

Chapter 22 Kildare Rural Design and
Development Guidelines

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22 Kildare rural design & development guidelines

22.1 Kildare Rural Design & Development Guidelines

22.1.1 Introduction

The landscape as a fundamental resource for the County is a central theme running through the Kildare Rural Design and Development Guidelines.

This chapter discusses four key issues:

- (A) The physical characteristics of County Kildare in relation to (i) landscape and (ii) settlement,
- (B) Building tradition,
- (C) Design guidelines for village clusters and case studies,
- (D) Design guidelines for single houses for rural needs.

Buildings and groups of buildings are as much a part of the landscape as the fields, woodlands, boglands and grasslands. Between the landscape, settlement patterns and building tradition they define and describe the pattern of development through the ages and in particular the last thousand years. This is the baseline from which decisions about development must be made. 'Tradition' is a word we use to convey the timeless quality of development over a long period. It implies continuity with change, and a sense of the value of the past in the present. The quality and diversity of the landscape in County Kildare can be seen as truly unique. It is Kildare, and it needs to be cherished for the present and future generations.

Nevertheless, the landscape and the countryside are living places, with habitation, people, work, education and leisure actively being pursued, embodying that same character of continuity with change.

The description and characterisation of the landscape, its settlements and buildings presented in this chapter provide a benchmark from which to review the existing policies of Kildare County Council. It also helps to interpret them in such a way as to

ensure that the County will be enriched and improved, by a further layer of sustainable habitation in the coming years. It should be read in conjunction with the more detailed Landscape Character Assessment of County Kildare which also accompanies the County Development Plan.



A (i) Landscape

22.1.2 Landscape

Introduction

“The basic resource of the county is its landscape” (Kildare County Development Plan, 1999).

The quality and character of the landscape is inseparable from its settlement pattern and the location and distribution of its dwellings. To be sustainable future policy on settlement structure, needs to be guided by landscape and environmental considerations, as well as social and economic priorities.

The two motorway routes, from Dublin to the West and to the Southwest, define the major urban growth lines in the County, both historically and at present.

- The Eastern boundary is defined mainly by the East Kildare Uplands area and the Wicklow Mountains.
- The Northwest is predominantly Bogland.
- The Plainlands, which occupy much of the County, are divided by the Chair and Newton Hills.

Map 1.1 Towns, Rivers, Canals, Boglands, Plainlands and Uplands of County Kildare



Land Use

Overwhelmingly, the landscape of Kildare is a working one, with diversity in its use for agriculture, which is remarkable. Some of the widest land use capability in Ireland is available in the relatively fertile soils of the county, and even the extractive potential of the boglands has overcome to some extent the limited agricultural capability of the north-western areas of the county.

Topography

The topographical character of Kildare is reasonably straightforward; mainly characterised by the central lowlands plain, occupying much of its territory. The East Kildare Uplands form a hilly margin for the Wicklow Mountains at the Eastern edge, and there are a few irregularities in the plain, with two groups of hills, one of which includes the Chair of Kildare and the Hill of Allen and the other, known as the Newtown Hills in north-central Kildare. The gently undulating bogland and glacial drift topography of north-west Kildare is also interrupted by the limestone reef knoll of Carbury Hill; site of the mediaeval castle. The rivers Barrow and Liffey generate the main water catchment areas, and a wooded riverside landscape. The addition of the canals to the landscape has generated new green paths through the countryside and modified the catchment of water.

Geology

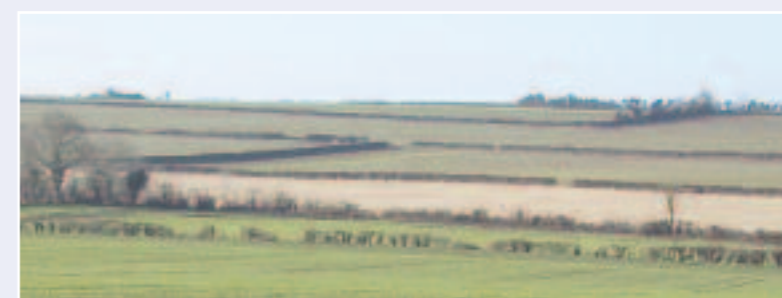
Any interpretation of the Kildare landscape and its land-use capability needs some degree of geological insight about what may now be hidden, but which helps to explain the nature of the landscape and its land-use capability.

J.B. Whitlow in “Geology and Scenery in Ireland” describes the Galtrim moraine, ‘which sweeps southwards into county Kildare’ as a ‘belt of ice-marginal deltas formed by glacial meltwaters, now left high and dry as sandy hillocks... To the east of the moraine, the enormous quantities of sand and gravel washed out from the former ice-front have created the sweeping, well-drained expanse of the Curragh with its close-grained springy turf and clumps of yellow gorse.’

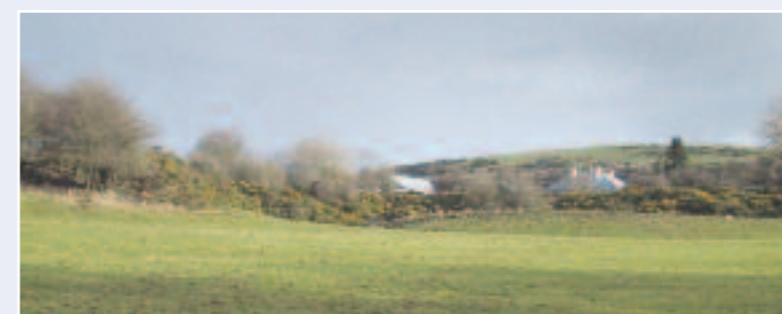
By contrast, to the west of the moraine ‘its impervious tills have given rise to a waterlogged environment, the Bog of Allen, in which post-glacial peat has built up to considerable depths’.

Thus, it is the geological and in particular the glacial features which have shaped the landforms of County Kildare, on top of which the landscape has been further shaped by centuries of human activity and settlement.

Landscape near Calverstown



Farmlands near Kilcullen



Bogland landscape, Ballynafagh lake, near Prosperous



Upland farm near Ballymore Eustace



Horses on the Curragh



Ballynafagh Lake – Boglands close to Prosperous



Grand Canal near Robertstown



Agriculture in County Kildare

County Kildare is renowned for its breeding of thoroughbred horses. It has a high percentage of thoroughbred horses with the largest concentration around the Curragh. Other patterns of agricultural activity in the County include a rich mix of tillage activity, and livestock production.

Tillage crops occur in most parts of the County, particularly in the South, with wheat and barley and relatively small amounts of sugar-beet, oats and rapeseed, some vegetables and some fruit. Dairying and beef production are widely distributed throughout the County, with sheep located mainly in the North and East.

The landscape favours concentrations of specialised activity in certain areas, no doubt due to climatic and soil conditions. The impact is of an intensely used landscape, with large fields where crops predominate and a pattern of hedge divisions in most areas, which imparts a strong regional character to most of the County.

The grasslands of the Curragh, the uplands of East Kildare, the boglands of North-west Kildare and the valleys of the Barrow and the Liffey form a contrasting landscape character. Although much of the county is low-lying, it is rare that the presence of upland areas or undulating countryside is far away.

The Liffey at Ballymore Eustace



Landscape Character Change in the County

The process of change in County Kildare has accelerated enormously over the last few decades, due to new pressures on the established settlement patterns. In the centre and north-east of the county, urbanisation has placed increasing pressure on the allocation of land for housing; in the north-west the boglands have been severely depleted by extraction of peat; the new urban motorways have attracted development due to their proximity thereby creating a linear concentration of development. Other landscapes have also experienced pressure, and vulnerable areas have generated some suburban enclaves and ribbon development. In the larger tillage farmlands of the south, the removal of hedges and enlargement of fields has changed the scale of the landscape.

It is within the context of the essential characteristics of the Kildare landscapes that the urban settlement pattern has developed - in the more favourable lands; along communication routes; beside rivers and road junctions.

Higher densities and suburban forms at Kilcullen



In recent times, extensive areas of land have developed as 'the urban countryside,' this is problematic because it blurs the definition between town and country and swallows up large areas of agricultural landscape.

There is a need to maintain and protect the diverse qualities of the Kildare landscape, whilst accommodating within its urban

settlement structure a pace of urban growth and change unparalleled in the history of the County.

22.1.3 Key Issues for Landscape Protection in County Kildare

Open Landscape

An open, flat or gently rolling landscape is vulnerable to development, even of a modest scale because its visibility is high and impacts over a considerable distance. It is difficult to minimise the impact of development with landscaping in a stand-alone location with high visibility. It can be particularly problematic where the number of houses suggests a suburban rather than a rural landscape. Thus open landscape areas like the Curragh and areas in the South of the County are vulnerable to development.

Very large fields in the South create an open, featureless landscape through loss of hedgerows



Enclosed Landscape

In other, low-lying areas more enclosed by vegetation, there is a strong tradition of planting hedges as boundaries and a consciousness of the important role, that they play in sheltering land and buildings from winds blowing across the plainlands. In such areas, there is a greater possibility of dealing with the visual impacts of development either by having regard to the existing tree and hedge structures or by ensuring that shelter and screening is an inherent part of any proposed development.

Effective hedging creates shelter and screening, near Pollardstown



In such low-lying areas the landscape structure is able to accept a certain level of development without having a profound impact on the countryside character. However, it is vital to consider landscape-sensitive siting, screening and sheltering.

Beautiful roadside treatment, with verge, wall, hedge and trees, Rathmore



There is a diversity of character in the designated High Amenity Areas, but a common concern that the evolution of these areas over a great length of time could be obscured by insensitive development.

Upland Areas

In the undulating upland areas buildings can range from being visible but contained within the landscape, to prominent, where their position and quality may not merit such prominence, to obtrusive, where the buildings clearly make a negative impact on the structure of the landscape. The converse opinion, that the view from the house justifies an obtrusive position is not compatible with the sensitivity needed in such areas.

Visible but well contained in the upland landscape, near Ballymore Eustace



A stunning view over County Kildare, but very obtrusive location for a house on a ridge in the landscape, Killeel



Entrance gate, Rathmore



Suburban countryside at Killeel. A poor fit with the Uplands area landscape character



River Valleys

The river valleys have always provided an attractive location for houses and settlement, but they are also areas of important biodiversity and wildlife and are of great value visually. Therefore a careful balance between essentially competing uses needs to be maintained.

The river Liffey near Bodenstown



Country Houses, Parklands and Gardens

The historic buildings and their estates, parklands and historic gardens are integrated by their design into the landscape of County Kildare, as we know it. However, distributed around the County, there are many historic houses and their attendant lodges and farm buildings, which need conscious protection from development both outside and inside their perimeters.

Lyons House Demesne



Castletown House



House and Landscaped Park, Straffan



Boglands

Boglands have traditionally been seen as visually impoverished, yet their exploitation and inhabitation at the edge have stretched the capacity of this unique and fragile landscape to accept further development. In many locations the character and location of houses beside the bogs is poorly considered - built on piles of fill dropped onto the bog around, scarring the land without trying to limit the impact.

Undisturbed bogland below Carbury Hill



Eyesore created by tipping on the bog at Allenwood



Woodland and Forest

Woodland and Forest areas, such as Donadea are seen as recreational areas of importance. They are, of course another vital element in the overall landscape structure. They can help in siting buildings below the landscape and the tree line, but they also need to be read at their edges as clearly defined landscape components and more than a backdrop for houses.

Strong edge to woodland area, near Kilkea



Review of Landscape Section

This section has represented the principal, broad, landscape issues that need to be taken into account;

- when deciding on the suitability of a particular location for building,
- when choosing the scale and character of building,
- when deciding upon design responses to the immediate landscape surroundings.