessary to demonstrate that it can be accommodated without damage to the visual, natural or heritage environment, or adverse impact on the character of the area.
- D. Encourage and facilitate small indigenous industries, in recognition of their increasing importance in providing local employment and helping to stimulate economic activity among local communities.
- E. Liaise with the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and the County Enterprise Board, to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the provision of necessary infrastructure and services to support industrial development.
- F. Promote the integration of employment with other land uses and the transportation network and ensure, in particular, that employment-intensive uses are located in proximity to existing and planned strategic routes, where public transport is most viable.
- G. Acquire sites for industry and enterprise, subject to the availability of funds.
- H. Support an expanded education and research sector in County Sligo.
- I. Ensure that a high standard of design, layout and amenity is provided and maintained at locations selected for enterprise development.
- J. Continue to support and facilitate cross-border co-operation and trade between County Sligo and Northern Ireland.

5.4.2 Provisions for the prevention of major accidents (Seveso II Directive)

The EU Seveso II Directive aims to prevent major industrial accidents and to limit their consequences. The Directive covers the presence of dangerous substances in industrial establishments, including industrial activities and the storage of dangerous chemicals. During the preparation of this Plan, the Health and Safety Authority of Ireland was not aware of any industries in County Sligo which are subject to the Seveso II Directive.

Article 12 of the Seveso II Directive requires that controls be exercised on:

- siting of new establishments;
- modifications to existing establishments covered by Article 10;
- new developments, such as transport links, locations frequented by the public and residential areas in the vicinity of existing establishments, where the siting or development are such as to increase the risk or consequences of a major accident.

5.4.2.1 Objectives for the prevention of major accidents

- A. Reduce the risk and limit the consequences of major industrial accidents, by seeking the advice of the Health and Safety Authority of Ireland in relation to development proposals affected by the Seveso II Directive.
- B. Have regard to the following when assessing proposals for new development involving hazardous substances:
 - the Major Accidents Directive;
 - potential adverse impacts on public health and safety;
 - the need to maintain safe distances between residential areas, areas of public use and areas of particular natural sensitivity.
- C. Under its development control functions, the Council will have regard to the provision of the Fire Services Act, 1981 and developments that do not meet the requirements of the Act shall not be permitted.

5.5. Sligo County Retail Strategy

All planning authorities are required to prepare a Retail Strategy for inclusion in the development plan for their area, as set out in the *Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities* published by the DoEHLG in December 2000 (reviewed in January 2005).



5.5.1 Retailing in County Sligo

Unlike many Irish counties, Sligo is mono-nodal, with Sligo City being by far the largest and most dominant urban centre in the County. A Retail Strategy for Sligo City and Environs was prepared as part of the *Sligo & Environs Development Plan 2004-2010*. The County Retail Strategy draws upon and complements the City and Environs Strategy.

Five centres in the County are of pivotal importance to the retail economy, due to their size, location or acknowledged importance in the NSS – Tobercurry, Ballymote, Enniscrone, Grange and Collooney. In terms of population, there are other significant settlements in the County – Rosses Point, Strandhill, Ballysadare – that have not come under detailed consideration, due to their proximity to Sligo City. Recognition of the dominance of Sligo City should not diminish the importance of the smaller retail centres in the County. They provide a key role in sustaining local communities and in reducing the need to travel.

Table 5.D Summary of retail provision in County Sligo (based on survey undertaken in 2003)

Settlement Outlet type	Ballymote	Collooney	Enniscrone	Grange	Tobercurry	TOTAL
Convenience						
number of outlets	8	6	4	3	13	34
floorspace (sq.m)	1,226	642	242	452	1,835	4,397
convenience as % of all outlets	13%	18%	19%	17%	17%	16%
Comparison						
number of outlets	16	10	3	6	19	54
floorspace (sq.m)	1,937	241	211	622	2,103	5,114
comparison as % of all outlets	26%	30%	14%	33%	25%	26%
Vacancies						
number of outlets	11	6	1	1	8	27
floorspace (sq.m)	410	369	20	18	602	1,419
vacant as % of all outlets	18%	18%	5%	6%	11%	13%
Service						
number of outlets	26	11	13	8	35	93
service as % of all outlets	43%	33%	62%	44%	47%	45%
Total retail floorspace (sq.m)	3,572	1,252	474	1,092	4,539	10,929

5.5.2 Assessment of floorspace requirements

The population of the County rose by 4.26%, or 2,379 persons, between 1996 and 2002, from 55,821 to 58,200. Sligo Borough grew 3.6% during this period, while rural County Sligo, i.e. the area outside the Borough, grew faster than the urban core, gaining 4.5% in population.

The assessment of floorspace requirements is based on the estimated future population of rural County Sligo.

It is assumed that the most expenditure originating in rural County Sligo takes place in larger centres, particularly Sligo City and Environs, and also in centres such as Ballina and Boyle. It is assumed that this will continue to be the case. Therefore, only expenditure on convenience goods (predominantly foodstuffs) has been examined. The individual (per capita) expenditure figures used are those outlined in the *Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2004-2010*.

It is assumed that 30% of convenience expenditure is spent locally, with the remainder being directed towards larger supermarkets in bigger centres, particularly Sligo City and Environs. Convenience turnover was presumed to be €3,500 per square metre in 2002, which would be typical for a sparsely-populated rural area. Inflation estimates were used to calculate future turnover. Based on population estimates, there is relatively little surplus expenditure in rural County Sligo.

It is assumed that new convenience floorspace will have an annual turnover of €7,000 per square metre. This is much higher than the existing turnover, since it is assumed that new floorspace will be associated with higher sales efficiency. However, this is not as high as the estimated turnover of new convenience goods floorspace in Sligo City and Environs, where outlets benefit from a more densely populated immediate catchment and from economies of scale.

Table 5.E sets out future population, expenditure and turnover estimates, indicating the approximate retail floorspace required during the life of this Development Plan.

Table 5.E Synthesis of retail floorspace requirements to 2010

	1996	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Population in rural County Sligo						
	38,035 (Census)	39,771 (Census)	40,170 (projected)	40,572 (projected)	40,979 (projected)	41,390 (projected)
Per capita expenditure estimates* (€)						
	2,491.30	2,952.30	3,111.80	3,280.10	3,457.60	3,644.80
Local expenditure estimates* (€)						
	--	35,224,699	37,500,540	39,924,611	42,506,651	45,257,047
Turnover estimates* (€)						
	--	33,085,500	33,700,890	35,616,594	36,953,854	38,341,321
Expenditure surplus* (€)						
	--	2,139,199	3,799,649	4,308,016	5,552,798	6,915,725
Estimated floorspace requirements* (sq.m)						
	--	306	543	615	793	988

*All estimates relate to convenience goods, as indicated in section 5.5.2.

5.5.3 Location of future retail development



Dromore West

It is anticipated that most new retail floorspace will be provided within a rapidly expanding Sligo City and Environs within the first years of this Plan, fuelled by the anticipated increase in population.

Prospects of growth and expansion in the rural parts of the County are more limited and the thrust of Development Plan policy is to maintain and enhance the existing retail environment to serve and benefit local communities.

In this respect, outlets of particular importance include general foodstores, newsagents, post offices and pharmacies, in addition to pubs, restaurants and cafés. The convenient location of these facilities, within the heart of towns and villages, contributes to sustainable patterns of development in a number of ways, namely:

- by enabling services to utilise existing infrastructure, therefore saving resources;
- by strengthening town and village centres and fostering community and social interaction;
- by reducing the need to make journeys, particularly by car, thereby decreasing congestion and creating a safer environment.

Rural County Sligo could also look to tourism as another source of potential retail income. Appropriate shops and services should be encouraged, to enable the County to better exploit its tourism potential, including hotels, craft outlets and shops specialising in outdoor pursuits, such as angling and water sports.



Riverstown

5.5.4 Retail objectives

- A. Support and encourage the key role of retailing within the towns and villages of County Sligo, particularly for daily convenience shopping, e.g. foodstuffs.
- B. Encourage the retention of retail/service outlets (e.g. general foodstores, newsagents, post offices, pharmacies, pubs, restaurants and cafés) within town and village centres, with the exception of commercial operations that are no longer viable or are more appropriately located elsewhere (e.g. car repairs, petrol filling stations).
- C. Encourage uses that support local retail and service outlets, such as tourism-related ventures, hotels, craft shops and shops specialising in outdoor pursuits and water sports.
- D. Ensure that retail and service outlets will generally be located within the central area of a town or village, where they can best serve the surrounding population.
- E. Discourage inappropriate out-of-town shopping facilities that detract from the vitality, viability and/or character of existing town and village centres.
- F. Generally discourage any retail outlet in excess of 500 square metres retail floor-space, including extensions that would enlarge an existing development over this threshold. Development over this size is clearly intended to serve more than a local catchment and would therefore be more suitably located in Sligo City and Environs.
- G. Acknowledge the fact that many retail cores have an interspersed residential element. Give favourable treatment to proposed changes of use to retail, where the dwelling has adjacent retail uses on both sides, as this helps to create compact and sustainable retail cores.
- H. Promote the reuse of existing vacant retail outlets in towns and villages.
- I. Promote initiatives or programmes to enhance the character and urban design quality of Tobercurry, Ballymote, Enniscrone, Collooney and Grange, to ensure that they remain attractive for investment in commerce and retailing.
- J. Ensure that all new retail and commercial development proposals respect the scale and character of the streetscape within which they are proposed.
- K. Encourage the retention of traditional shopfronts and pub fronts of character and design quality.





View across Sligo Bay to Ben Bulbin

5.6 Tourism

5.6.1 Existing resources

With the growth in affluence, mobility and leisure time, tourism is one of the major growth areas of the national economy. County Sligo, with its wealth of beautiful scenery, still remains largely unspoiled and relatively undiscovered. The County's cultural heritage and landscape, its accessibility by road, rail and air, and the range of activities available augur well for the continued expansion of this sector.

The natural scenery of Sligo is amongst the finest and most spectacular in the country. It is the County's primary tourist attraction. The mountains, forests, woodlands, lakes, rivers, coastline, offshore islands and largely unspoiled rural landscape offer the widest range of natural amenity and recreational pursuits. The protection of this unique natural environment, which could be jeopardised by development pressure, particularly unsympathetic sporadic residential development, agricultural and forestry development and increased risk of pollution, is fundamental to the development of the tourist industry.

The mountain areas provide the most spectacular scenery in County Sligo and have major potential for activities such as touring, sightseeing, mountaineering, hill walking and pony trekking. In addition, some of the more spectacular mountains are areas of scientific and archaeological importance.

Forests occupy a significant portion of Sligo's land area and most under State control have a major recreational value and are open to the public. Woodlands like Slish Wood, Union Wood, Lough Gill Forest, Ben Bulbin Forest, Collooney Forest and Lough Talt Forest have significant stands of deciduous trees. These woodlands are located in scenic areas and specially organised forests walks can exploit the botanical, visual, and literary/archaeological interests in a sensitive and unobtrusive manner.

The lakes of Sligo give the County a special identity. Lough Gill, Lough Arrow, Lough Gara, Glencar Lake, Templehouse Lake, Lough Talt and Lough Easkey are immediately recognised as part of the typical Sligo landscape. These are a major resource for sailing, boating, fishing and lakeshore walks and they also have strong wildlife, literary, archaeological and historical significance, although infrastructural services need to be developed to fully exploit their potential in a sustainable manner.

The coastline of County Sligo is a major resource. The traditional resorts of Mullaghmore, Rosses Point, Strandhill and Enniscrone have long attracted many visitors. In addition, there are magnificent beaches at Dunmorán and Streedagh, and many similar beaches are dotted along the coast.

Fishing in Ballysadare



In recent years, coastal erosion has caused significant damage in some areas. The protection of existing infrastructure and the unspoilt beauty of the whole coastline is of major importance in ensuring that its recreational and tourism potential can be fully exploited.

The other major resource for tourism in Sligo is the County's cultural, literary, historical and archaeological heritage. Increased interest in heritage, both nationally and internationally, has resulted in these becoming a major resource. The protection of such heritage assets and their contexts is extremely important.

Coleman Heritage Centre, Gorteen



The Council recognises the importance of the tourism industry to County Sligo and the potential that exists within the County for the industry to expand further. This can be especially significant in more peripheral rural areas, many of which are areas of scenic value.

It is the policy of the Council to encourage the development of the tourism industry through the use of its statutory powers, where appropriate, and to promote County Sligo as a tourist destination in co-operation with the appropriate statutory agencies, private tourism sector and community groups.

Mullaghmore



It is the Council's objective to encourage the increase in hotel, guesthouse and hostel accommodation, subject to normal development control standards.

The Council recognises the improvements in tourism development in the County in recent years but a major "flagship" project for the County has not to date emerged: it is the Council's objective to secure the establishment of a flagship visitor attraction, subject to normal development control standards.

It is the Council's policy to advance the development of tourism by the provision and extension of existing amenities, particularly water-based activities, and the provision of medium- and long-distance walking routes (in co-operation with adjoining local authorities).



Strandhill golf course

It is the Council's policy also to designate sustainable tourist routes and improve the visual appearance of towns and villages by the continuance of environmental schemes, design control and the removal of dereliction.

In addition, it will be the Council's policy to improve roads, existing amenity and viewing areas, and to provide for car parking, public facilities and access in scenic areas.

It is further the policy of the Council to control development, which might be detrimental

to scenic and heritage assets, in cSACs, SPAs, proposed NHAs, designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes and Visually Vulnerable Areas, and along designated Scenic Routes.

The Council will use its other statutory procedures, particularly in relation to waste management, water and air pollution, to ensure that these natural amenities remain unpolluted and visually unspoilt.

In recognising the special amenity value of mountains, moorlands and forests, valleys and lakes, it is the Council's policy to encourage use of these areas for activities such as touring, sight-seeing, mountaineering, and hill walking. This will be done in co-operation with state agencies and other interested bodies and local community groups. In this regard, the Council shall, within financial resources, improve access and create public rights of way.

5.6.2 Trends and assumptions for the future

There are strong indications that Sligo has not capitalised on its full tourism potential. The availability of high-quality accommodation is a prerequisite for attracting high-spending tourists to the region. Bord Failte surveys¹ indicate that the number and size of hotels in County Sligo is substantially lower than the national standard. County Sligo is also significantly lacking in guesthouse accommodation.

The poor availability of hotel accommodation in particular, will reduce County Sligo's competitiveness, both nationally and internationally. Unless addressed, such deficits will continue to act as a constraint to the development of the local and regional tourism industry.

Sligo County Council supports the policy document *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West* (Western Development Commission, 2000) and the tourism development strategy prepared by West Sligo Forum Ltd. In line with the BMW Strategy, it will be the aim of Sligo County Council to promote the development of major new tourist attractions, particularly with regard to untapped tourism potential.

The Council will also co-operate with neighbouring local authorities, cross-border bodies and other agencies to promote and establish sustainable tourism initiatives in less-developed tourist destinations, particularly marginalised rural areas. Although rural tourism remains a relatively small niche in the overall tourism context, local communities can benefit from the promotion of local assets and the development of specialist activities.



Riding at Culleenamore



Surfing at Easky



Seaweed baths, Enniscrone



Sligo Folk Park, Riverstown

¹As highlighted in *Sligo County - Economic, Social and Cultural Profile*, Sligo County Development Board, 2002

Examples of the tourism products that are emerging, or have scope for further development, include:



- holidays breaks that focus on the music tradition, literature, literary associations, hill walking, archaeology and geology;
- angling;
- surfing;
- equestrian holidays;
- thalassotherapy (e.g. seaweed baths);
- golf.

Each of these activities can generate spin-offs and demand for additional services, including accommodation, restaurants and transport.

5.6.3 Tourism objectives

- A. Protect and conserve those natural, built and cultural heritage features that form the basis of the County's tourism industry, including areas of important landscape, coastal scenery, areas of important wildlife interest, historic buildings and structures and the traditional form and general appearance of towns and villages.
- B. Promote the development of tourism in a sustainable manner and encourage the provision of a comprehensive range of tourism facilities, subject to location, siting and design criteria, the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and other planning considerations.
- C. Promote the development of high-quality tourist accommodation, especially hotels and guesthouses.
- D. Ensure high standards of architectural and urban design in all new tourist accommodation and facilities.
- E. Promote County Sligo as a tourist destination and work with the tourism sector to ensure that facilities and attractions are adequately signposted.
- F. Promote the development of eco-tourism and other leisure activities, in an effort to diversify the range of tourist experiences available in the County and extend the tourist season.
- G. Support and promote, with the co-operation of private landowners, public access to heritage sites and features of archaeological interest, coastal areas, mountains, rivers, lakes and other natural amenities.
- H. Promote the development of interpretative signs and information boards at important sites of archaeological and natural interest.
- I. Work with North West Tourism, West Sligo Forum Ltd and other organisations in the promotion and development of the tourism sector in County Sligo.
- J. Promote walking, rambling and cycling as appropriate recreational and tourism activities within the Plan area.
- K. Secure the establishment of a flagship visitor attraction in the County, subject to normal development control standards.



**Quarry at Killeenduff
near Easky, West Sligo**

5.7 Mineral Extraction

The demand for aggregates (stone, sand and gravel) has increased in line with the growth in national construction activity and this is expected to continue. Owing to the low unit value of aggregates, the most significant cost is transport and, as a result, most quarries operate within a 30-50 km radius of their market. Sligo County Council recognises that the aggregates and concrete products industry contribute to the development of the County by the creation of employment and the provision of essential building materials for all new construction, urban development, roads and infrastructural projects. The Council seeks to ensure that the extractive and concrete products industry follows an environmental code of practice, so as to minimise the potential adverse impacts on the environment and local communities. In assessing development applications relating to existing or proposed quarries, the Council will be expected to take full account of the document *Quarries and Ancillary Activities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (DoEHLG, 2004).

5.7.1 Objectives for minerals, mineral extraction and quarrying activity

- A. Protect all known unworked deposits from development that might limit their scope for extraction (e.g. one-off housing).
- B. Identify the location of major mineral deposits in County Sligo with the assistance of the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) and safeguard these resources for future extraction.
- C. Ensure that extraction and associated processes are carried out in a sustainable manner.
- D. Minimise the impact of quarrying on residential and natural amenities through rigorous licensing, development control and enforcement measures.
- E. Encourage development proposals – subject to normal planning criteria – that can demonstrate a commitment to good environmental management through the implementation of recognised environmental management practices approved by the Planning Authority.
- F. Seek the reuse of worked out quarries for recreational, industrial, ecological and other uses, following appropriate restoration.

