



## **Design guide**

for social housing in rural Northern Ireland





A small traditional housing grouping or "Clachan" at Coolanlough, Fairhead, Co. Antrim. An early example of how rural dwellers lived within small communities. The National Trust now manages these properties.

“

*For John Greer and John Caldwell .... rural planners .... rural pioneers .... rural heroes .... rural inspirations .... rural Ulstermen.”*

**Mark Conway,**  
board member, **Rural Housing Association**

## **Design guide**

for social housing in rural Northern Ireland

by  
**GM Design Associates Ltd.**

for  
**The Rural Housing Association**

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**Front and back cover image:** The rolling hills of The Sperrins, Co.Tyrone, with the small settlement of Gortin nestled in the glen.



# Contents

## 01 Introduction

The <b>purpose</b> of the guide .....	x
The <b>approach</b> of the guide .....	xx

## Creating rural places:

Achieving quality

## 03 Considering the location

<b>Identifying</b> where there is <b>need</b> .....	xx
The <b>range of locations</b> for rural social housing .....	xx
Identifying a suitable site within a <b>Dispersed Rural Community</b> .....	xx
Identifying a suitable site within <b>small settlements</b> and <b>villages</b> .....	xx
Identifying a suitable site outside <b>small settlements</b> and <b>villages</b> .....	xx

## 05 Considering the layout

<b>Layout &amp; roads</b> considerations .....	xx
Considering <b>access</b> .....	xx
Considering the definition of <b>boundaries</b> .....	xx
Creating appropriate <b>private</b> and <b>semi-private</b> spaces .....	xx
Integrating <b>landscaping</b> .....	xx
Enhancing the <b>public realm</b> .....	xx

## 02 Considering the place: Rural Northern Ireland

<b>Landscape</b> considerations .....	xx
<b>Settlement</b> considerations .....	xx
Regard for the <b>characteristics</b> of <b>vernacular</b> rural houses .....	xx
The significance of recent <b>changes</b> in the <b>countryside</b> .....	xx
The <b>evolution</b> of the <b>provision</b> of rural <b>social housing</b> .....	xx

## 04 Considering the site

<b>Orientation</b> .....	xx
<b>Shelter</b> .....	xx
<b>Slopes</b> .....	xx
<b>Character</b> .....	xx
<b>Neighbours</b> .....	xx
..	

## 06 Designing appropriate buildings

Considering <b>building form</b> .....	xx
<b>Roofs</b> .....	xxx
<b>Chimneys</b> .....	xxx
<b>Dormer windows</b> and <b>skylights</b> .....	xxx
<b>Windows</b> .....	xxx
<b>Entrances</b> .....	xxx
The <b>building fabric &amp; performance</b> .....	xxx
<b>Energy use &amp; renewable</b> technologies .....	xxx
<b>Utilities</b> .....	xxx
<b>External</b> finishes .....	xxx



A common sight in rural Northern Ireland, roadside cottages and associated outbuildings.

# 01

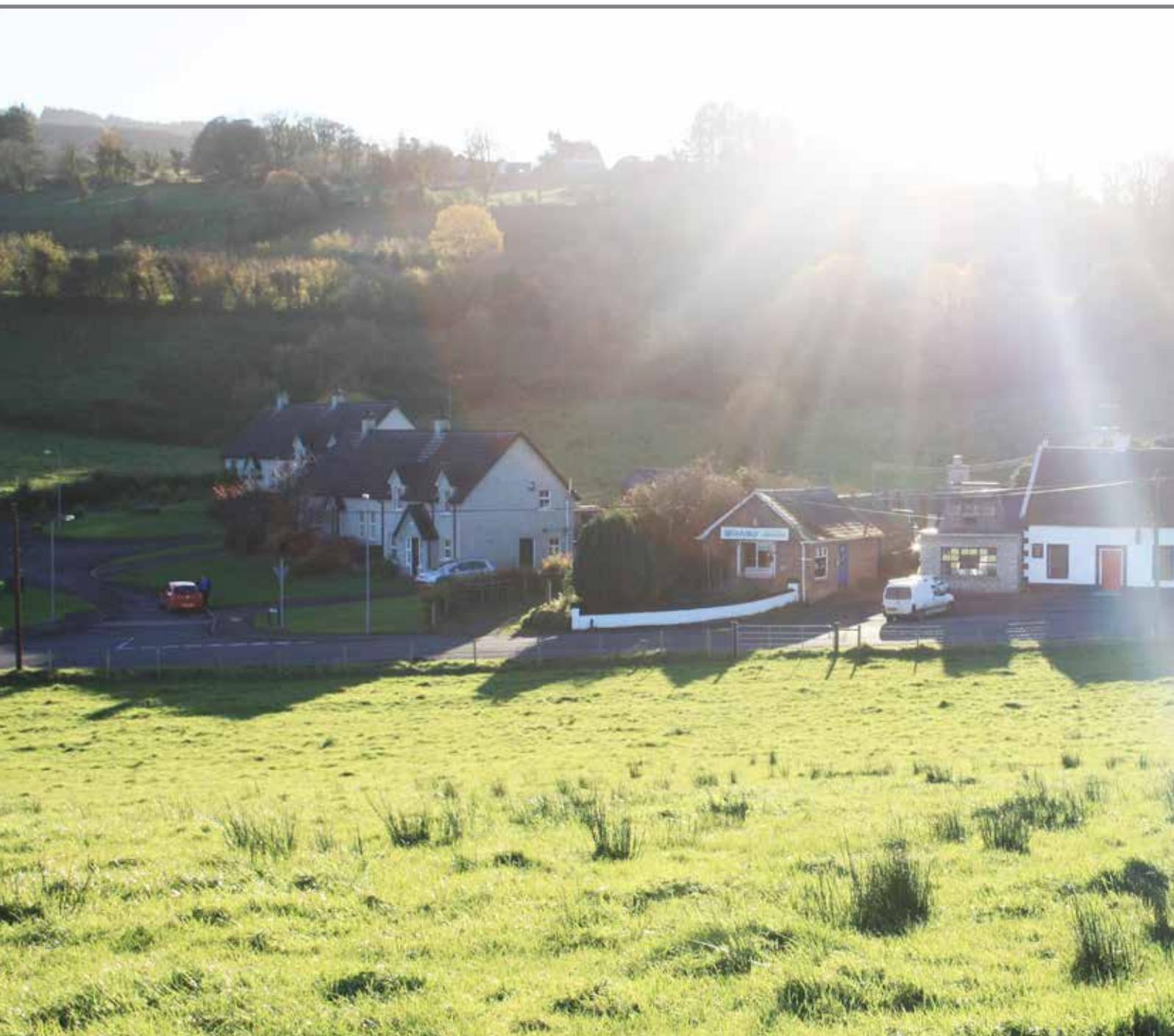
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## Introduction

The **purpose** of the guide

The **approach** of the guide

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Social housing by the Rural Housing Association at Boho, Co.Fermanagh. These four units are designed to cluster with the existing shop and public house within this remote rural community.

## The **purpose** of the Guide

The Rural Housing Association is active throughout rural Northern Ireland providing and managing high quality affordable homes for rural people in rural areas, contributing to maintaining and sustaining rural communities.

Twenty years after establishment the Rural Housing Association now manages 416 houses, across 16 districts, with an emphasis on the more marginal and disadvantaged rural communities. It has established a reputation for providing affordable, good quality rural homes with high standards of management.

The Rural Housing Association has consistently sought to provide homes that achieve all relevant contemporary standards and contribute to a quality environment.



An early Rural Housing Association scheme at the small and remote settlement of The Cranagh, Co.Tyrone, deep within the Sperrins. This is typical of many of their housing schemes within rural landscapes of exceptional quality.

This Guide is the Rural Housing Association's response to the concern that the recent delivery of good quality social housing, while meeting all contemporary standards has been achieved too often without regard to local character or the specific needs of rural residents.

Hence this Guide, which seeks to direct the designer of rural social housing to consider not just how to achieve good quality, energy efficient, easy to use and maintain social housing, but also homes that enhance local character and support all aspects of rural living. This document provides appropriate planning site identification, design and construction guidance for modest size, new build rural social housing.

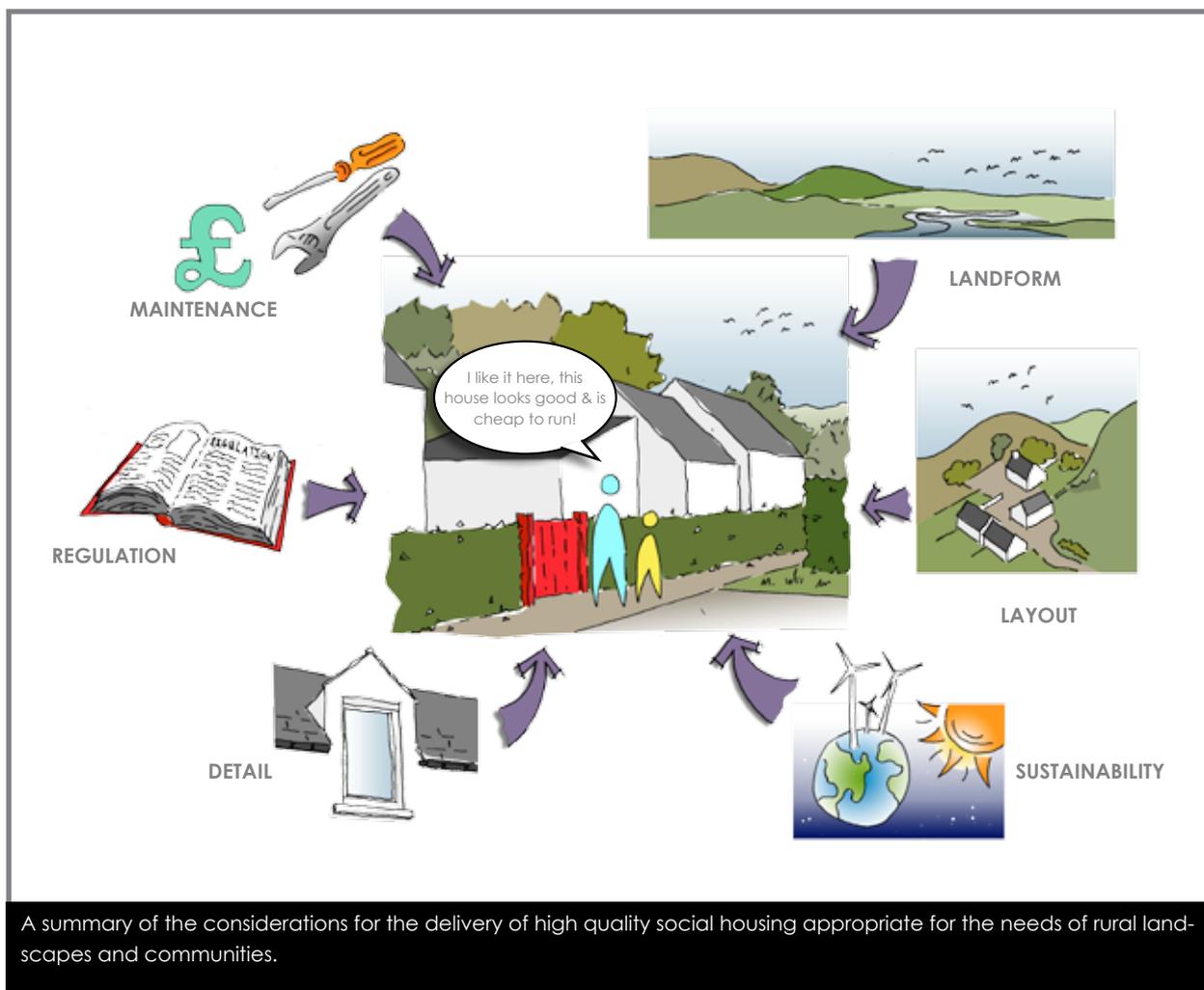


Rural Housing Association's recent scheme within the heart of the small village of Kircubbin, the Ards Peninsula, Co. Down. The 7no. units were completed on a brownfield site in co-operation with the Kircubbin Regeneration Plan.

# The approach of the Guide

Consistent with the definition of rural Northern Ireland used by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, this guide is primarily relevant to the provision of social housing in the countryside and all small settlements with a population of less than 4,500.

In the context of changing legislation, housing and planning policy and building technologies, this Guide sets out the basic principles, which if understood and applied, will contribute to the delivery of a new generation of high quality, attractive, and affordable social housing, meeting the needs and aspirations of rural dwellers.



The context is on-going changes in rural society and the rural economy along with progress in delivering modern social housing that applies contemporary construction technologies. This Guide builds on a century of construction of rural social housing, which has transformed the lives of rural families, radically improved living conditions and delivered wider health, social and economic benefits.



The problem..... standard deep plan house types of suburban style repeated throughout our rural environments. These were originally NIHE dwellings but in essence these forms are still being used in new-build social schemes.

This Guide provides:-

- A brief review of the history of the provision of rural social housing;
- The considerations that should influence site selection;
- Appropriate design responses when a site has been identified;
- A detailed review of the elements of appropriate rural house design;
- Guidance on sustainable solutions suited to rural house building; and
- An overview of the requirements of planning policies and guidance that are applied to rural house-building.

**There are numerous design guides for new rural housing both within Ireland and Great Britain but these generally focus on the design of single dwellings for owner occupation. This Guide is focused on the specific opportunities, characteristics and needs of contemporary social housing in Northern Ireland. It will have a wider relevance to all rural house building.**

This Guide is not prescriptive, rather it seeks to highlight and draw out those considerations which if thoughtfully applied will contribute to the delivery of high quality, contemporary, homes meeting the needs and aspirations of rural residents. This is done by setting out the principles of good quality rural design and construction, assisted by the extensive use of illustrative drawings, complemented by concise notes.

# 02

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## Considering the **place** - rural Northern Ireland

**Landscape** considerations

**Settlement** considerations

Regard for the **characteristics** of **vernacular** rural houses

The significance of recent **changes** in the **countryside**

The **evolution** of the **provision** of **rural social housing**

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The Sperrins, mid-Ulster. A distinctive landscape with a real sense of place.

# Landscape considerations

Northern Ireland has a rich and varied rural landscape. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency in its assessment identified 130 distinct Landscape Character Areas. Designers of rural social housing should be aware of each areas distinct features and respond appropriately. Within this context there are four generalized areas which especially in the past generation have experienced widely different development influences.

## THE UPLAND AREAS

Mostly higher than 250 metres above sea level, and largely devoid of human occupation. These areas of ridges and crests, extensive open moors, hill grazing and conifer plantations, are most extensive across the Sperrins, the Antrim Hills and in Fermanagh and West Tyrone.

## REMOTER RURAL AREAS

These extend across the centre, west, north and south of the Region, beyond the distance that most are willing or able to commute daily into the Greater Belfast area. This area includes much of the drumlin lowlands so evocative of the Northern Irish landscape of hills interspersed with small lakes or wet-lands, winding minor roads, pastoral fields with hawthorn hedgerows and small farms. Within this area there is considerable difference between those areas closer to the larger towns and the more remote communities; particularly in south and west Fermanagh, west Tyrone and mid Ulster. The decline of rural communities remains a concern within many of these areas.

## RURAL AREAS IN PROXIMITY TO THE REGIONAL CITIES AND TOWNS

The main towns typically have a wide range of services, facilities and opportunities and a greater influence on neighbouring rural areas. The largest of these towns have considerable influence on their neighbouring rural areas including:-

- Derry city and its urban satellites, with a population of almost 100,000;
- Newry city and its urban satellites, with a population of about 45,000;
- The north coast triangle area of Coleraine, Portrush and Portstewart, with a population of about 40,000;
- Ballymena and its nearby villages, also with a population of nearly 40,000;
- Tyrone's county town, Omagh, with a population of 25,000, and in addition;
- The large towns/service centres including Enniskillen, Strabane, Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt.

## RURAL AREAS WITHIN THE COMMUTER BELT OF URBANISED GREATER BELFAST

The Greater Belfast Metropolitan Area has a major impact on those rural areas that are relatively accessible. Typically these rural areas are close to the main road network radiating out from the Greater Belfast area. These areas, particularly within the past 40 years, have experienced a large influx of new residents often without any significant ties or input into their local rural community and along with major changes in agriculture have had a major impact on the rural landscape.

Within these broad areas there is a rich mosaic of individual landscapes, with the following particularly distinctive areas:-



## Some of our most special rural environments

It is important to emphasise that designers must recognise and sympathetically respond to the subtleties of the Northern Irish landscape, including its built characteristics, in the design process.

The most significant features of some of the most valued rural landscapes are summarised below:-

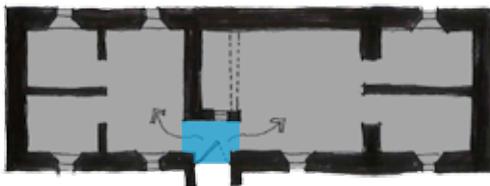
### ANTRIM COAST & GLENS

Small farmsteads, often with low 2 storey slated dwelling houses with “direct entry” to the kitchen associated with a “ladder” of fields climbing from the valley floor far up the hillside.



### SHORES OF LOUGH NEAGH & THE BANN VALLEY

Areas of peat bog, interspersed with dwellings and farmland on the better drained land. Traditional cottages generally had lobby entrances.



### THE ARDS PENINSULA & LECALÉ

The intimate rural landscapes of drumlins interspersed with wetlands along with the partially drowned drumlins of Strangford Lough create one of the British Isles most distinct landscapes.



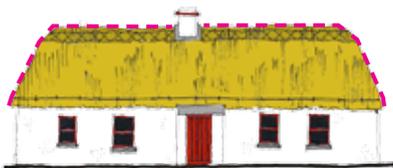
#### THE MOURNES & THE RING OF GULLION

The great granite mass of Slieve Gullion and its encircling hills forms a particularly grand setting for individual dwellings, housing clusters and the villages of South Armagh. In the Mournes, dry stone walling appears draped across the surrounding slopes.



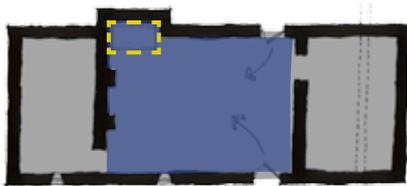
#### THE ERNE LAKELANDS

The contrasting landscapes of the upper and lower loughs; the former a world of meandering waterways through the drumlins, the latter a great expanse of inland water bounded by high hills. Traditionally a high proportion of hipped roof dwellings were found here.



#### THE HILLS & MOUNTAINS OF MID-ULSTER

An area of quiet valley communities with a sense of seclusion, between the great rounded hills of the Sperrins. Along with western Derry and Donegal, the majority of cottages were “direct entry” with unique “bed-outshots”.



#### THE FLAT LANDS OF THE FOYLE BASIN

This area of flat alluvial farmlands is very unusual in the Irish context, with its large arable farms and substantial farm houses, under the shadow of the great escarpment of Binevenagh.

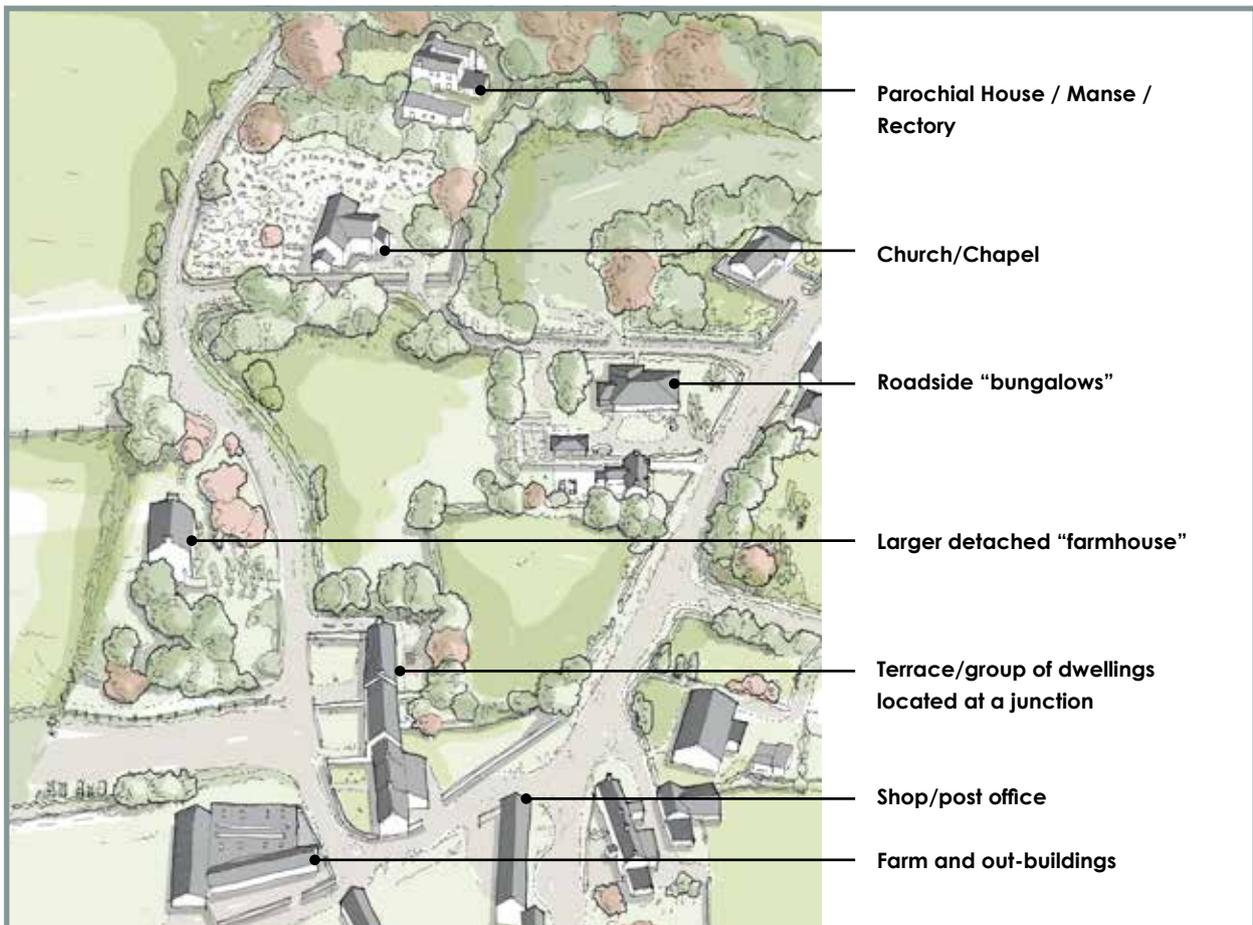


# Settlement considerations

Throughout the Northern Irish countryside, there are a wide range of settlement sizes and types. An understanding of their distinctive characteristics and their development history is of great value to the designer in achieving sympathetic contemporary buildings.

## Dispersed rural communities including “crossroads” settlements

Throughout the countryside, there have long been numerous small clusters of development. These are sometimes known as “cross-roads” settlements, due to the propensity for a rural road junction to provide a focus for some local facilities, along with a scatter of houses. Often these include one or more community buildings, such as a Chapel or Church and sometimes a small school. Occasionally a general store meets a wide range of day to day needs of the local community, typically incorporating a post office. Sometimes there are sporting and recreational facilities.



Some “crossroad” communities may display as little as one or two of the above characteristics, whilst others may have them all.



At Finvoy, Co. Antrim, "Drain's" shop/filling station/post office serves the wider dispersed rural community of farmholdings and individual dwellings. A small cluster of public and private housing has developed at this focal point.

## Villages and small market towns

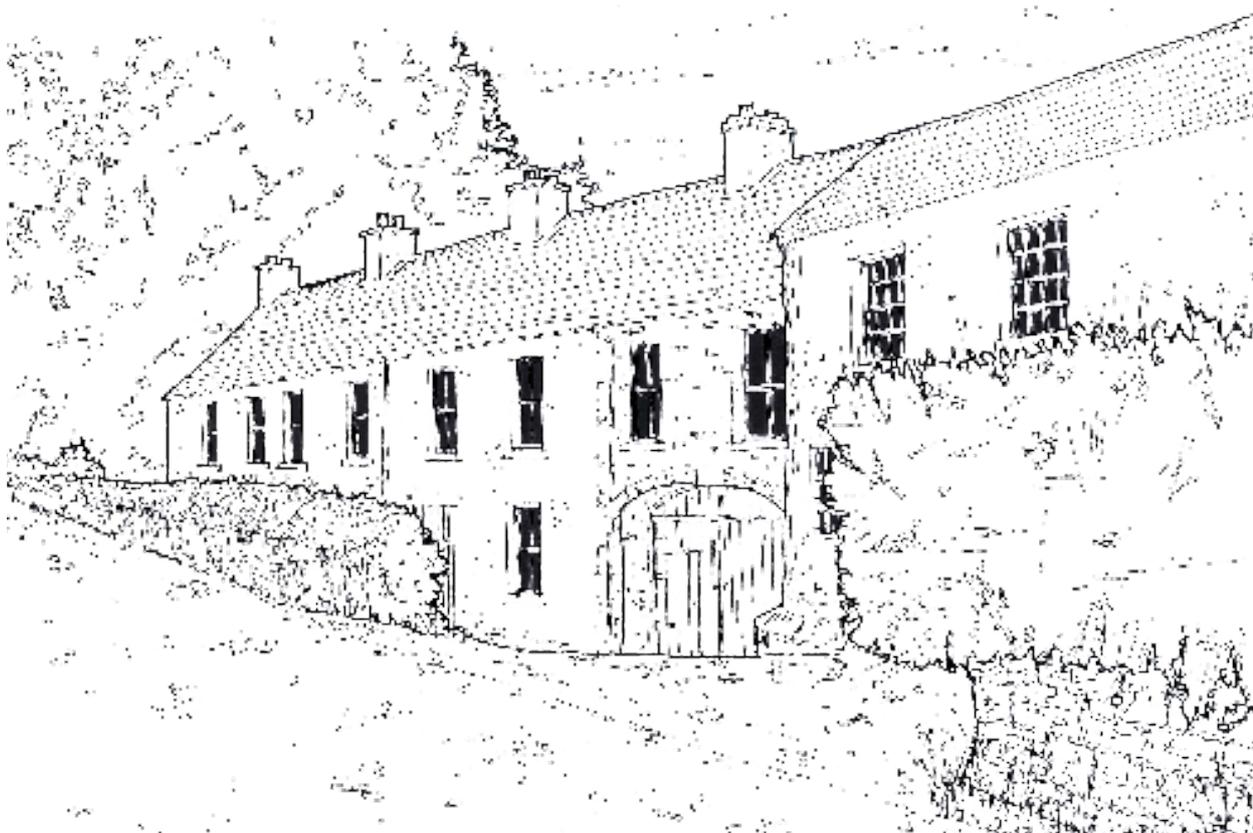
The earliest recognisable urban communities in Ireland were established on sheltered coastal locations by the Vikings. Many of them grew into sizeable towns, but some remained villages (such as Dundrum and Ardglass). Later fishing villages developed such as Glenarm and Portavogie. The growth of domestic tourism and travel in the second half of the century, often facilitated by the railways, led to further new coastal villages and towns such as Whitehead and Castlerock.

It was the Ulster Plantation at the beginning of the seventeenth century that introduced a network of small towns and villages across much of the North, many of which subsequently developed into market towns providing trade and commerce for the surrounding countryside.

By the nineteenth century the lowland countryside and its farming communities, was served by numerous small towns with shops and pubs, fairs and markets along with churches and educational and health facilities. Some of these, with the development of the linen industry subsequently grew into much larger urban centres. In the twentieth century some also became major centres of administration with extensive educational, health and recreational facilities.

Many of these settlements, however, such as Keady in Co.Armagh, Rathfriland in Co.Down, Portglenone in Co. Antrim, Irvinestown in Co.Fermanagh, and Aughnacloy in Co. Tyrone remain modest size "market towns", providing essential local services both for residents and surrounding rural communities.

Especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many landlords developed small estate villages, often of great charm and character such as Tynan and Seaford.



18th Century workers cottages at Loughgall, Co.Armagh. These dwellings are located within the Conservation Area of this Plantation settlement.

The greatest growth of urban communities came with the expansion of the linen industry during the nineteenth century. This included not just the development of large manufacturing towns but the creation of mill villages such as Sion Mills, Upperlands and Donaghcloney. Bessbrook is a particularly interesting mill village, developed by the Quaker landlord, John Grubb Richardson, along paternalistic lines, with high quality workers' homes around village greens along with social and recreational facilities but without "pub, pawn-shop or police station".



Boyne Row, Upperlands, Co.Londonderry. These attractive and listed terrace dwellings were originally built to house workers of the nearby linen mill. In many ways a perfect model of early social housing.

Throughout Northern Ireland there are settlements that have a very distinctive history and a unique character.

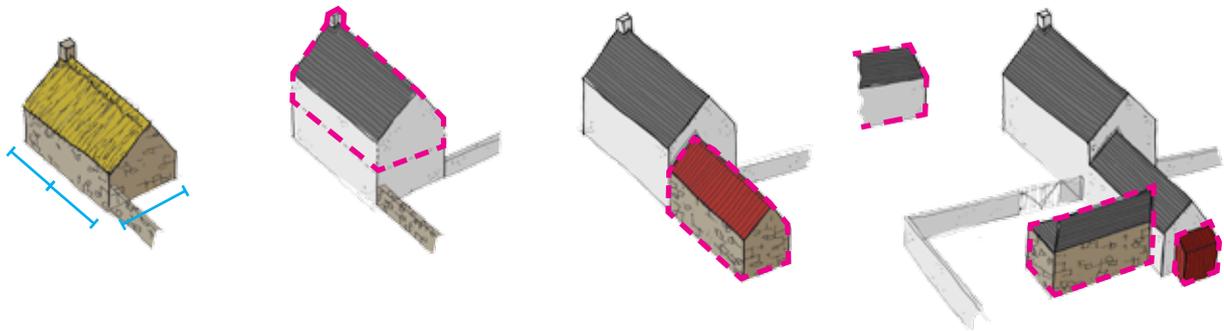
For example Gracehill, a small village in Co.Antrim was founded by the Moravians from Central Europe in the 18th Century and retains a village core of extraordinary quality.

Cushendun on the Antrim coast, is another exceptional place. It was extended using distinct architectural styles (inspired by Cornish fishing villages) to the designs of the famous Welsh architect Clogh Williams Ellis, early in the twentieth century.

# Regard for the **characteristics** of **vernacular** rural houses

Traditional design of domestic rural buildings was characterized by simplicity and symmetry. This is to be seen in a wide range of rural buildings, ranging from modest single storey cottages, one and two storey terraces provided for mill workers, cottages for farm labourers through to the larger two storey farm houses. Respect for these traditional building forms would contribute to a continued sense of place, which is widely valued and appreciated.

Generally rural dwellings were of limited depth, with a typical length to depth ratio of not less than 2 to 1. In Ulster, rural cottages were normally extended, either by going up and adding a first floor or adding another room to the gable. Only later did it become common to add larger one and two storey rear extensions or front porches.



The common three bay farmhouse with associated outbuildings, which was so typical in the Northern Irish rural landscape.



Rural dwellings appeared sturdy and robust with their high wall to window openings ratio. Window openings invariably had a vertical emphasis, sometimes arranged symmetrically and typically with uniform sill and head heights. In larger rural dwellings, windows tended to be quite high, which along with lower sills than modern dwellings, had the advantage of allowing considerable light into larger rooms. Normally glazing bars were consistent in pattern, but with a change through time from the multiple panes of Georgian to the double panes of later Victorian.

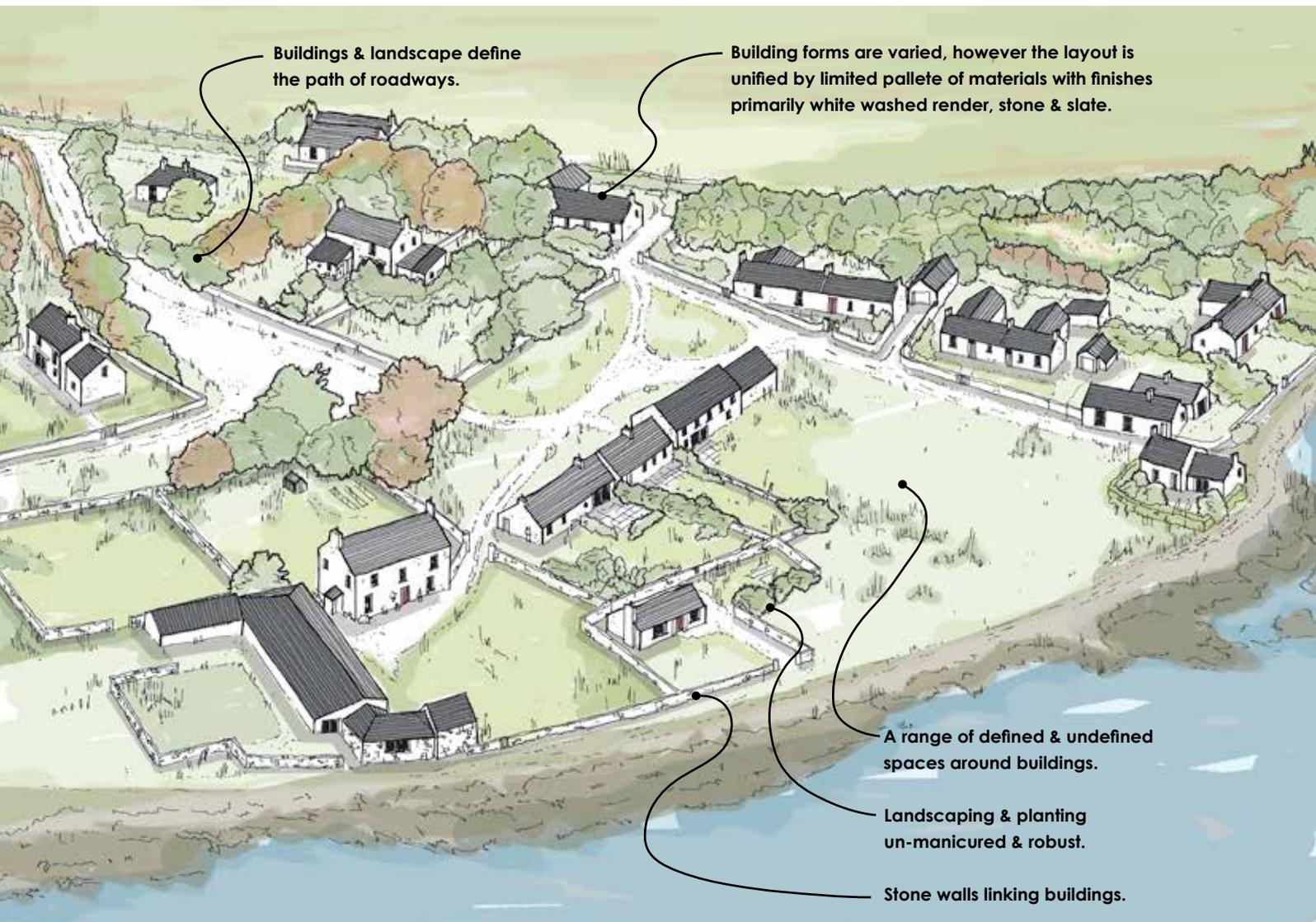
The simple three bay, two storey farm-house, with a central entrance door, up until a generation ago was the countryside's most characteristic built feature. Sometimes the larger farms had dwelling-houses with four or more bays.



The Irish countryside before the Great Famine included numerous informal clusters of houses and outbuildings known as "clachans". A small number survive. They integrated harmoniously with their surroundings and formed highly distinctive, pleasant and intimate places.

Some have been converted into holiday villages (such as Hanna's Close, Killkeel, Co.Down). Often the smaller houses were converted into agricultural outhouses. There are also numerous remains to be seen in upland and coastal areas. Sometimes they are clustered in a dip in the landscape, to protect from Atlantic winds, elsewhere they stretch, what appears to be, haphazardly along main roads.

External spaces immediately around the buildings were often communal and shared, sometimes using low level boundary treatments such as planting beds, hedges, post and wire fences and a network of stone walls to enclose some private spaces and link buildings together. Traditionally one or two of the sites boundaries were planted with indigenous tree and hedge species, often on the northern and north western boundaries to provide shelter. Other boundaries were left relatively open and walls, hedging or fencing at these boundaries was kept at a low level.



The common traits of Ulster "clachans" as seen at Kearney on the Ards Peninsula, Co.Down.



Coolanlough, Co.Antrim. A good example of the "clachan", illustrating all its attributes, pleasantly sited within the Moyle landscape. This is a world away from the repetitive "boxes" of much of recent rural social housing.

# The significance of recent **changes** in the **countryside**

## Rural settlements

House building, particularly for public rental, drove the early Post War expansion of many small towns and villages that had been static for over a century, with the local Councils, the Housing Trust and then the Housing Executive particularly active. With increased private house building it has been the small settlements that have experienced the greatest growth in the Region, contrasting with more modest growth in the main towns and decline of the population of Belfast.

In the period from 1971 to 2008, the population of the:-

- "Intermediate settlements", with 2,500 to 4,500 residents more than doubled to 67,000 and
- Villages with 1,000 to 2,500 residents more than doubled to 76,000.

Of 69 small settlements of the region, with between 1,000 and 4,500 residents:-

- 30 now primarily function as "dormitory" settlements with almost all their residents in employment elsewhere, either commuting to nearby towns or to Greater Belfast,
- 26 have a substantial service role for their surrounding communities,
- 3 have a "working" character with considerable local employment, and
- 10 are distinctive coastal settlements.

In contrast in 1971, most of these settlements had a very different character with over half functioning primarily as service centres for the surrounding countryside. Character has been damaged by their rapid expansion due to a wave of new residents who typically worked elsewhere and often only had loose, local, economic and social connections. It has mainly been the "commuting villages" that have increased most rapidly in size, often dominated by generic and repetitive social housing or "suburban" style private dwellings, without due regard either to context or local village identity.



The once small coastal settlement of Castlerock, Co.L'Derry, has experienced significant and somewhat damaging expansion with sub-urban designed/styled private and social housing in the past 40 years.

## The countryside

The past generation has seen profound social, economic and physical change in the countryside as a result of:-

- The decline of employment in agriculture and changes in agricultural practice with larger farms, larger fields, less hedgerows and larger modern agricultural buildings, significantly altering the rural landscape;
- IT/ICT changing the dynamic of location within work;
- Change of rural planning policy, from restrictive to permissive to very restrictive and back to something in between;
- All policies have however resulted in significant private sector house building of "one off" houses, changing the appearance and character of rural areas;
- A steady increase in rural mobility with a greater ability and propensity to travel further as part of the daily routine;
- The continued decline of rural services and facilities, e.g. the closure of many primary schools and most post offices;
- Relatively few social houses built in the countryside outside the larger villages;
- Growing concerns and actions related to environmental issues, with rising standards as directed from Europe.

The commuter belt around Greater Belfast, has spread in the past 30 years from the immediate vicinity of the city to now include the greater part of counties Down and Antrim and parts of counties Armagh, Tyrone and Derry. The impact of the new rural dwellers here is most pronounced, and is also evident around every good size town in the Region. In the more remote, rural communities of South Down, North Antrim, mid Derry and much of Tyrone and Fermanagh however, the impact of the inward move of outsiders, is less pronounced and less evident. Here the strength and vitality of many rural communities remains largely undiluted. These places are often greatly enriched by the strength and vitality of the continuing community life of rural parishes, with its infrastructure of schools, sports clubs and churches. Paradoxically it is often in the more remote communities where rural life remains most vibrant and the ties of kith and kin most valued.

**In rural communities there remains a deep attachment to land, place and community. Families often have lived at the same place for many generations and have extensive kinship and friendship networks. Their ancestors have toiled on the land and created the local landscape. Typically there is an abiding sense of being part of the community, which means there is often a strong desire to stay in the locality, even if employment is elsewhere. This has not always been acknowledged by either planning or social housing policy. In this context the role of rural social housing has wider benefits than just meeting housing need, as the occupants contribute considerably to sustaining and nourishing rural community life and the associated social, and economic infrastructure.**



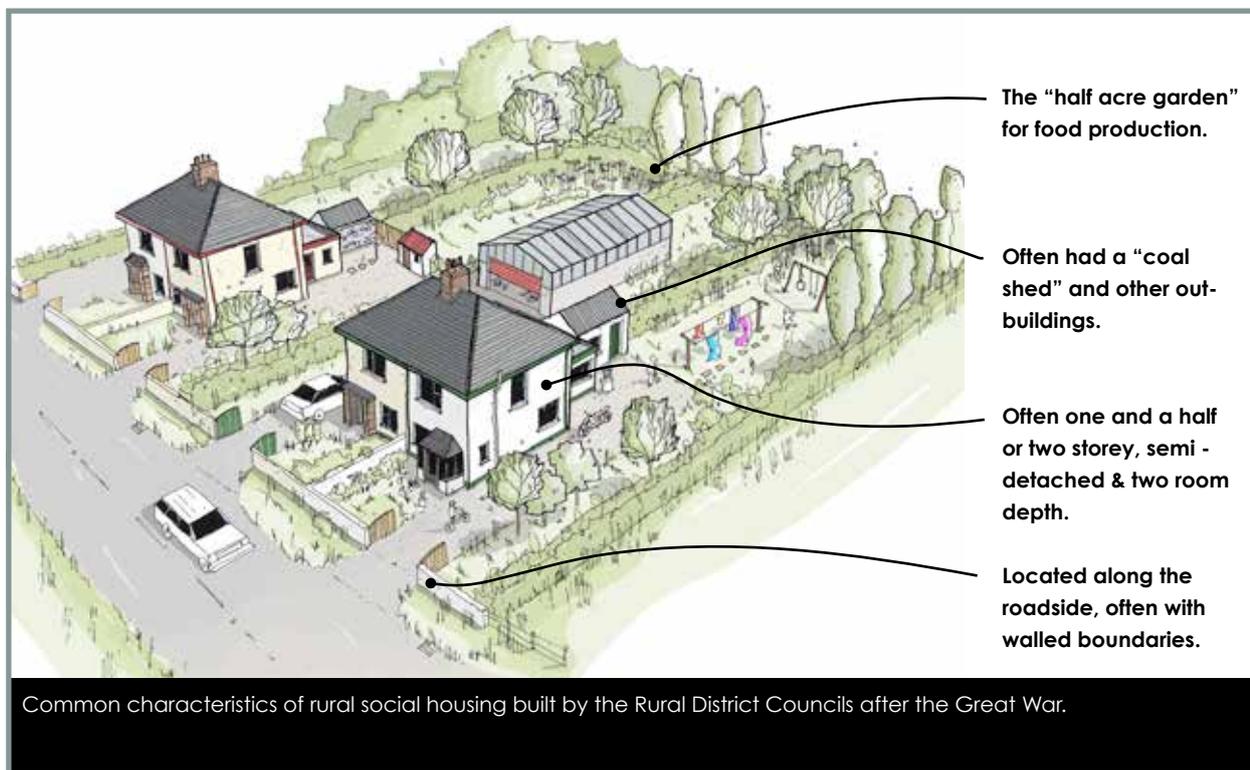
# The evolution of the provision of rural social housing

Rural agitation in the later decades of the nineteenth century in Ireland, delivered the gradual achievement of tenant rights and eventually resulted in the transfer of the ownership of the land from the landlords to the former tenant farmers. Along with this profound change in rural Irish life and economy, further improvements followed with the progressive provision of decent, basic housing for farm labourers. The Labourers (Ireland) Act 1906 was the basis for the provision of 40,000 rural cottages built for rent by the County Councils in the 5 years before the commencement of the Great War in 1914.

The earliest labourers' cottages were distinctive roadside houses of sound construction with basic but greatly improved accommodation and gardens sufficiently large to provide for a considerable part of a family's food needs. For their occupants these houses were a paradise, compared to the damp, tiny hovels they replaced. They were generally built to "pattern book" designs, varying between County Councils, resulting in significant regional diversity.

These houses provided security and stability for those who had previously survived a precarious existence at the bottom of the social order; rural labourers without either job or tenure security, dependent on casual labouring, moving from place to place, with families frequently ravaged by infectious diseases. They provided decent accommodation for the rural labouring class, supplied farmers with a steady supply of reliable labour and helped stabilise rural communities, after the generations of emigration, dispersion and uncertainty that followed the Great Famine.

This very successful provision of early rural social housing was added to by the Rural District Councils of the North throughout the Inter War period. This second generation of "labourers' cottages" tended to be larger, often with three bedrooms, typically one and a half and two storey, detached and semi-detached roadside houses, again with large gardens, during a period when little social housing was provided in the towns and villages.



After the war the process of rural social house-building was continued up to 1973 by the Rural District Councils who re-housed many of the remaining occupiers of unfit older rural cottages and met the growing demand from new rural households as living standards improved, mobility increased and rural depopulation eased.

While standard house types were widely used, there were considerable variations between districts. Some Rural District Councils extensively built clusters or terraces of up to 20 houses throughout the countryside, along with larger social housing developments within villages and small towns.

After 1973 the provision and management of social housing became the sole responsibility of a new regional housing authority, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. For the next 20 years the Housing Executive implemented a major programme of new house construction across the Region. Consistent with prevailing planning policy however, they built very few dwellings in the open countryside but erected large numbers of new homes for rent in the settlements.

In recent years Housing Associations, have become more prominent in rural house building, the result of a major shift in social housing policy. The role of the Housing Executive is now primarily managing their existing stock and assessing need.



NIHE designed and built social housing at Killough, Co.Down. The local architectural features of the village have been replicated, particularly the tall chimneys, resulting in a well mannered street of notable character.

# Creating **rural places** - achieving quality

## 03 Considering the **location**

This section details the mechanisms, for establishing a need for social housing and then how to identify a suitable site, based on an assessment of attributes and constraints, consistent with current rural planning policy.

Site identification in our rural communities is not a simple process, and can often be inhibited by the difficulties of identifying, establishing and confirming need, complying with the current sequential tests of planning policy and sometimes the unrealistic expectations of the value of rural sites.

## 04 Considering the **site**

This section highlights the importance evaluating a site within its wider environment and its interaction and relationship with neighbouring land uses.

The aim should be the creation of a series of interlinked spaces which will ultimately become a seamless part of our rural communities. The spaces should respond, respect and enhance neighbouring uses.

## 05 Considering the **layout**

This section establishes the principles of designing layouts for new-build social housing in rural landscapes, which create places of quality and distinction.

Placemaking influences will vary depending upon the site's setting as determined by the overall site context. For example, is the site located at a focal point or crossroads within a dispersed rural community or on the edge of a village? Any proposal should create a built environment of human scale which makes best use of the land, is legible, permeable and of course pleasant to live within.

## 06 Designing appropriate **buildings**

This section addresses the importance of appropriate aesthetic and functional design elements and form.

Vernacular buildings in Ulster were the result of the limited construction methods of the time, and the limited availability of materials, often sourced from the site, which produced pleasant and identifiable buildings and places. A faithful contemporary interpretation of the Region's vernacular can make a positive contribution to the appearance of a scheme and how it is received by the community. It can contribute to the creation of a place which residents can identify with, feel attached to and ultimately care for.



A modest but pleasantly attractive rural cottage. Its visual integration, simple proportions and personal touches, typify much of what we associate with the best rural places.

# 03

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## Considering the **location**

**Identifying** where there is **need**

The **range of locations** for rural social housing

Identifying a suitable site within a **Dispersed Rural Community**

Identifying a suitable site within **small settlements** and **villages**

Identifying a suitable site outside **small settlements** and **villages**

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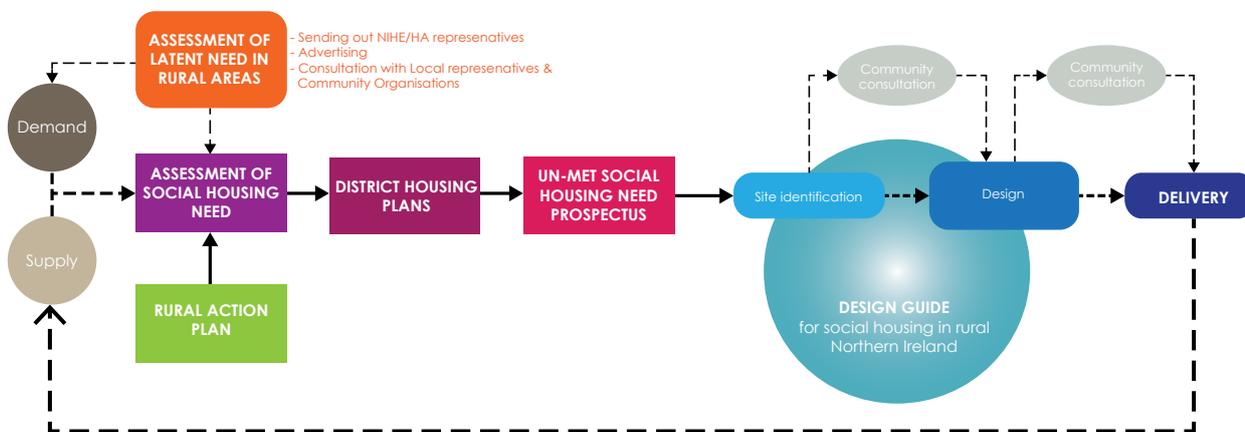
Saul, Co. Down is two distinct clusters separated by the setting of the St Patricks Memorial Church. A site for new social housing at the settlement should among other considerations minimise the visual impact on the church.

# Identifying where there is a need:

## Latent need, site constraints & strengths

The identification of those locations where there is an existing housing need along with the quantum and the detail of that need, will normally be based on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's annual assessment. In addition however, particularly in the countryside and within more remote rural communities, there is often an un-met latent social housing demand, which is not identified through the normal analysis based on social housing waiting lists.

Where a local social/affordable housing need is confirmed, this should be followed by consultation with the local community. Starting with local elected representatives and other local residents who have an understanding of their own community and its needs, followed by wider consultations providing the opportunity for input from all the community.



There is merit in testing latent, social housing demand, in those localities where there is a clear perception that this may exist. Often in the past, in the absence of the provision of any significant social housing in the countryside, the only available housing was in nearby towns and villages. As a result many families and individuals with rural connections, in the absence of any alternative, moved out of their own community but retain the preference of moving back closer to their family and the community they grew up in.

Hence the identification of latent demand requires thorough and extensive consultation including reaching out beyond the locality to contact those who have links with the community but at some time in the past have moved away.

In 1991, in the 'ground breaking' rural policy statement "The Way Ahead" NIHE adopted the principle of researching latent demand. During the past twenty years there have been many such assessments, which have demonstrated latent demand in a wide range of rural locations across the Region. These have been followed by the successful delivery of significant numbers of social housing units. The method of identifying latent demand is now well established including:-

- Liaison with local MLAs and Councillors,
- Extensive consultation within the local community,
- Arranging, where appropriate, public meetings in the locality, and
- Advertising and informing a wider audience, including through local newspapers and other means of communication, of the possibility of the provision of local social housing.

Having completed extensive and thorough consultation, where a need is established, the number and type of houses required can then be finalised.

When the decision is made to proceed with a new build scheme, the social housing provider should complete an appraisal of all realistic and available site options by:-

- Completing an initial appraisal of possible sites with reference to all relevant planning documents, particularly the development plan;
- Identifying those sites that may be available and excluding those with major ownership impediments or other obvious constraints;
- Ensuring the practical availability of all services;
- Identifying any other major technical impediments to development; and
- Consulting with the local community and their elected representatives.

Development options for social housing in rural Northern Ireland can be constrained by existing planning policy with its emphasis on directing grouped housing to within settlement limits as defined by local development plans.

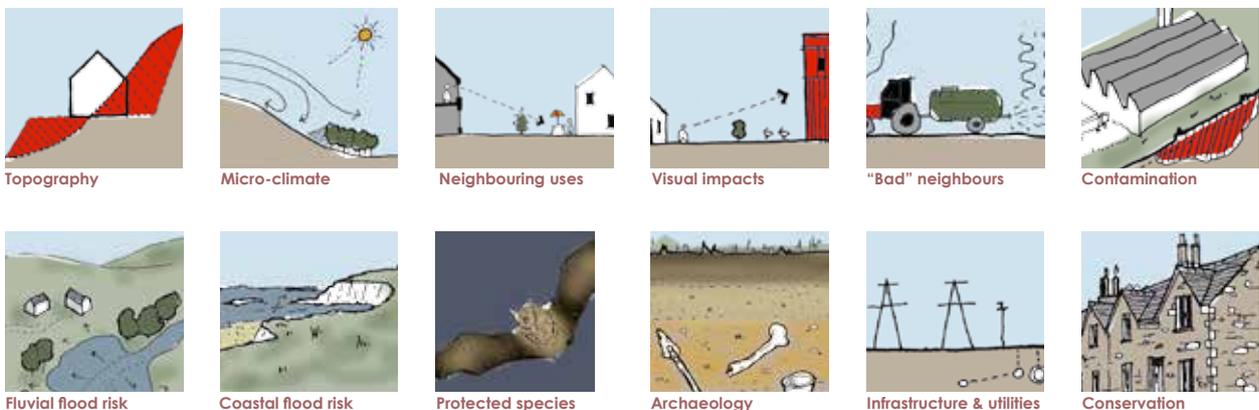
Having completed an initial appraisal, the range of options should be rationalised by:-

- Completing a detailed appraisal of all those sites that are identified as suitable and acquirable, including an initial appraisal of environmental or other major constraints,
- Preparing initial concept plans that will indicate potential housing output and
- Completing further consultation with the community and their elected representatives.

### Site constraints and strengths

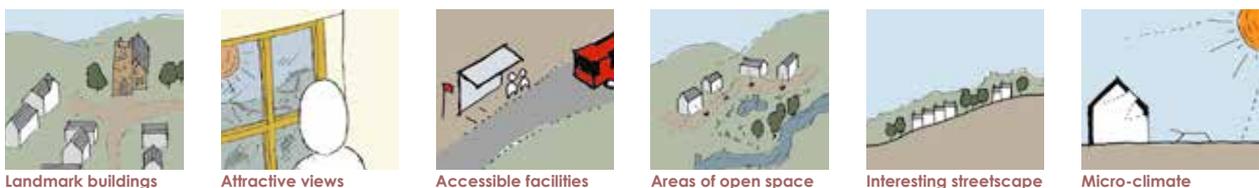
Site constraints can be physical, visual or social. Special design solutions, specific construction techniques, or mitigation measures may be required to overcome or minimize them.

Site constraints can include:



The most successful developments are based on designs which recognise and positively respond to the site's attributes. This can provide greater distinctiveness, and a historical connection with the area's past. It often facilitates an acceptance of new development by local people and greater enjoyment by the residents.

Site strengths can include:



# Identifying a suitable site

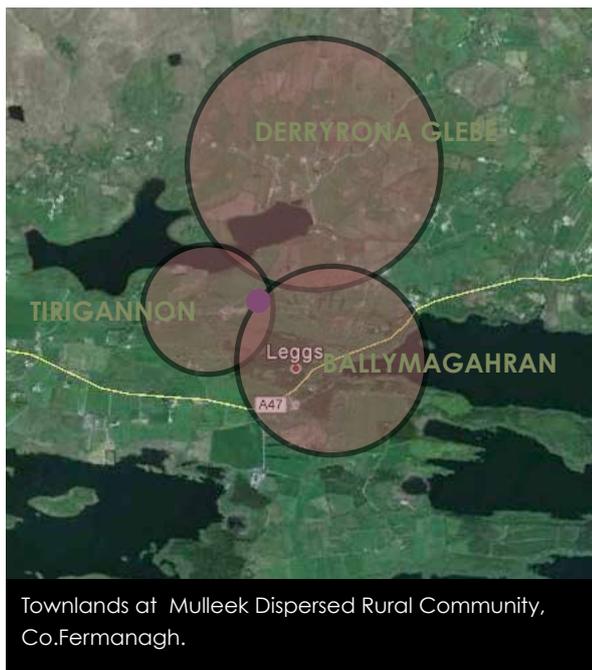
## within a Dispersed Rural Community

Some local development plans, including the Fermanagh Area Plan do not restrict development at Dispersed Rural Communities (DRC) to within fixed limits but rather identify townlands which make up a DRC. Others such as the Magherafelt Area Plan designated a broad line around their DRCs.

Either way Area Plans provide for a single or a number of focal points within each DRC, at which a new group of housing could cluster.

For proposed housing developments at these focal points to gain planning approval they are expected to be consistent with the following criteria :-

- Scale – modest and appropriate (Planning Service policy limits the scale of development to a maximum of 14 houses),
- Visual impact – capable of visual integration, relating to existing focal points and avoiding undue prominence in the rural landscape,
- Physical integration – capable of appearing as part of the established pattern of development, and
- Provision of services – capable of practical connection with all necessary services.



Townlands at Mullееk Dispersed Rural Community, Co.Fermanagh.

### Key

- Best option
- Issues, lowering potential
- Least favourable option

#### 1 South of Mullееk Church

- + Balances development to both sides of Mullееk Rd.
- + Visually integrated by existing hedges on all boundaries.
- + Similar levels to existing cluster.

#### 2 Linear site adjacent to Mullееk Church

- + Maintains an appropriate grain along Mullееk Rd.
- Small site area which may not be able to accommodate a viable number of dwellings.

#### 3 Elevated lands, NE of the existing cluster

- + Roadside frontage.
- Elevated ground.

#### 4 Elevated site, behind Mullееk Church

- + Screened by existing buildings.
- Elevated ground.
- Backland, no roadside frontage.

#### 5 Lands at the north, adjacent to Lough Scolban

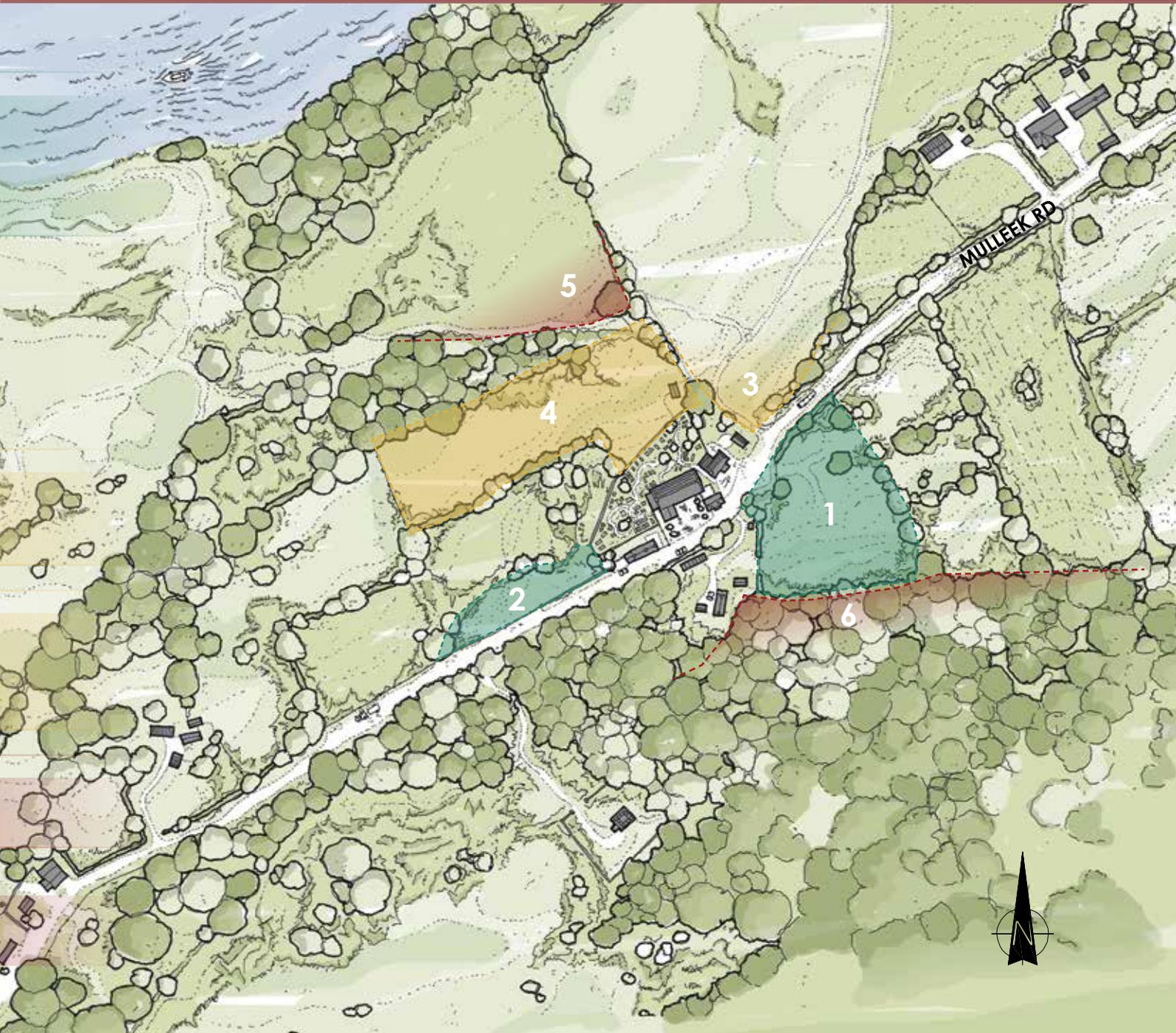
- Elevated ground.
- Remote from existing cluster.

#### 6 Lands at the south, within Castle Caldwell Forest

- Heavily planted with existing mature woodland which should be protected.

North of Lower Lough Erne, Co.Fermanagh is the designated Dispersed Rural Community of Mulleek, which encompasses the Townlands of Tirigannon, Ballymagahran and Derryrona Glebe.

A single focal point is identified at the Church, Church Hall and a couple of individual dwellings which form a small cluster of development at a "dip" in Mulleek Road just south of Lough Scolban.

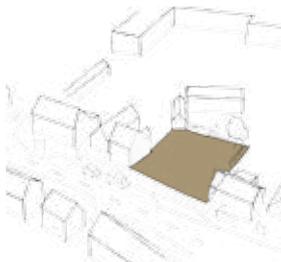


This plan highlights social housing development options where the new dwellings could cluster with existing development within Mulleek dispersed rural community.

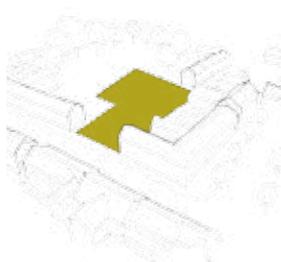
# Identifying a suitable site

## within Small Settlements & Villages

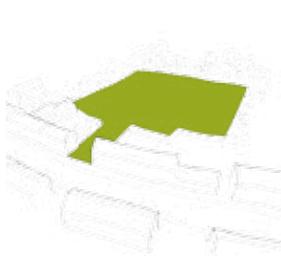
At small settlements and villages, potential housing sites within the settlement development limit are generally:-



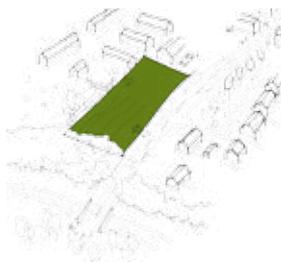
Infill within a street frontage, generally brownfield.



In depth, within the village core, often brownfield.



On under-used back lands, sometimes greenfield.



On the edge of the village, usually greenfield.

Undeveloped sites on the edge of a settlement often appear to be the easiest to progress. This is because design issues can be easier to resolve as the built context will not normally impose a significant constraint. Such sites normally involve only a single owner and they rarely have physical and environmental limitations.

Sites within existing settlement cores however should not be lightly disregarded, because while they may be more complex, they generally have significant advantages relative to edge of settlement sites, including the potential to:-

- Provide the optimum accessibility to the widest range of services and facilities, thereby enhancing the quality of life for residents in the long term;
- Provide better links to public transport;
- Contribute to the physical, economic and social regeneration of small settlements;
- Create more interesting built forms;
- Provide an identifiable focus for the village in visual social and commercial terms; and
- Encourage mixed tenure.

### 1 Site with vacant buildings at the "crossroads"

- + At settlement heart, adjacent to open space.
- + Frontage to three different roads.
- + Existing mature hedges.
- + Opportunity to replicate grain of adjacent linear "Clachan" farm.

### 2 Site at Attical Bog / Livins Rd. junction

- + Zoned for housing in Area Plan.
- + Central location beside existing shop
- Site slightly elevated
- Lack of mature boundary planting.

### 3 Site north of Attical Chapel

- + Linear infill site.
- + Close to settlement centre.
- Fairly open, lack of mature boundary planting.

### 4 Site at Attical Bog Rd. to the SW

- + Zoned for housing in local plan.
- + Large infill site.
- Long site with narrow road frontage, which may dictate a "cul-de-sac" arrangement.

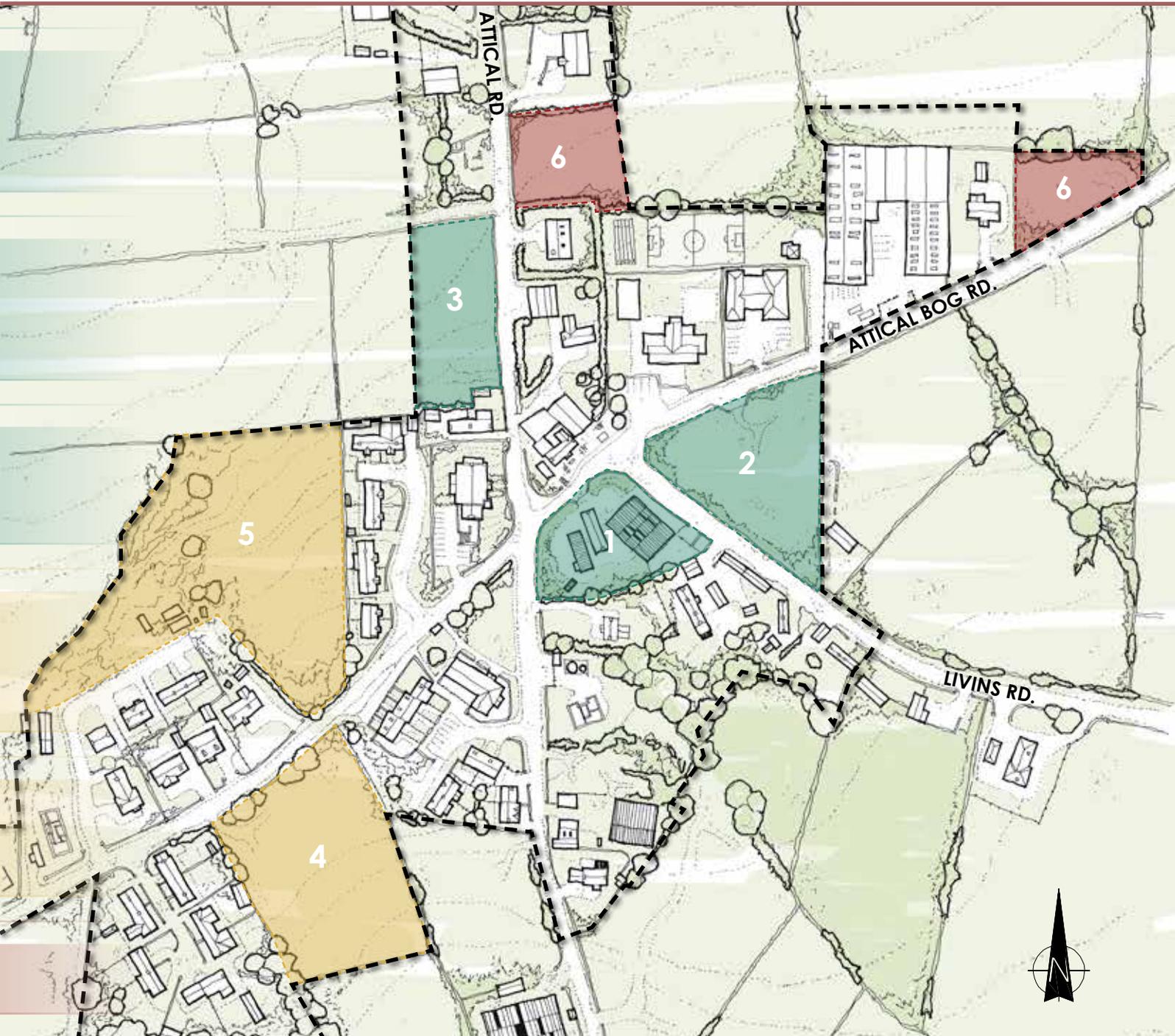
### 5 Site to the rear of existing housing development

- + Access already constructed.
- Existing layout & settlement grain entirely inappropriate and would be difficult to rectify.

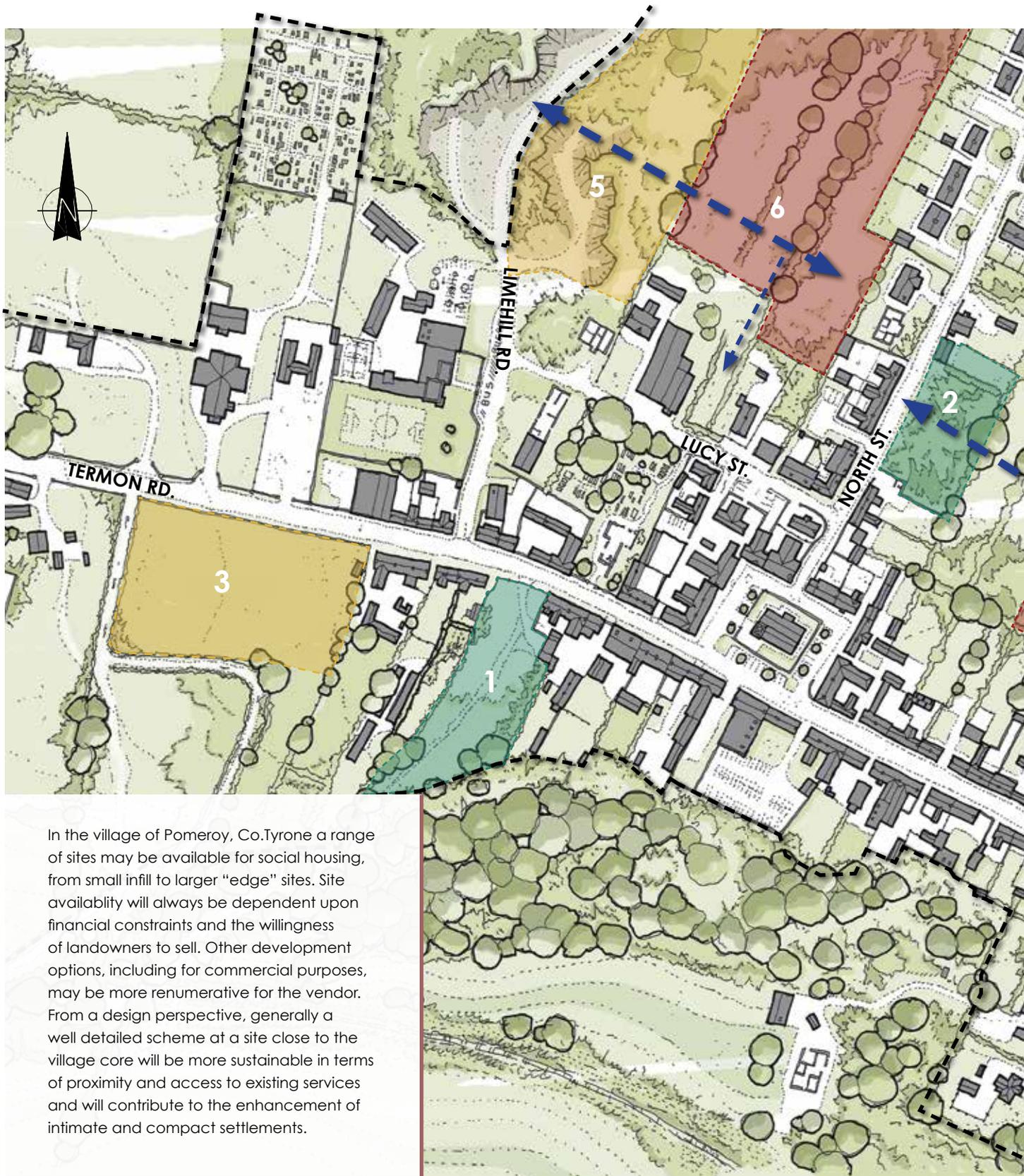
### 6 Sites at the settlement's edge

- Sites not large enough for 4 or more dwellings.
- More distant from the village's facilities.

Attical, Co.Down is a small village around a cross-roads located in the foothills of the Mourne, with an attractive recently constructed Chapel, a small shop, some older social housing and modern suburban style private dwellings. Due to its small size a limited range of sites are available. The most appropriate site is adjacent to the main junction at Attical Road, where development would contribute to the re-instatement of a more compact settlement form.



Social housing development options within the designated Development Limit of this small "crossroads" settlement.



In the village of Pomeroy, Co.Tyrone a range of sites may be available for social housing, from small infill to larger "edge" sites. Site availability will always be dependent upon financial constraints and the willingness of landowners to sell. Other development options, including for commercial purposes, may be more remunerative for the vendor. From a design perspective, generally a well detailed scheme at a site close to the village core will be more sustainable in terms of proximity and access to existing services and will contribute to the enhancement of intimate and compact settlements.

Social housing development options within the Village of Pomeroy, Co.Tyrone.



**1 Derelict site along Termon Rd. in the village core**

- + Compact infill site.
- + Attractive views over the countryside over the Valley towards the south.
- + Roadside frontage.
- + Visually integrated by existing woodland & surrounding buildings.

**2 Infill, roadside site at North St.**

- + Linear infill "greenfield" site.
- + Close to village "Diamond".
- + Roadside frontage
- Site slopes away to the north.

**3 Greenfield site adjacent to chapel at Termon Rd.**

- + Attractive views over the countryside.
- + Roadside frontage.
- On the edge of the village core.

**4 Site at Edendoit Rd.**

- + Would create an attractive urban edge to the village entrance.
- Low density development surrounds the site.

**5 Site at Limehill Rd.**

- + Large site with roadside frontage.
- Exposed site with little boundary planting.
- Issues with excavated levels.
- On the edge of the village.

**6 Sites to the rear of existing development**

- Backland with no appropriate relationship with the existing roads, however it could be suitable as "phase 2" development if there were development on the adjoining road frontages.

# Identifying a suitable site

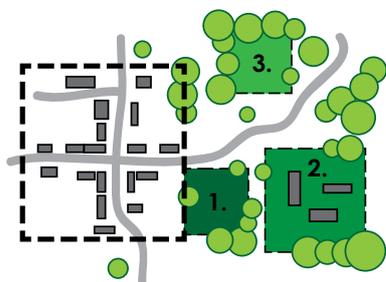
## outside **Small Settlements & Villages**

There are situations where it is neither feasible nor practical to deliver social housing within existing settlement limits. When this can be convincingly demonstrated, planning policy makes provision for social housing on the edge or close to the edge of a settlement, subject to a number of planning considerations. The tests for the circumstances when Planning Service will consider a site beyond the statutory development limit are set out in detail in Appendix A, but can be summarised as follows:-

- There is a specific need for social housing that settlement has been identified and confirmed by NIHE,
- The required housing cannot readily be provided within any existing settlement in the locality,
- Detailed examination of all potential housing sites within the settlement limit confirms the absence of any suitable site, and
- Any planning application is submitted by a Housing Association.

In this context Policy CTY5 of Planning Policy Statement 21 sets out a sequential test for identifying a site capable of planning permission with the following steps:-

1. The first planning preference is for a site adjoining the settlement limit, then
2. The second preference is for a site close to the settlement limit and presently either occupied by buildings or on land that is in a degraded or derelict condition, and finally
3. The third preference is for a site close to the settlement limit where any development is capable of visual integration.



Moneydig is a small “crossroads” settlement near Garvagh, Co.Londonderry. A number of dwellings “cluster” in a linear form south from the crossroads along Moneydig Rd., with significant groups of trees alongside.

### 1 In-fill site at the “crossroads”

- + Site is well enclosed on all sides by existing built development.
- + Development would re-enforce the “compactness” of the small settlement.

### 2 Backland to the west of the settlement

- + Can be visually integrated, maintaining a compact settlement.
- No direct road frontage.

### 3 Site at the southern edge of the small settlement

- + A large and un-used, in-fill site.
- + Nestled in a “dip” adjacent to Moneydig Rd., with higher ground to the west.
- + Existing mature hedges and trees on all boundaries.
- Could contribute to “ribbon development”

### 4 Sites at the settlement’s edge

- Development of these sites would not enhance the settlement’s compact form
- Backland sites some with limited access.
- Overly large and open, therefore difficult to design and visually integrate a compact layout with the landscape.

The Development Limit designated by the Area Plan has been drawn tightly around the existing development, with little opportunity for new groupings of four or more dwellings. If in the future a need for social housing should be established in the area, it may be necessary to identify a site outside the settlement limit consistent with Policy CTY5 of PPS 21. The plan below analyses site options in accordance with the first step; that is those adjoining the settlement limit.



Social housing options outside the Development Limit as defined by the Area Plan, in Moneydig, Co.L'derry.

From time to time opportunities may arise to develop sites containing existing buildings which are outside the development limit, in accordance with the second sequential test of Planning Policy Statement 21 CTY5. Such sites should be close to the development limit and contain either occupied buildings or buildings in a dilapidated condition.

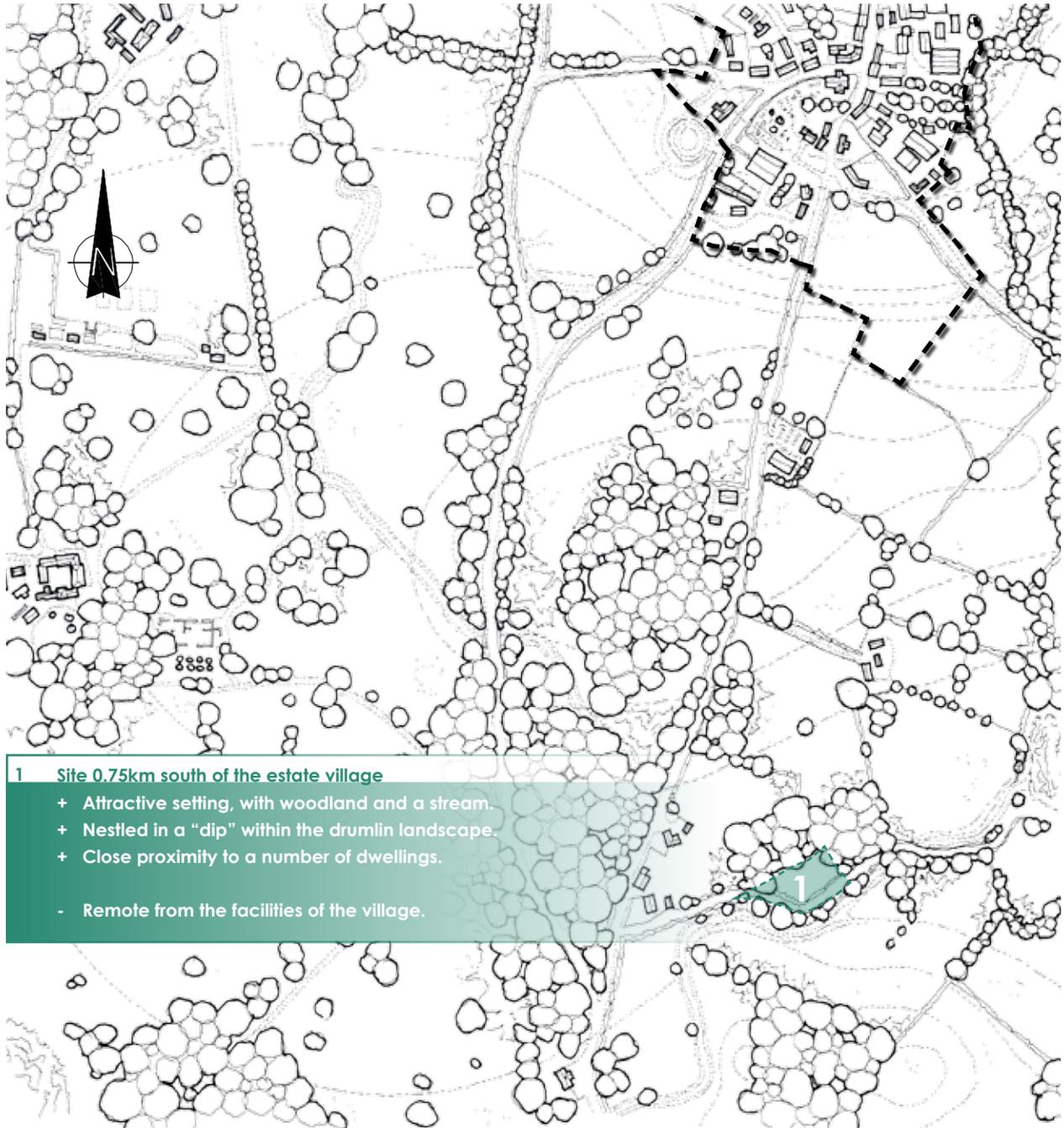
An example of this is at the small coastal settlement of Mill Bay, Island Magee, Co.Antrim. Just 200 metres outside the development limit is a small oyster fishery. It is currently an active and successful business, however for the purposes of this Guide it could represent a good example of an appropriate social housing development opportunity. This site could be preferable to sites that directly adjoin the development limit, where the topography rises steeply to the east, or sites to the north or south which would create ribbon development along Ballylumford Road. The re-development of the oyster fishery in contrast would not cause any considerable adverse impact upon the settlement and would bring visual enhancement relative to the existing functional buildings.



**1 Oyster fishery at the foreshore of Larne Lough**

- + Contains a number of existing buildings.
- + Although a shoreside location, it is well sheltered by an existing band of woodland to the north.
- + Attractive views across Larne Lough.
- Former light industrial use may require some contaminated land mitigation.

Social housing development opportunity outside the designated Development Limit, at the site of an oyster fishery which contains a number of dilapidated buildings at Mill Bay, Island Magee, Co.Antrim.



**1 Site 0.75km south of the estate village**

- + Attractive setting, with woodland and a stream.
- + Nestled in a "dip" within the drumlin landscape.
- + Close proximity to a number of dwellings.
- Remote from the facilities of the village.

If there are no suitable sites adjoining the existing settlement and no replaceable buildings nearby the third sequential test of Planning Policy Statement 21 CTY5 allows for possible small scale social housing on a site capable of visual integration.

Near the small village of Tynan, Co. Armagh within the drumlin landscape with many belts of mature woodland, the identified site, suitable for 5 or 6 dwellings, located off the main road south of the village, is well screened by mature trees and hedges. A number of individual dwellings are also close by, with the potential for the proposed dwellings to connect to the existing utility network.

A social housing development opportunity outside the designated Development Limit, at a site capable of visual integration, near Tynan, Co. Armagh.

# 04

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## Considering **site characteristics**

Orientation

Shelter

Slopes

Character

Neighbours



Contemporary social housing at Edinbane, Isle of Skye, Scotland by *Rural Design Architects* for *Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association*. Rural Scotland and rural NI share many affinities, and lessons can be learnt from each other.

# Orientation

Often insufficient attention is given to orientation. This has considerable significance not just for the potential to optimize solar gain, but also to contribute to the sense of warmth and well-being that bright, sunny rooms bring.

In our high latitude location with its cool temperate climate it is especially important to maximize the benefits of sun and light.

## Using the site

The key to optimising solar gain is to orientate the main habitable rooms towards the south, ideally on south sloping sites. This is best facilitated by streets orientated within 30 degrees of an east-west axis. Other patterns can be accommodated using various arrangements of single room depth housetypes to intelligently orientate habitable rooms, creating useable sun pockets for each dwelling at different times of the day.

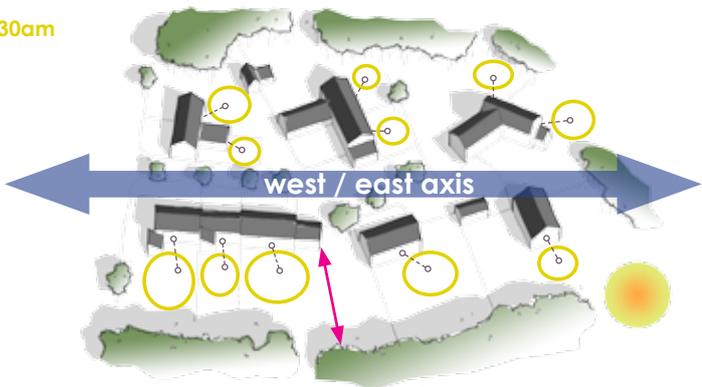
### street patterns

**The aim is to ensure the built form or existing landscaping does not create significant overshadowing. Appropriate distances should be maintained to achieve this.**

**New landscaping can then be strategically placed for shading, shelter and privacy.**

**Ensure habitable rooms are connected to the sun pockets, to facilitate indoor/outdoor living in pleasant weather.**

**21st June 08:30am**



**21st June 03:30pm**

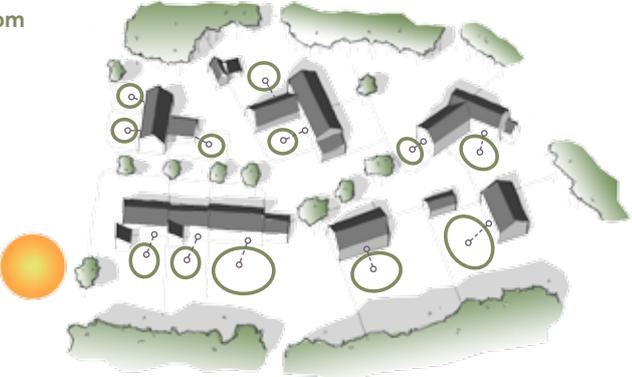


Illustration of how the orientation of the street pattern influences the creation of pleasant internal and external environments, which avails of the path of sun throughout the day.

## Views

The benefits of available attractive views should also be considered. Views or vistas obviously can be towards all directions. If appropriate views to the north can be utilised with modest size windows, framing what can be seen. As a minimum a window from a habitable room should allow a seated person to look out.



In this development the main habitable rooms and spaces are orientated eastwards towards the attractive views of the Firth of Clyde and provided with large glazed areas.

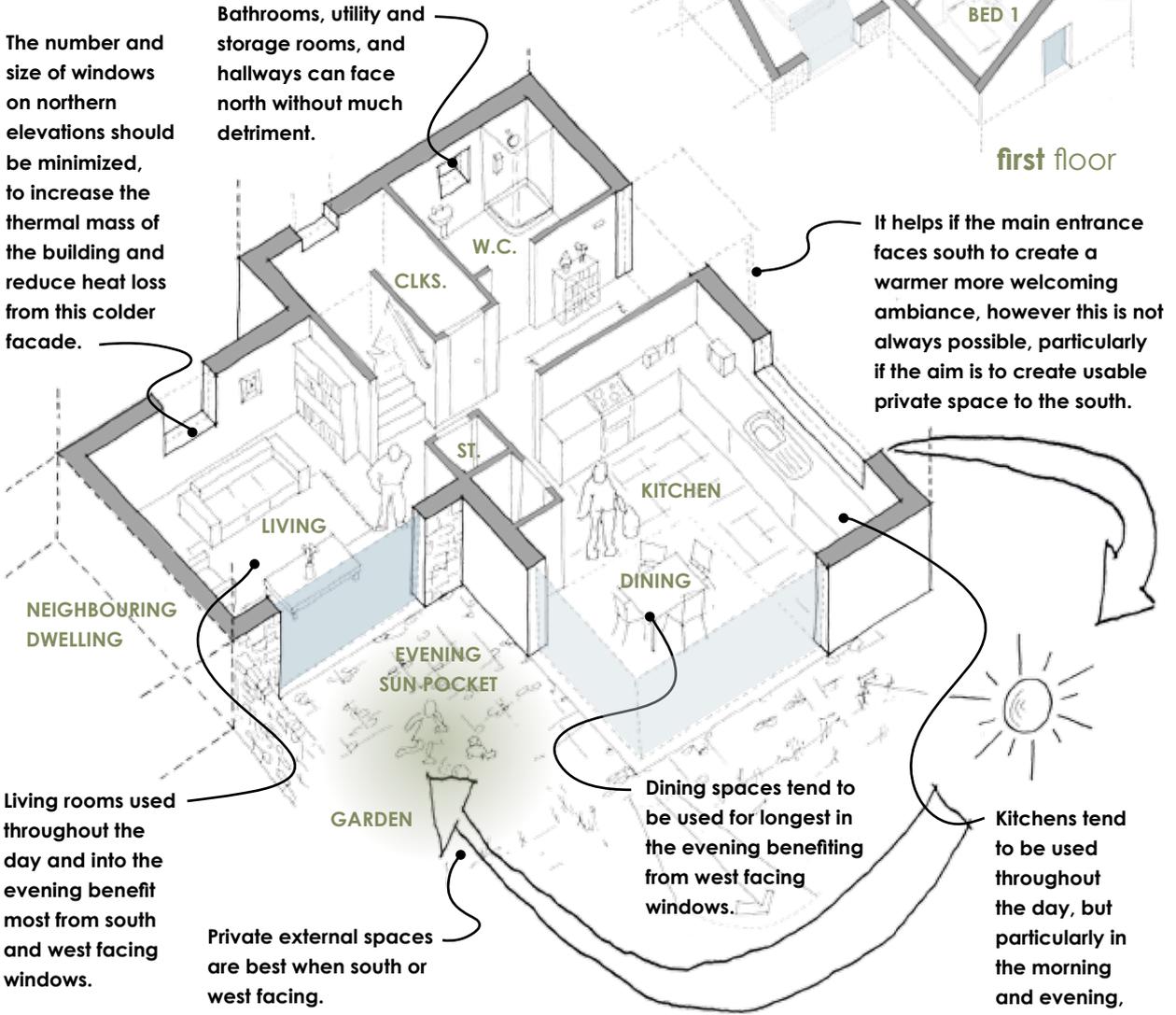


Social dwellings at Dunoon, Argyll and Bute, Scotland by Gokay Devici for Fyne Initiatives, are designed to avail of the attractive views across the Firth of Clyde.

The orientation of the rooms of a dwelling

One of the advantages of single room depth dwellings, traditional in our rural landscapes, is the ability to place the largest windows on a range of facades relating to the path of the sun. The result is a room which will benefit from solar gain and high daylight factors. Clever use of building forms using returns and build outs can also create sun pockets when the overall site layout does not facilitate the perfect south facing orientation for private spaces.

Bedrooms can benefit from the rising sun with east facing windows.



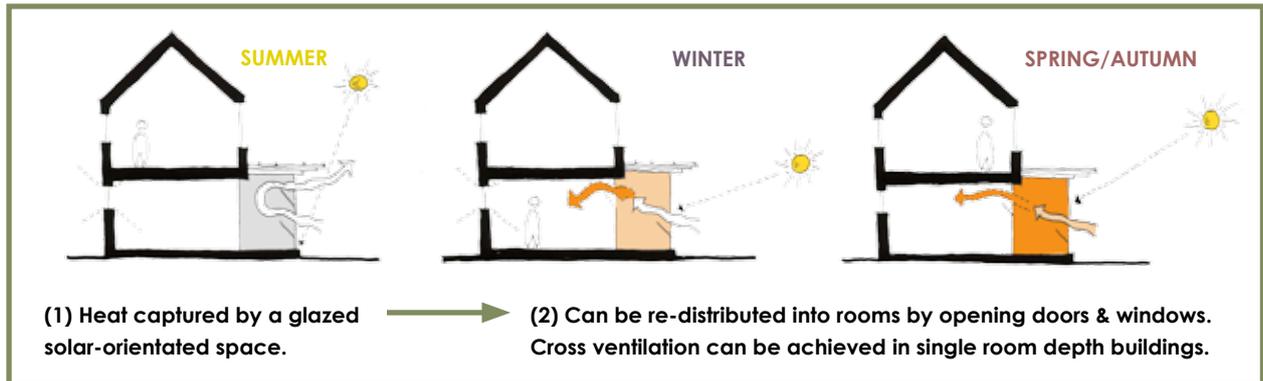
ground floor

Aim to have a roof slope facing within 30 degrees of south, to facilitate the effective insallation of photovoltaic and solar thermal panels.

A sketch lay-out demonstrating how important the orientation of rooms can be in relation to the benefits that can be gained from the path of the sun throughout the day.

## Creating sunspaces

A sunspace will nearly always be a usable semi-external room, but will be subject to large temperature swings unless carefully designed with high performance glass and summer shading such as adjacent trees, pivoting louvers/shutters, and roof overhang. These are most appropriate with single room depth dwellings as windows can be placed on both facades to maintain high levels of daylighting to the habitable room. An area of glazing, orientated towards the sun, of approximately 10% of the floor area of the building to be heated, combined with natural ventilation can be effective.



A notional scheme at Tynan, Co.Armagh, demonstrating the use of shading features to create comfortable living conditions in rooms/sunspaces orientated towards the south.

# Shelter

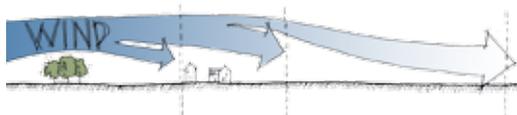
There is not only considerable merit in designing sheltered, sunny, private external space for outdoor activity such as children's play, gardening or simply sitting in the sun, but also of availing of a more sheltered location and siting to reduce the adverse effects of wind chill, contributing to reduced heating costs for the dwelling itself. There is much to be learnt from previous generations, who availed of topographical hollows, built in the lee of hills, planted hedgerows and, on a grander scale, built walled gardens; all to create and reinforce the attributes of a pleasant micro climate.

## 1 PLACEMENT OF BUILDINGS

Site buildings with an aim of achieving sheltered pocket spaces. Clever placement of outbuildings can protect rear gardens from harsh winds.

## 2 LANDSCAPING ACTS AS A WINDBREAK

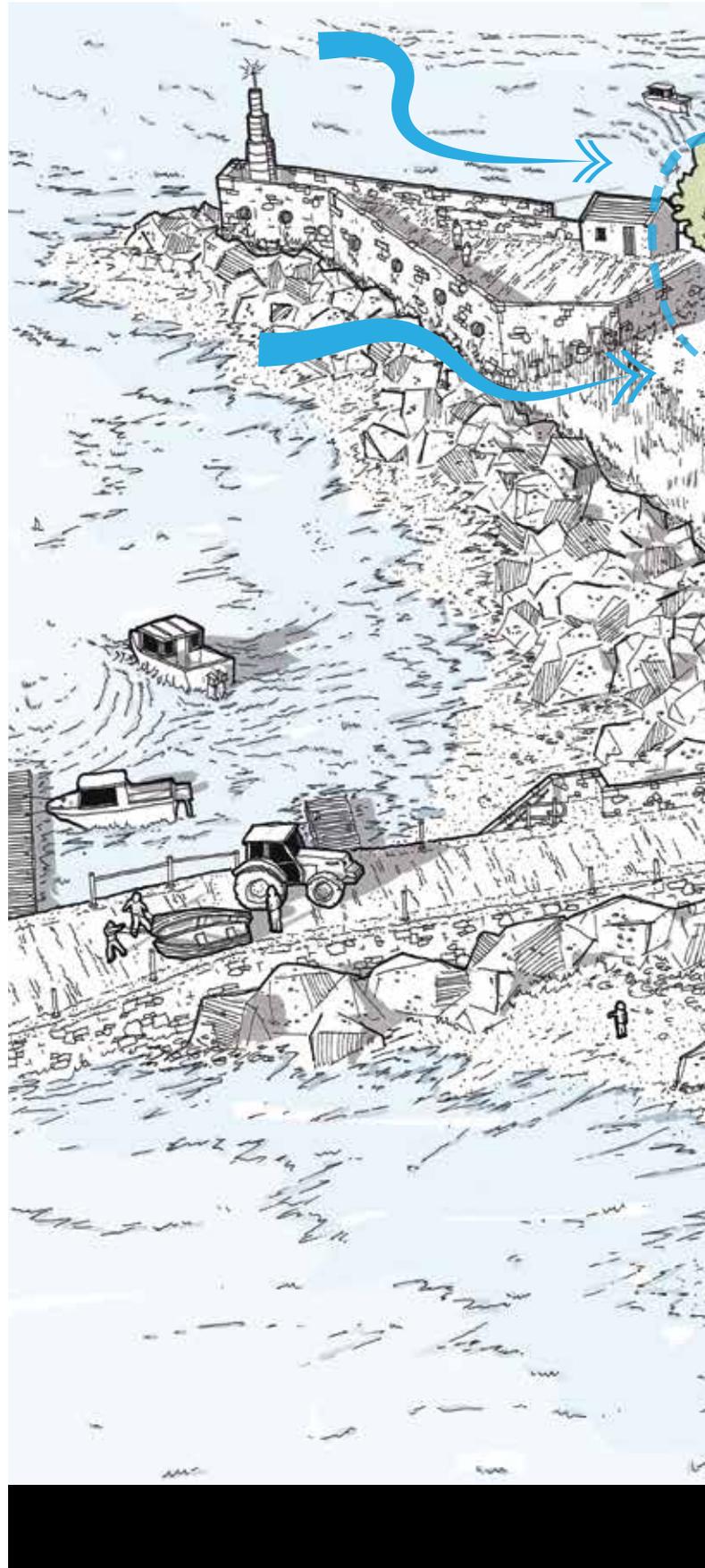
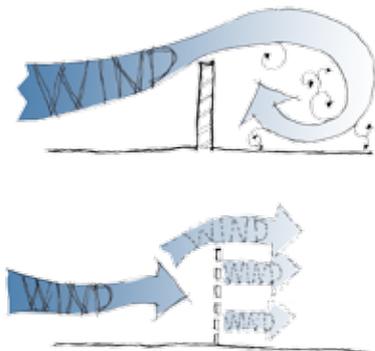
Wind speed will be reduced for distances up to 20 times the height of the shelter on the downwind side.

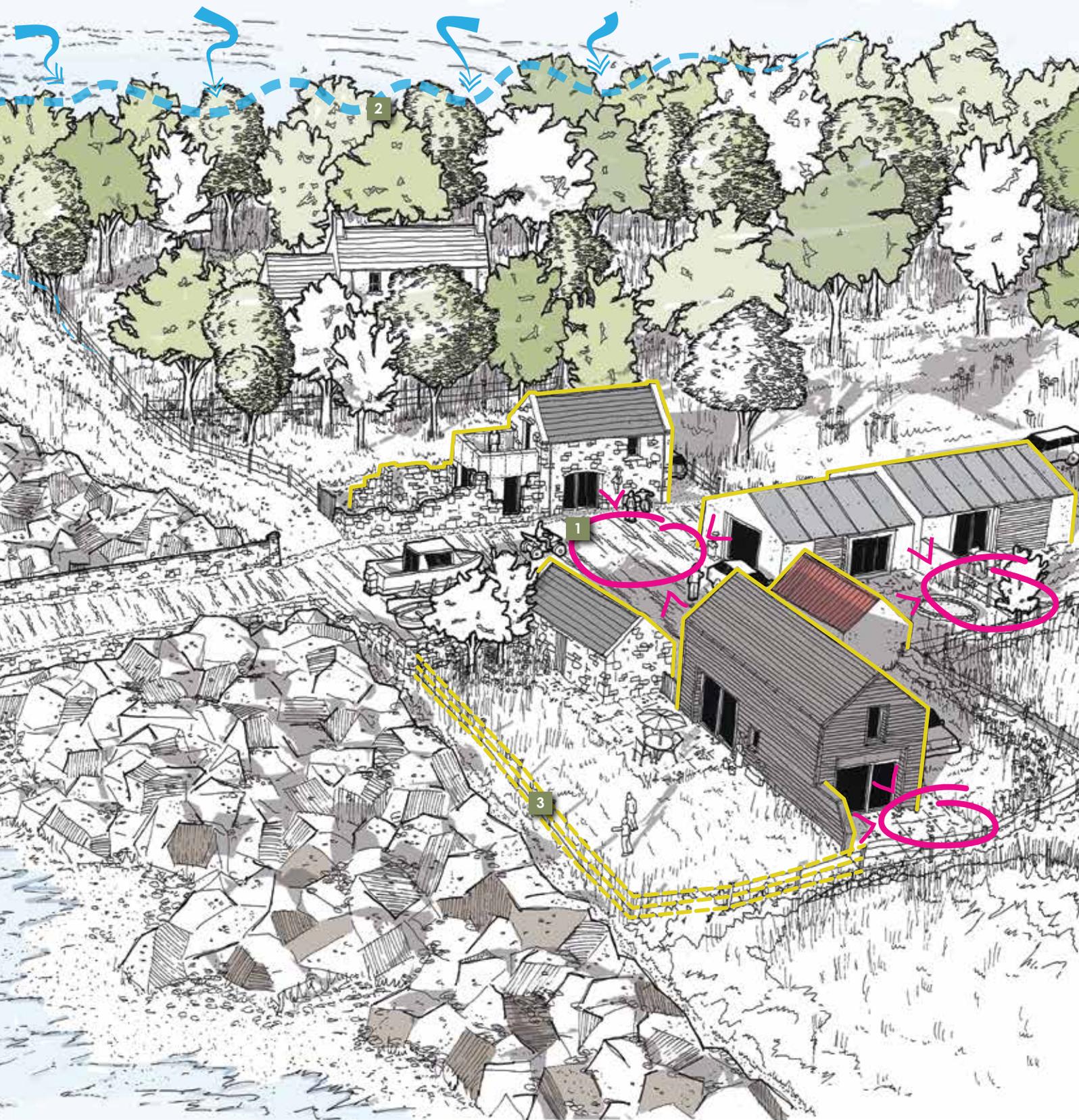


New tree and shrub planting both create shelter and enhance existing shelter.

## 3 SEMI-PERMEABLE SCREENS

These can reduce wind speeds, i.e. post & wire fencing with planting.





A notional scheme at Mill Bay, Island Magee, Co. Antrim, demonstrating design features and principles used to build upon the natural shelter at this windy coastal location.

# Slopes

Where there are significant slopes, these need to be considered as part of the design process. In particular the drumlins which are the archetypal topographical feature of a considerable part of lowland Northern Ireland, typically have slopes of between 1:8 and 1:20 and can be steeper in places.

Development on steeper slopes can create particularly interesting places, but the contemporary emphasis on standards, based on laudable safety and accessibility concerns, can be a major inhibition and difficulty for the creative designer. The steeper the slope, the greater the challenge of delivering an attractive contemporary development.

The steepest slopes are probably best avoided, such are the difficulties of creating an attractive, safe and accessible residential environment within the context of obligatory standards and the additional costs incurred. Where there are significant slope variations within the site, there is merit in avoiding building on the steepest slopes, which can then be landscaped, to the benefit of wider amenity.



This scheme addresses a change in level of the site by creating an entrance for one unit directly from the street and the other from a lower court yard.

Development on slopes create opportunities to vary roofscapes and divide building forms into smaller components aiding visual integration.



“Stepping” social housing units at Plockton, Scotland by Rural Design Architects for Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association.

**1 STEPPING DOWN THE SLOPE**

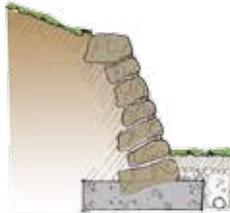
Traditionally the “farmhouse” was constructed a foot or two higher than any adjoining outhouses. The visual appearance of this common characteristic could be replicated in modern day rural social housing schemes.

**2 MINIMISE CUT AND FILL**

This not only involves considerable earth-moving, under-building and retention structure costs, but is also expensive and can be exceedingly visually intrusive.

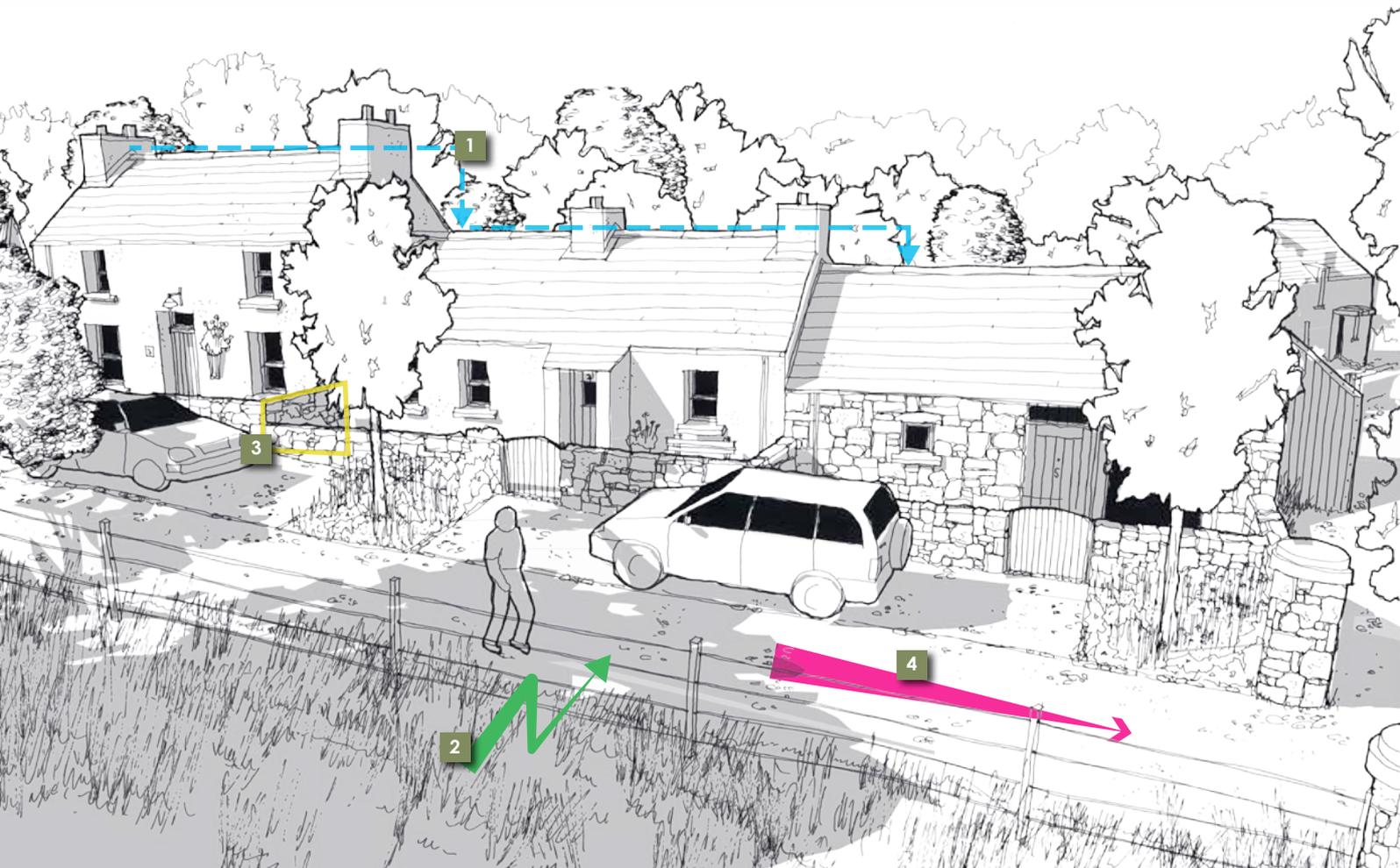
**3 ATTRACTIVE RETAINING STRUCTURES**

A well constructed natural stone retaining wall is an attractive method of addressing necessary differences of level. They will age to become part of the landscape.



**4 ROADS SHOULD BE TO ADOPTABLE STANDARDS**

DRD Roads Service will adopt roads up to a maximum gradient of 1:10, however to comply with *Lifetimehomes* standards, roads at social housing developments should not exceed 1:20.



An illustration of how rural social dwellings step up a hill at a notional scheme at Mulleek, Co. Fermanagh, demonstrating design features and principles to apply when designing schemes on sloping land.

# Character

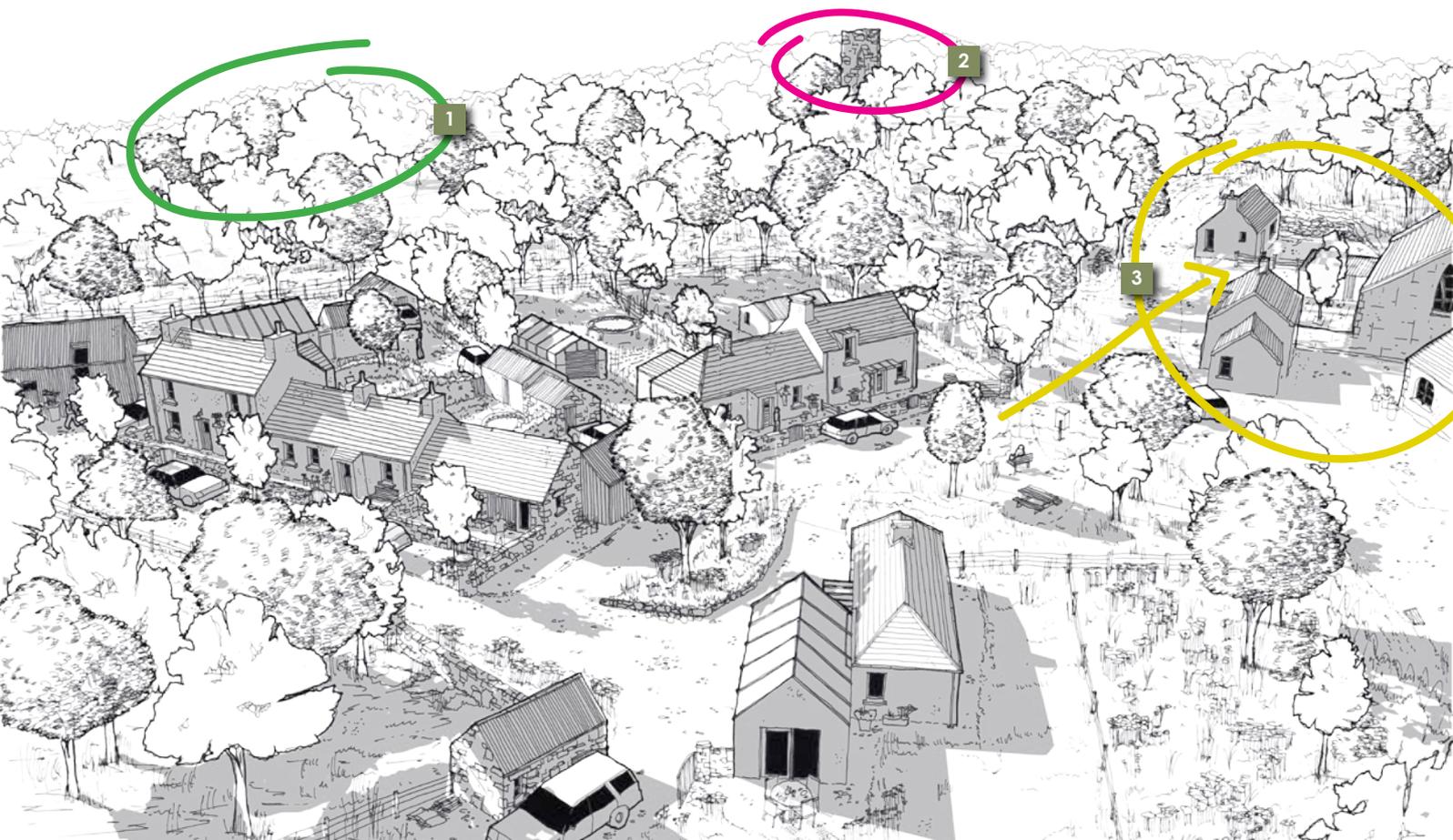
It is important to appreciate a development site's landscape context. Northern Ireland Environment Agencies (NIEA) database of 130 Landscape Character areas of Northern Ireland is a useful starting point. NIEA's other information databases including those for Built Heritage, Monuments and Listed Buildings, help to profile the area's character and identify potential constraints.

Successful proposals enhance the best elements of the area's character, or where eroded, create character.

**1 NATURAL CHARACTER**  
The scheme is set within an existing clearing on the edge of Castle Caldwell Forest. All existing healthy mature trees within the site have been retained.

**2 BUILT CHARACTER**  
Any new development in terms of scale & location should respect the remains of the Old Mulleek Church and its setting.

**3 COMMUNITY CHARACTER**  
The scheme provides homes for up to 8 families, who will choose to live & contribute to the locality. Often they will have a connection to this relatively remote community.



A notional scheme within the dispersed rural community of Mulleek, Co.Fermanagh. Identifying elements of the place's character that any proposed development should be aware of and respect.

## Settlement grain

Well mannered, housing proposals will have due regard to the "grain", and layout of the settlement and neighbouring buildings.

### 1 INAPPROPRIATE SETTLEMENT GRAIN

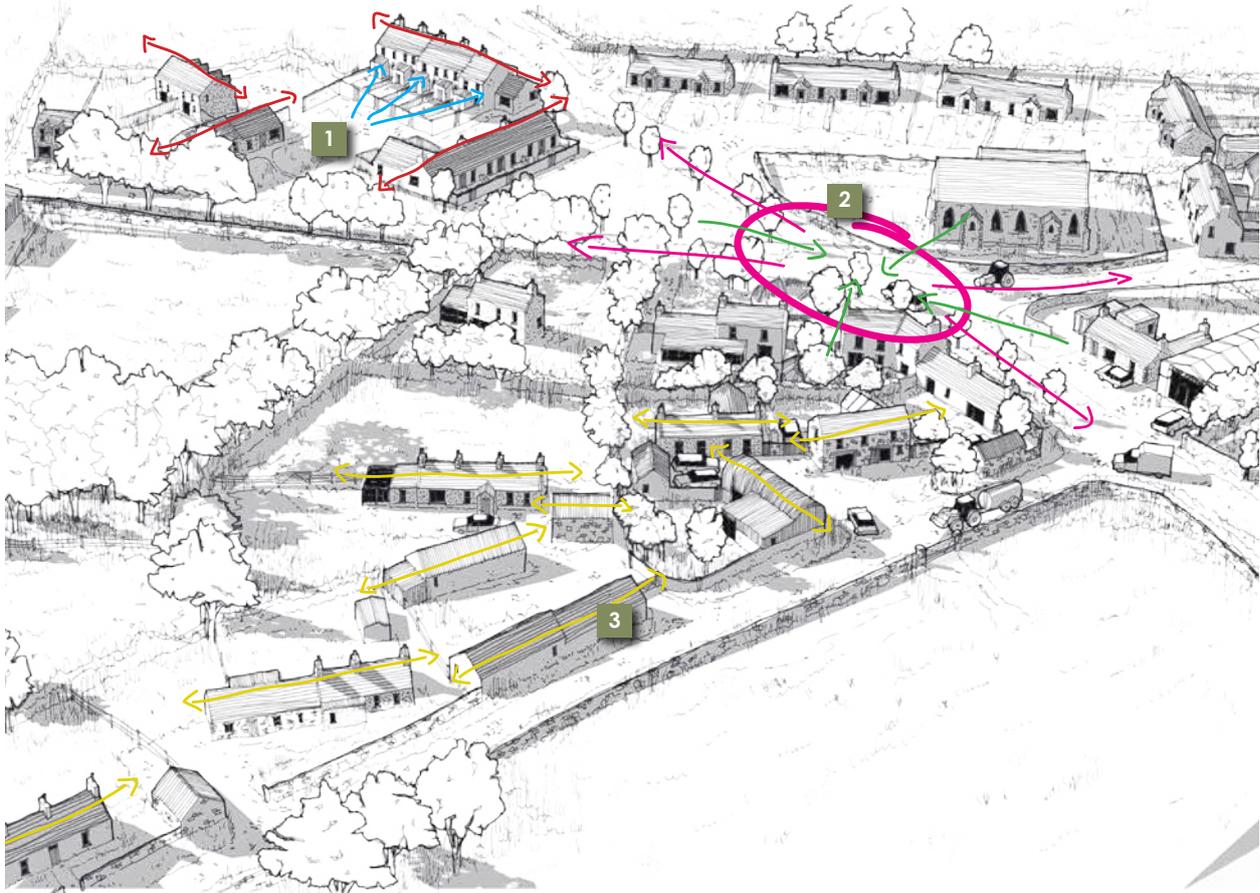
The character of most of our rural settlements has been diminished by inappropriate suburban style cul-de-sac layouts. New groups of rural housing should avoid this pattern.

### 2 THE HEART OF THE SETTLEMENT

Many of our smaller rural settlements, have distinctive grouped forms, normally linear, radiating from a focal building, it is appropriate to locate new development as close to this nucleus as possible. The proposed buildings are laid out in a formal structure to front the existing and proposed "village green" at the heart of the settlement.

### 3 ESTABLISHED STREET & BUILDING PATTERNS

In this case it would be more appropriate for new development to respect the original linear form of the settlement by placing buildings along the existing roadside or facilitating permeability by creating less formal streets. At Livins Rd. at the edge of the settlement the notional scheme continues the linear form of cottages & outbuildings alongside this country road.

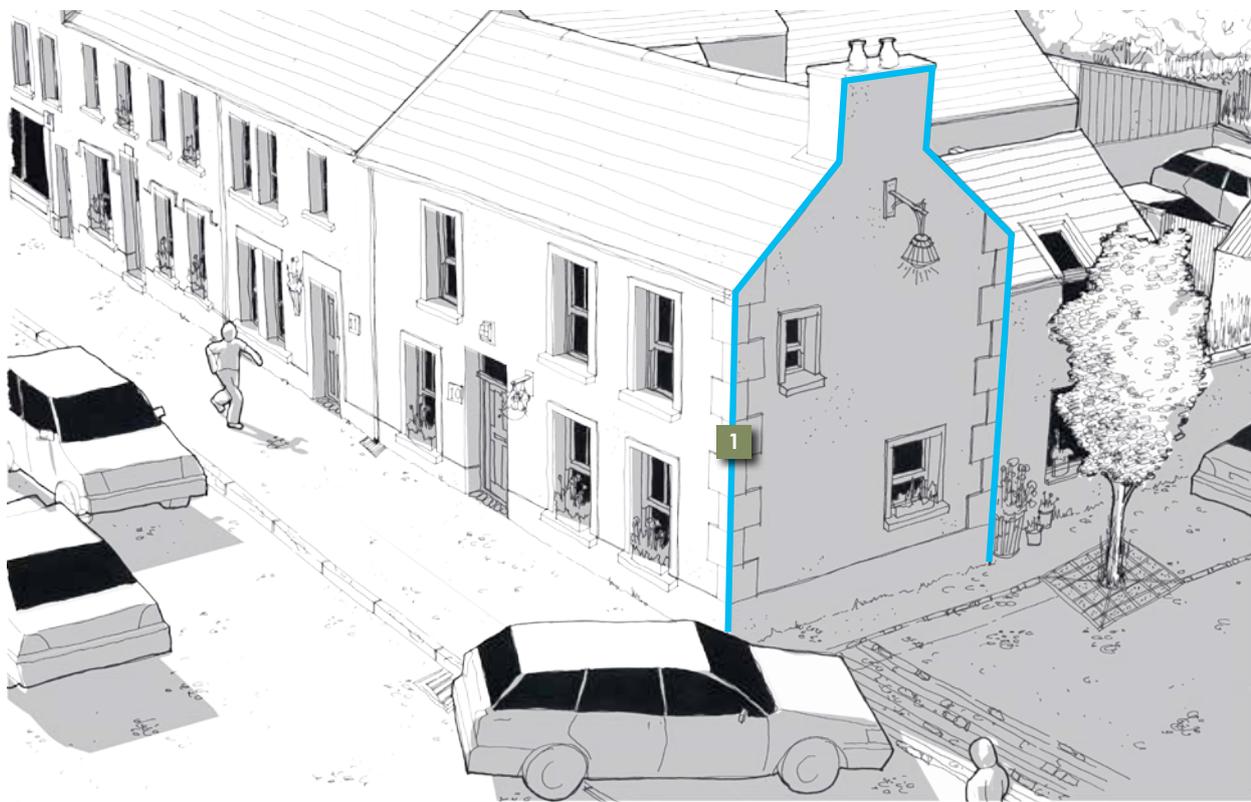


A notional social housing scheme in the heart of Atitilal, Co.Down. It demonstrates how the best aspects of the existing settlement grain and neighbouring land uses have influenced the layout.

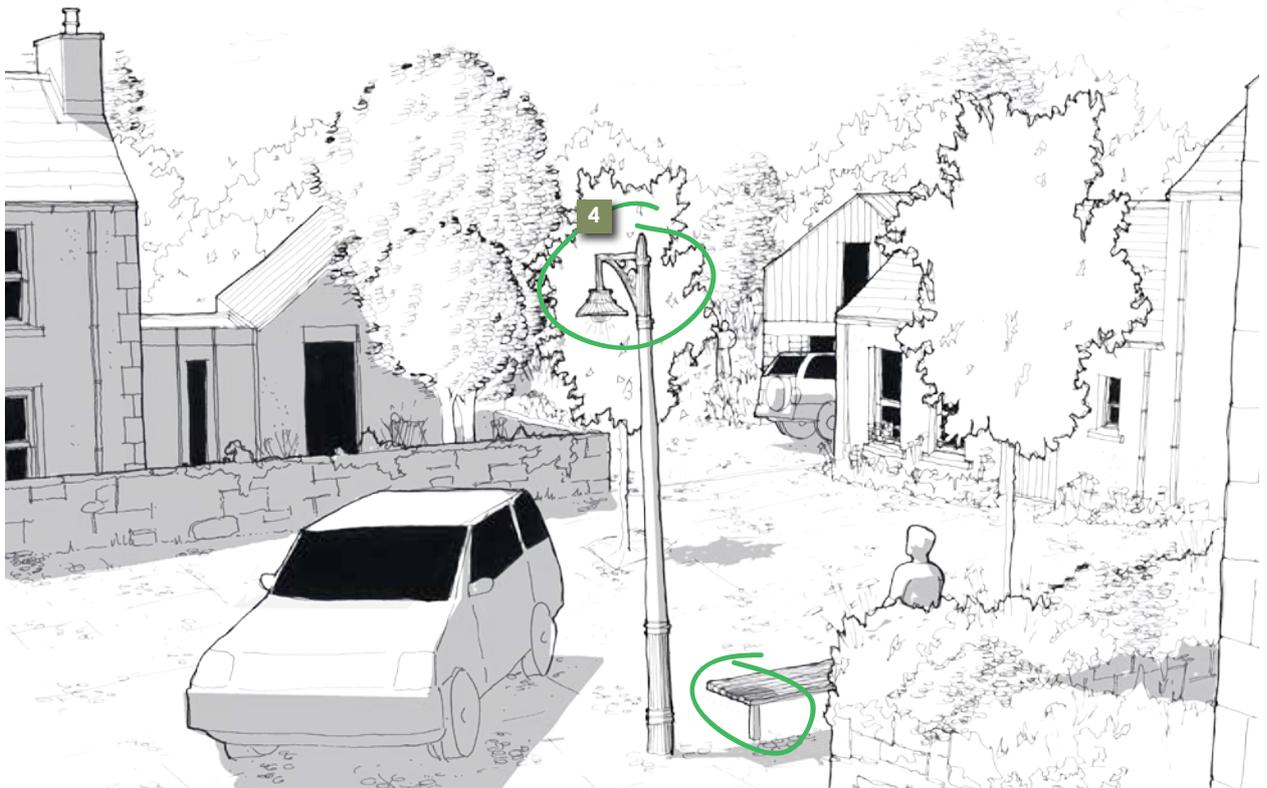
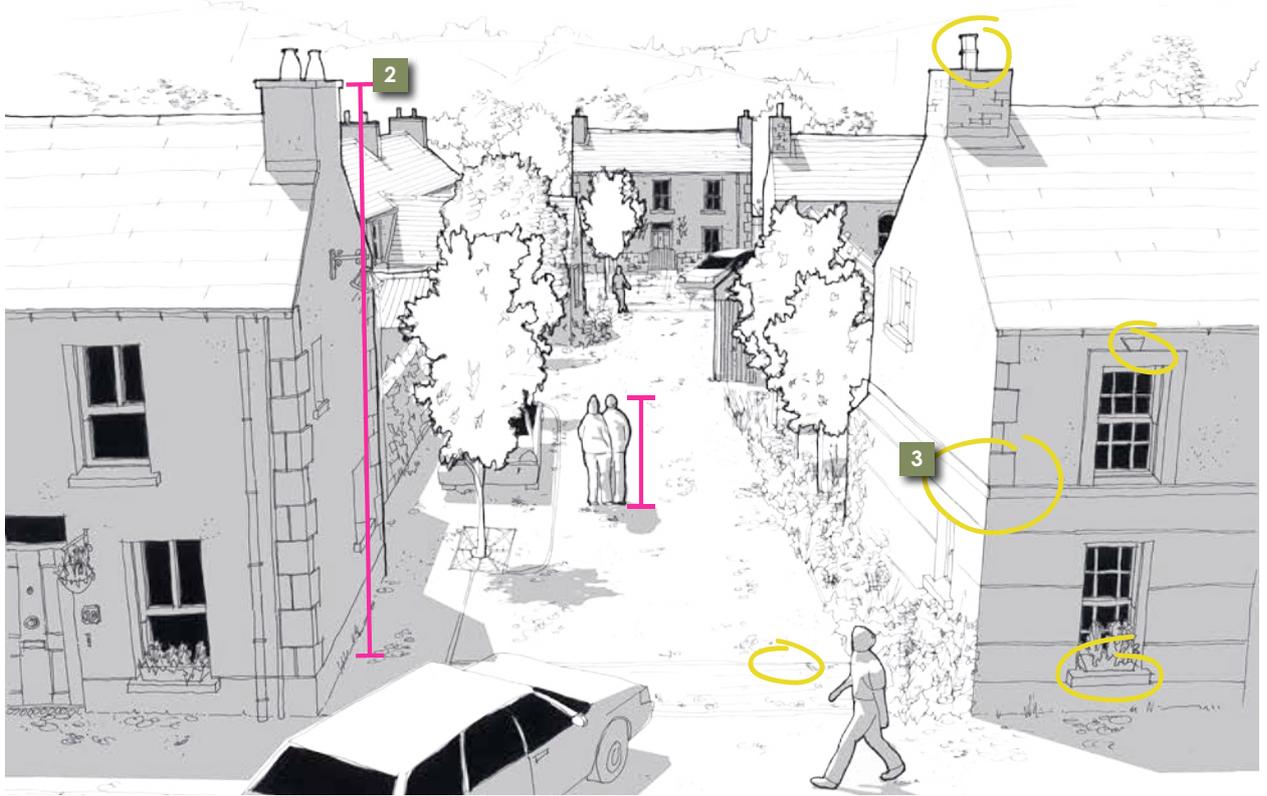
## Placemaking

Proposals should create new rural places by respecting and taking cues from the existing character. Particularly in village Conservation and Townscape Character Areas the context is likely to have a major influence on design. Careful consideration should be given to those specific characteristics of the built environment that contribute to its quality. This will often be the village's built heritage of a particular style or era.

- 1 FORM**  
Our small settlements and villages tended to have fairly simple building forms, with more complex returns & extensions added at later dates. Aim to replicate the original shapes & layouts.
- 2 SCALE**  
New buildings should not dominate their setting including adjacent buildings. Respecting proportions, roof pitches & heights is particularly important.
- 3 MATERIALS**  
It is preferable to continue to use the materials that made the place distinct. This ethos can be applied to both traditional and contemporary designs.
- 4 DETAILS**  
The designer should avoid “everywhere” features. It is beneficial to include design elements distinctive to the place. Also, good details are created by skilled craftsmen using good materials.

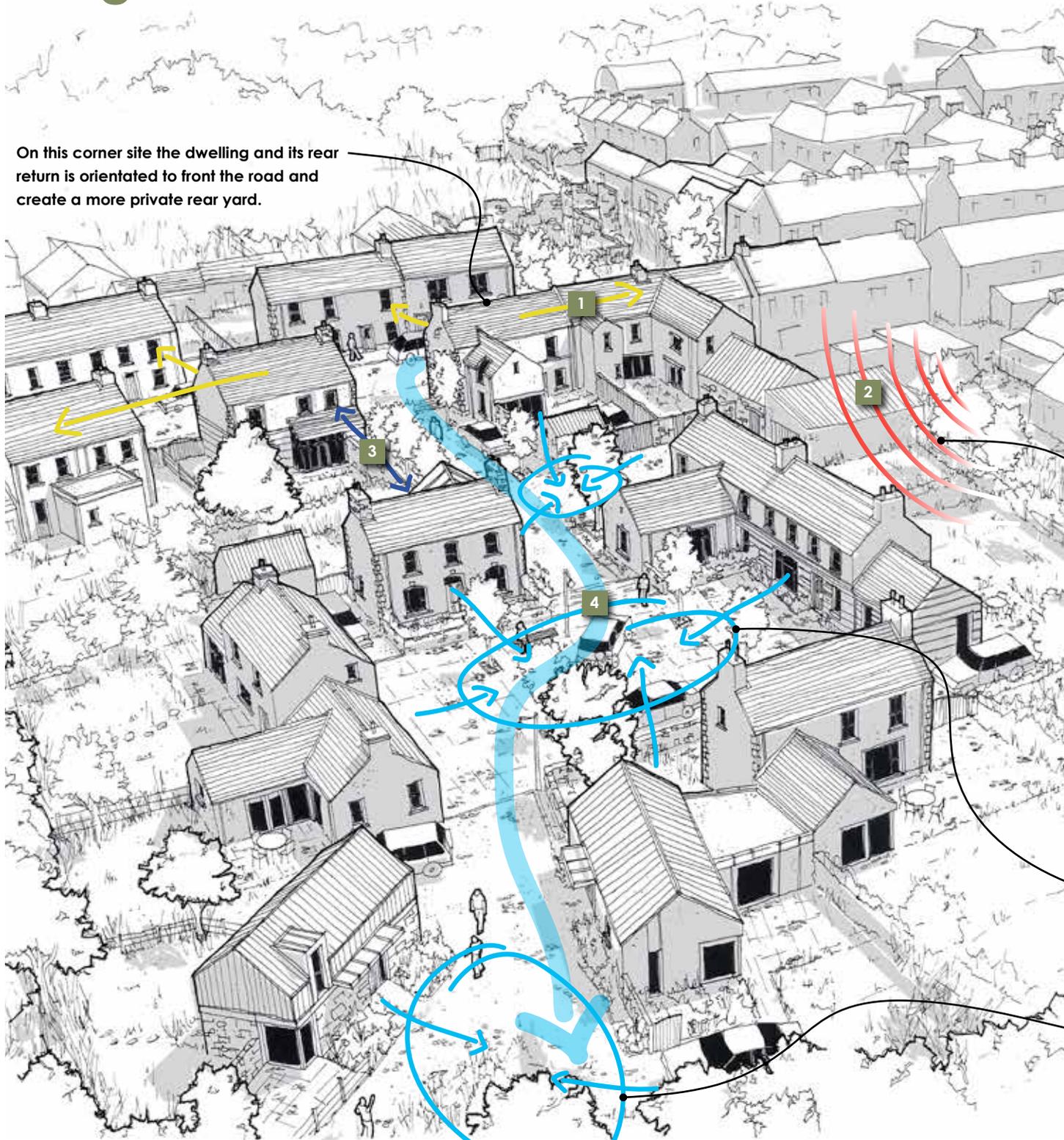


Illustrations of a notional scheme within the Area of Townscape Character at Pomeroy, Co.Tyrone, demonstrating how the scheme can be designed to respect and respond to the distinctive features of the village.

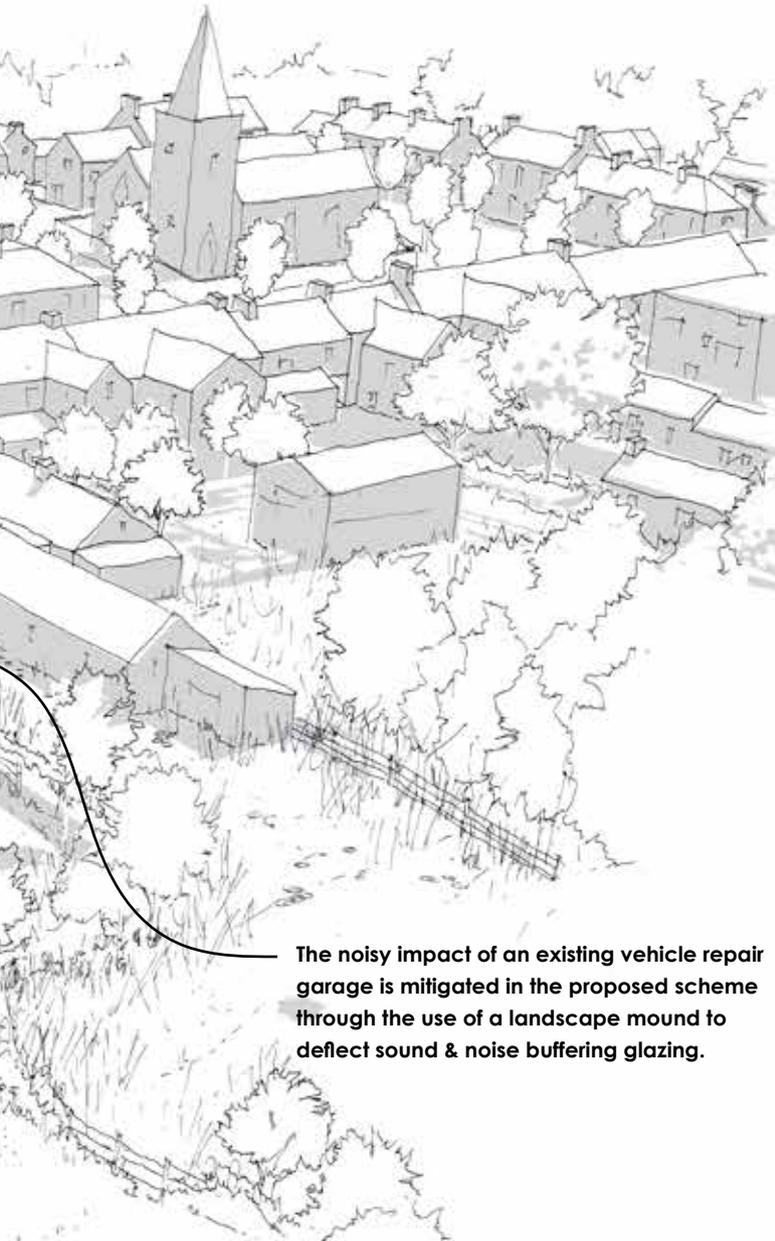


# Neighbours

On this corner site the dwelling and its rear return is orientated to front the road and create a more private rear yard.



A notional scheme at a brownfield site in the small village of Pomeroy, Co.Tyrone. It demonstrates how to design schemes that can benefit from, and will respect and improve neighbouring uses.



The noisy impact of an existing vehicle repair garage is mitigated in the proposed scheme through the use of a landscape mound to deflect sound & noise buffering glazing.

The paved housing square, overlooked by a number of dwellings has south facing seating and street trees. It provides a pleasant place for a chat, or for younger children to play.

The square leads to woodland and the “railway walk”, providing a link to an “around the village” walk.

A new social housing development should be sited where adjacent land uses will not cause any detriment to the future residents of the proposal, and the impact of the proposal on adjoining uses should also be considered physically and socially.

**1 RESPECT EXISTING SCALE, MASSING, BUILDING LINES AND ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER**

Provide homes that “fit” with existing dwellings and streets. They should not “shout out,” but become a part of the settlement.

**2 PROXIMITY TO “BAD NEIGHBOURS” MAY REQUIRE MITIGATION MEASURES**

Often the operations of rural businesses can have an impact on residential living. However, features added to boundary treatments or acoustic glazing can be used to mitigate the effects of any conflicting neighbouring use.

**3 RESPECT EXISTING AND CREATE NEW PRIVATE SPACE**

Ensure there is a reasonable level of privacy for all dwellings. Ideally there should be at least 20 metres between the rear facades of dwellings.

**4 CREATE OVERLOOKED AND SECURE PLACES TO FACILITATE INTERACTION BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS**

Generally, rural dwellers like to know their neighbour. They may help each other out or just “pop round for a chat”.



At St Josephs Court Sheltered Housing in Gorey, County Wexford by Paul Keogh Architects, seating has been designed into the front of this dwelling, facilitating a comfortable place for neighbours to have a chat.

# 05

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## Considering **the scheme layout**

**Layout & roads** considerations

Considering **access**

Considering the definition of **boundaries**

Creating appropriate **private** and **semi-private** spaces

Integrating **landscaping**

Enhancing the **public realm**

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Affordable housing at Kilmeena new village within the stunning landscape of Conemara, Co.Mayo by Cox Power Architects for Mayo County Council.

# Layout and roads considerations

Appropriate site layout is a key element in rural place-making. Influenced by site context it primarily involves the designer arranging the dwellings, roads and areas of carparking in a coherent fashion.

The way these three elements are addressed in rural areas is fundamentally different from how it would be done in an urban context. The more rural schemes, for example at crossroads, should feel looser and generally appear more random with a combination of spaces framed by the built and soft (landscaped) elements. In villages, more structure is appropriate with more regular and built up spaces.



An attractive and functional layout, reminiscent of historical rural patterns at this affordable housing scheme at Burnside, Plockton by Rural Design Architects for Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association.

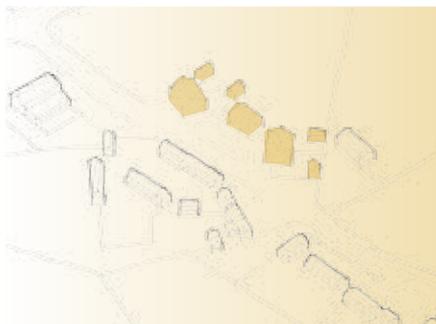
## Dwelling form and arrangement

Achieving a natural and pleasant rural layout is closely linked with the dwelling types and forms used. Traditional rural building forms were simple, narrow gabled, rectangular shapes. Secondary components were often linked, of varying height and length but always smaller than the main element and also narrow gabled (building form is discussed in greater detail later in this Guide). If layouts are done with pattern book housetypes, as often used in modern day social housing, the result is a series of identical "box" forms which sit uneasily with each other and are alien to traditional rural built forms.

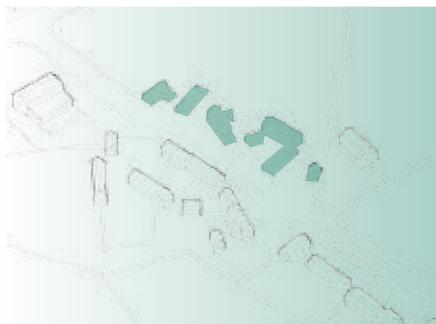
It is the aim of this Guide to promote individual character in rural housing groupings influenced by traditional forms.



This sketch shows the typical modern social housing response, using "box" narrow frontage deep plan semi-detached dwellings, which in terms of functionality and area bands "tick all the boxes". This solution does not respond to the setting.



Even with the layout principles of "clachan" development applied, for example irregular building alignments and shared spaces, standardised dwellings, as in this sketch, sit uneasily in the site, with each other, and with the adjacent established roadside development.



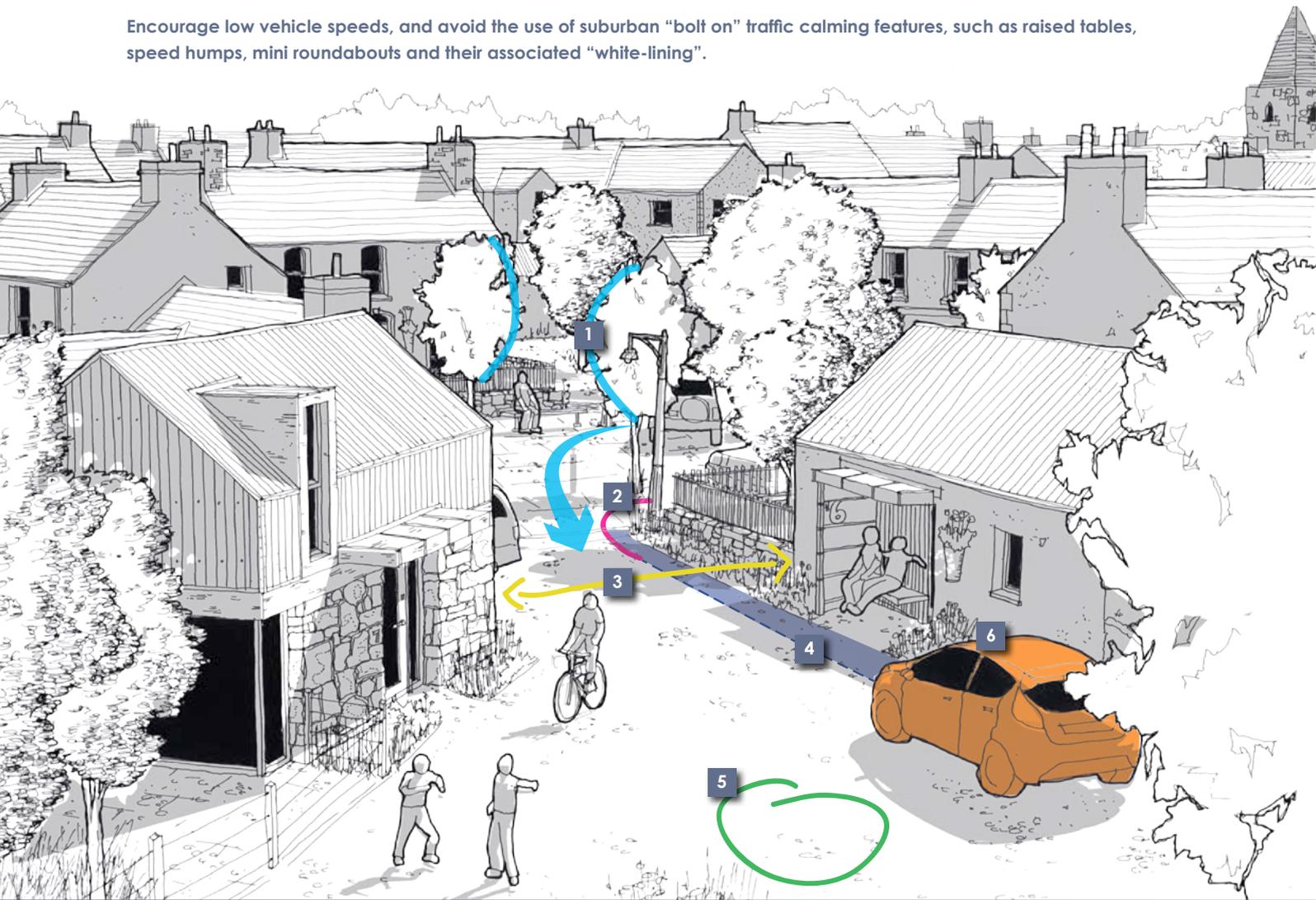
This is the best solution, with variations in the floor plans, heights and scale of mainly detached dwellings creating a series of seemingly haphazard irregular external spaces, each with a purpose (i.e. discreet parking). The scheme responds to the adjacent established development, creating a place that appears to have grown over time, adding visual variation and distinctiveness, apparent even before architectural style or landscaping has been applied.

A rural development opportunity at a crossroads settlement. It demonstrates the importance of dwelling form within a cluster and its ability to create appropriate places.

## Roads and streets

Roads serving modern rural social schemes tend to appear suburban, where footways and carriageways are generally separated by kerbs, barriers & markings. Traditionally, in rural environments pedestrians and traffic shared the same surface. Due to the small scale and very modest volume of traffic generated by rural social housing schemes, the shared surface layout is generally the most appropriate.

Encourage low vehicle speeds, and avoid the use of suburban “bolt on” traffic calming features, such as raised tables, speed humps, mini roundabouts and their associated “white-lining”.



- 1 LANDSCAPE “DEFLECTING” TRAFFIC PATH
- 2 SMALL CORNER RADII
- 3 STREET NARROWED BY BUILDINGS & WALLS

- 4 VISUAL CONTRAST FOR DISABLED USERS
- 5 APPROPRIATE SURFACE TREATMENTS
- 6 “ON STREET” CAR PARKING

A shared surface layout at a notional scheme in Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone, demonstrating the characteristics that make this the most appropriate road type for a small social housing scheme.

A traditional road with adjoining footpath can be appropriate at schemes within settlements, where opportunities exist to link with existing pedestrian routes or where there is a relatively large volume of traffic.

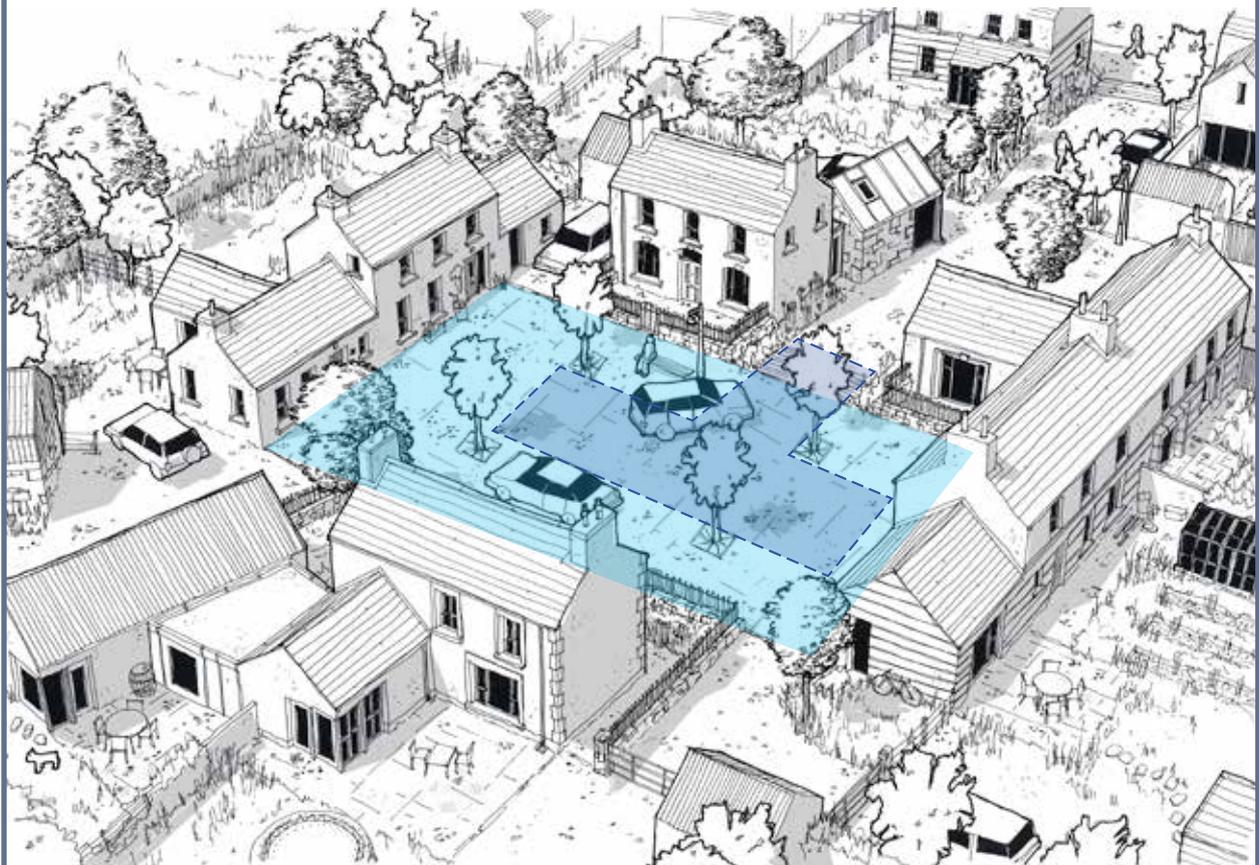
As with shared surfaces, the principles of encouraging low vehicle speeds through design, not by "bolt on" features also applies.

Although it is common to maintain a constant bitmac finish to this type of road, matching that adjoining, it is aesthetically pleasing to use a contrasting material for footpaths such as pavements or bound gravel. This reduces the perceived width of the road encouraging the motorist to reduce their speed and also providing good visual contrast for the visually impaired.

## turning spaces

Turning areas are a particular issue in rural road layouts, They should be avoided by creating permeable streets, however sometimes this is not possible and they are necessary. The typical suburban bitmaced turning head with its high kerbs and detached bungalows arranged in a circular arrangement around it is particularly characterless.

The turning area should not be obvious, rather it should be contained within the arrangement of buildings to create formal spaces or yards, which are more characteristic of rural forms.

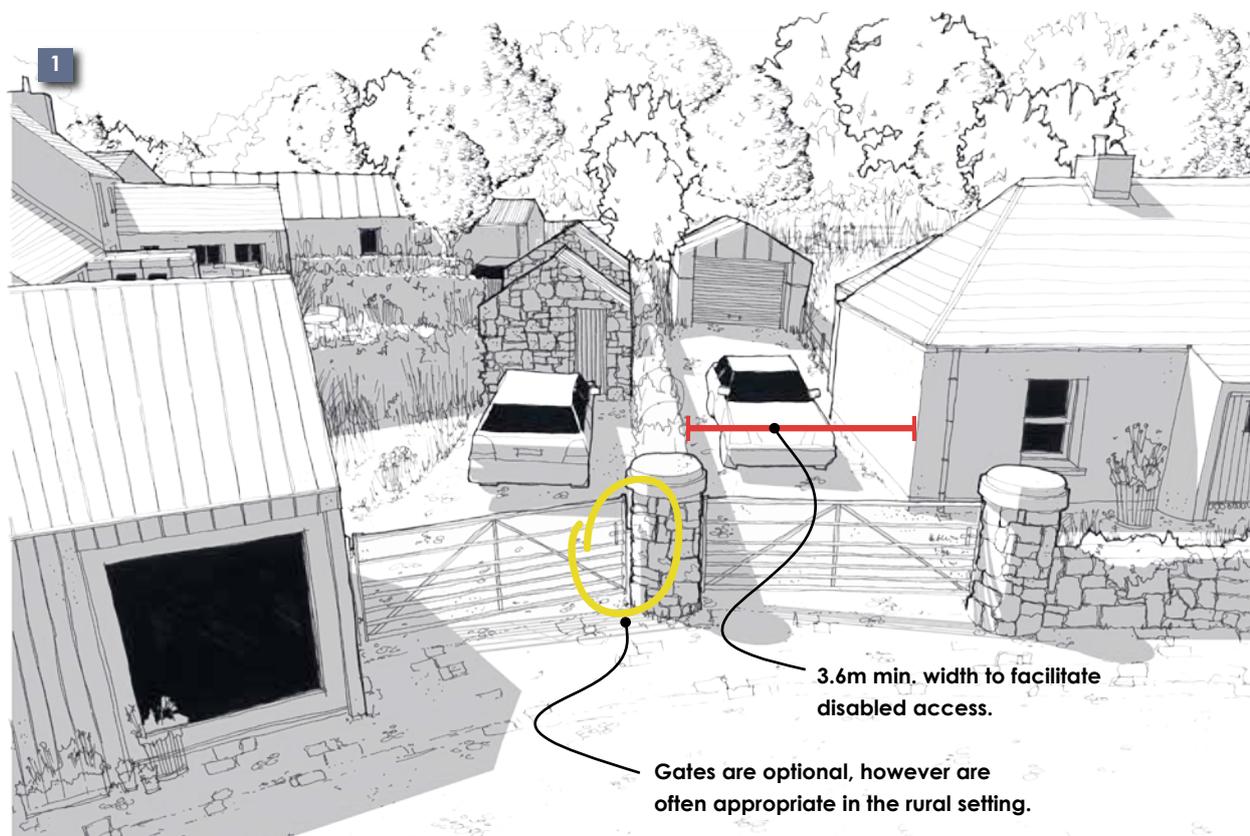


The housing square at a notional scheme in Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone. Demonstrating how the necessary turning area has been incorporated within the formal layout of the square.

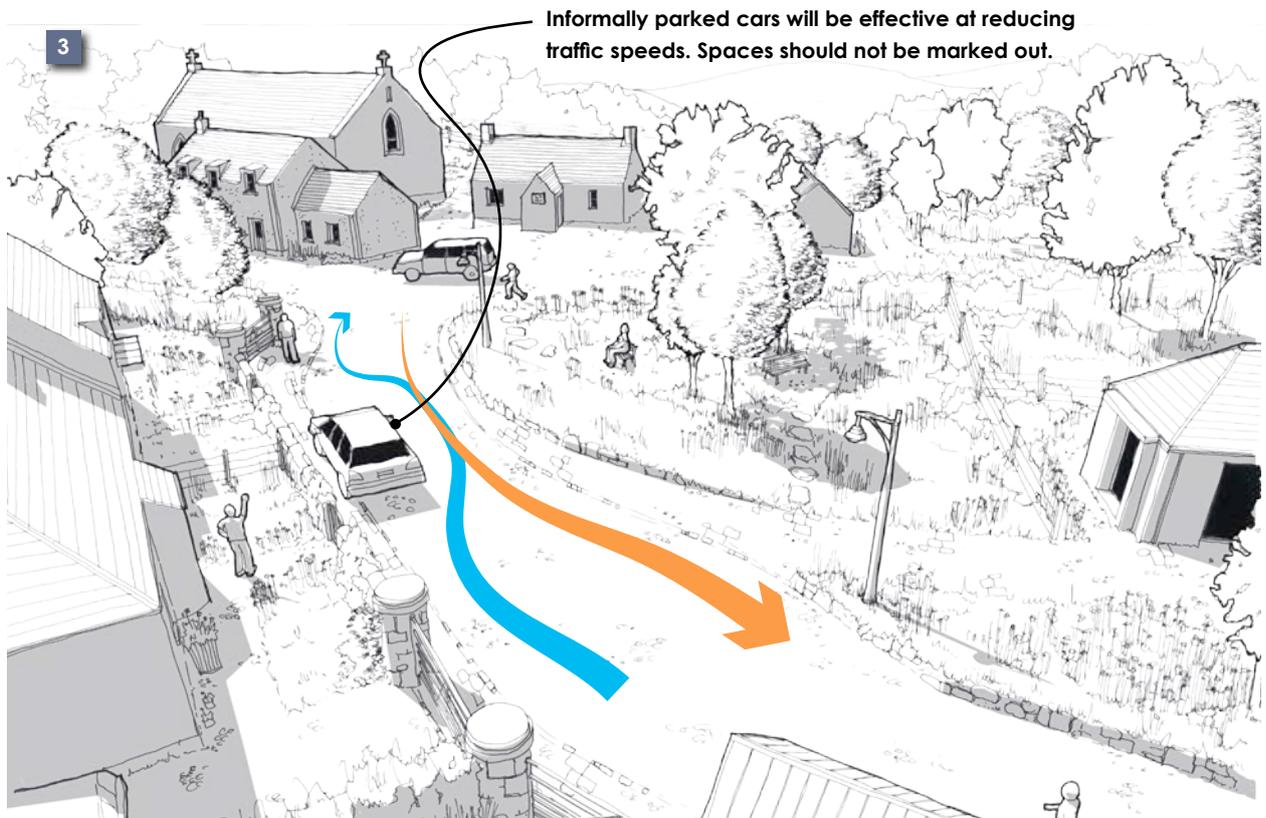
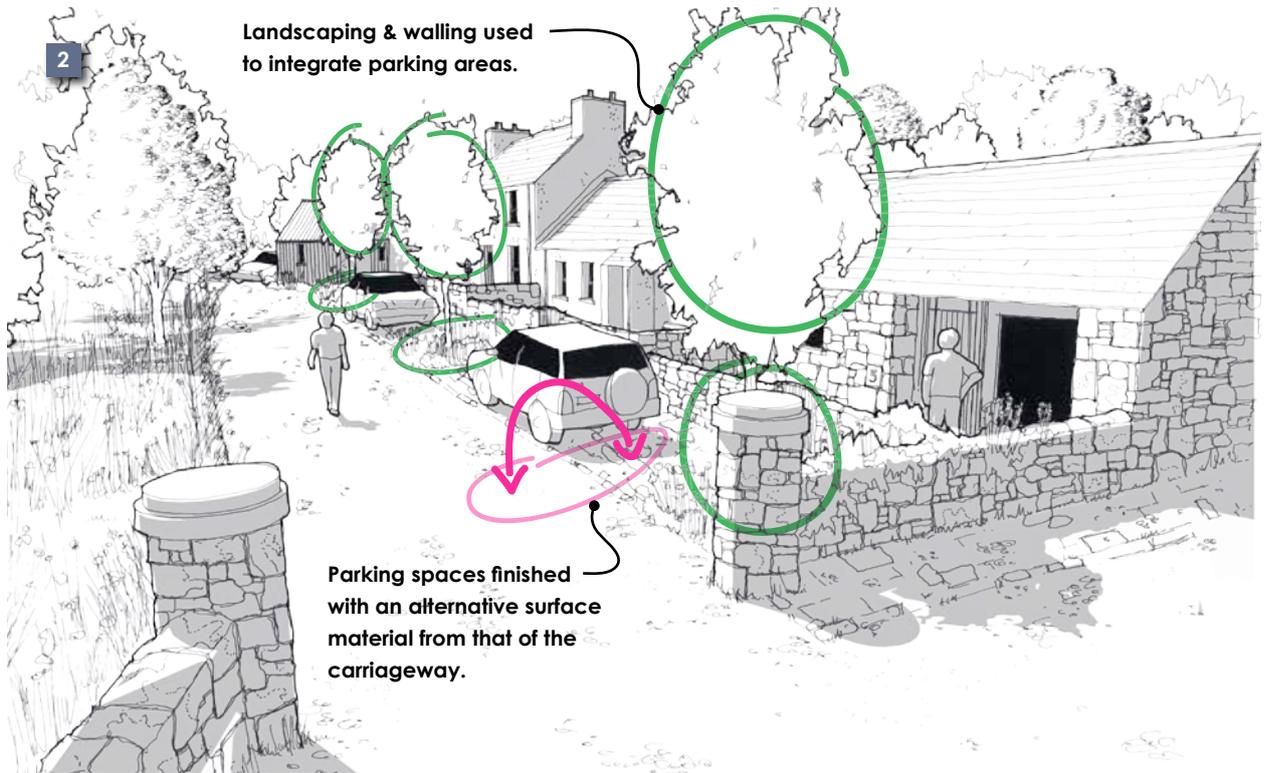
## Vehicle parking

Too often, vehicle parking becomes visually dominant. The presence of some vehicles parked on street can contribute to its vibrancy, however a range of parking arrangements works best. For example a larger family home could have off street access for the "work van", while a smaller cottage may only have a space for a car parked near the front door.

- 1 "WITHIN PLOT"**  
This often best fits the aspirations of tenants, but if used again and again, particularly at the fronts of dwellings, it can result in extensive areas of hard surface. "Within plot" parking should mainly be located at the sides of dwellings where vehicles can be partially hidden by buildings.
- 2 "ON-ROAD" COMMUNAL**  
It is essential that spaces are close and visible from dwellings. Spaces aligned parallel to the roadway often work better than those at right angles.
- 3 "ON-ROAD" OCCASSIONAL**  
An appropriate solution for accommodating visitors reducing the number of "formal" spaces.



The range of vehicle parking options within the notional scheme at Mulleek, Co.Fermanagh. This demonstrates that variation can be achieved even within the smallest developments.



# Considering access



The distinctive "witches hat" limestone pillars of Rathlin Island, by Apex Housing Association.

## Access at the **scheme boundary**

Accesses to rural social housing schemes should be obvious and legible, but should not be overly accentuated. Buildings and soft landscape are often the best way to frame the access, but simple locally distinctive boundary walls and pillars can work well. Small place name signs can then be added to the building facade, pillar or wall.

Where possible grass verges should be retained, providing visibility splays. Tight junction radii, and a change of surface treatment is particularly effective at signaling a change in the movement environment and encourages vehicles to reduce their speed.

Technical issues to be resolved include the provision of appropriate:-

- Horizontal visibility splays,
- Vertical visibility,
- Forward visibility,
- Gradients at the approach to the junction on to the public road, and
- Drainage to ensure no water flows on to or off the public road.

## Access at the dwelling boundaries

Pedestrian and vehicular access from dwellings to the adjoining street or road should avoid being overdominant and be formed either by the dwelling, an adjoining outbuilding, soft landscaping or appropriate built boundary treatments. Set backs of buildings and heights of boundary treatments should ensure adequate visibility for emerging pedestrians or vehicles.

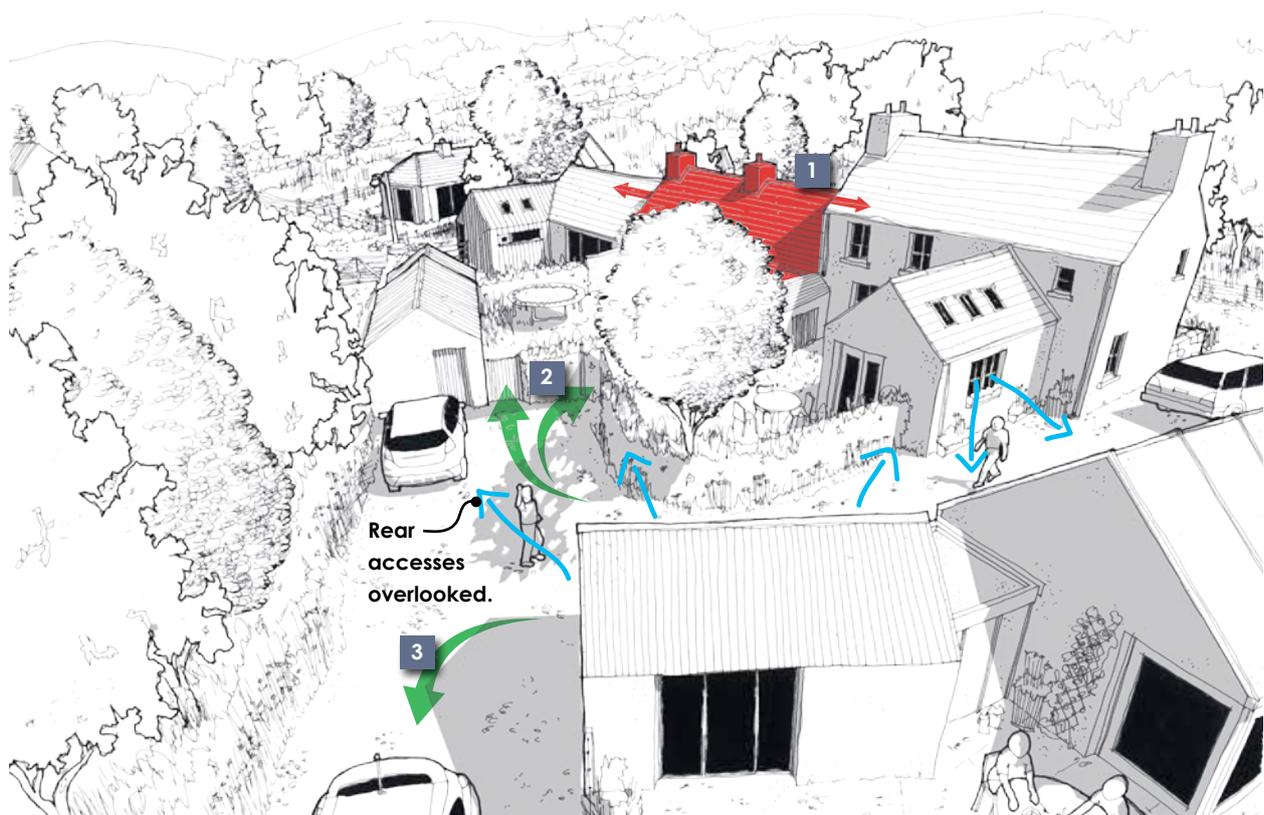
There is often merit for some rural houses to be provided with a rear access for vehicles. This particularly applies to those localities where there is a tradition of activities requiring access by vehicles to rear yards, such as transporting wood and peat for storage, or activities in workshops, sheds or garages. This may require either a driveway at the side of the dwelling or a shared rear access laneway.

Pedestrian access to rear gardens should be provided to accommodate the storage of bins and garden maintenance equipment etc. Pend access was rarely found in traditional rural dwellings, however it is recognised that it can be a useful solution to create external access to the rear of mid-terrace dwellings and is a better solution than access via the house. It can be appropriate to provide pedestrian and/or vehicle access to mid terrace dwellings via rear laneways, which are ideally overlooked, as an alternative to pends.

**1** ACCESS TO THE REAR CAN'T BE ACHIEVED AS THIS IS A MID-TERRACED DWELLING

**2** PEDESTRIAN ACCESS AT THE REAR FROM A SECONDARY ROAD

**3** PRIVATE DRIVEWAY ACCESS FOR VEHICLES



A range of access options to individual dwellings at the notional scheme at Mulleek, Co.Fermanagh.

# Considering the definition of boundaries

The first preference should be the retention of existing good quality boundaries wherever possible. This will give instant maturity to the public and private domains. There are four main alternatives appropriate to rural environments:-

## Walls

Walls, particularly built with local natural stone are one of the most effective methods of boundary treatment. They may be more expensive to construct than the alternatives, but subsequently they are virtually maintenance free and when appropriately designed and constructed can truly root new buildings into the rural landscape.

**1 APPEARANCE**  
Should match locally found stone, be simply detailed and of low height.



**2 DETAILS**  
The use of matching stone as pavement edge kerbing can complement the stone walling.



**3 ROBUSTNESS**  
Stone walling links buildings together and ground buildings into the landscape.



A dry stone wall within a notional scheme in Attical, Co.Down. The use of local granite for boundary walls is a particularly distinct and suitable feature of the Mourne landscape.



**FIG. 01:** A beautiful, rugged natural dry stone wall at the Mourne, Co.Down.

## Railings with walls

Railings are generally only appropriate when mounted on a low wall. This boundary treatment is more open and more suitable for the definition of front gardens within those small settlements and villages where there are precedents.

The wall and railing may be accompanied with a hedge behind, helping to enclose and soften the boundary. This obviously increases the level of maintenance which otherwise is normally minimal for several decades with the use of galvanised railings.

**1 METAL RAILINGS**  
Aim to use simple railing designs and avoid overly decorative styles (unless the setting dictates their use).

**2 ACCOMPANYING WALLS**  
A range of wall materials and finishes can be used within our villages, it is often variation that makes these places so interesting. Distinctive local stone is good and sometimes brickwork may be appropriate.



Stone wall with railings at a notional scheme at Pomeroy, Co.Tyrone. A similar boundary detail has been used within the public realm of the village's "Diamond".

## Timber fences

Timber fences are often the "default" boundary treatment in social housing schemes as they are one of the cheapest means of enclosure, are normally maintenance free for the first number of years and can provide considerable privacy when used around rear yards.

However, they eventually require significant maintenance or replacement and the impact of extensive "stockades", particularly on public boundaries, can be exceedingly intrusive and completely out of character with the rural setting.

**1 FENCING AT PRIVATE BOUNDARIES**  
**Only appropriate where there is no public aspect, i.e. between adjoining neighbours.**

**2 SOMETHING MORE ROBUST AT PUBLIC BOUNDARIES**  
**High walling is appropriate at public boundaries as it is more visually pleasing and permanent.**

**3 HEDGES BETWEEN BACK TO BACK DWELLINGS**  
**Hedges can be combined with fencing and offers the opportunity for increased height for improved privacy.**



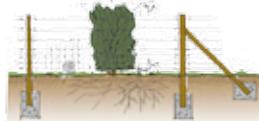
Various rear boundary treatments at the notional scheme at Pomeroy, Co.Tyrone, demonstrating the material should be appropriate to the context.

## Hedges

In Northern Ireland hawthorn hedges bounding fields area a major landscape feature. Hedges of appropriate species, when properly maintained, are visually the most pleasing of all boundary definitions and have a range of wider attributes, including shelter, wildlife habitats and changing appearance through the seasons. They require a relatively high level of maintenance, but if properly managed, will last as long as the houses.

**1 EXISTING HEDGING**  
Retain wherever possible to give instant maturity to a scheme and visual integration.

**2 NEW HEDGES & TREES**  
Accompanied by a timber post & stock-proof wire fence.



**3 COMBINE HEDGES WITH OTHER BOUNDARIES**  
Hedges soften stone walls, and provide flexibility to the height of the boundary.



Illustration of the use of existing and proposed hedge planting at the notional scheme at Attical, Co. Down.

## Gates

Some form of entrance gate to individual dwellings is often appropriate in rural social housing schemes.

Options include pedestrian gates into front gardens and at accesses to rear gardens along with vehicular gates at the entrance to front or side driveways. These provide more security and privacy. Front gates can be made from timber or wrought iron, and can be sensitively personalised or painted creating identification for visitors and a sense of ownership for the resident.

The scale and height of gates should relate to the building they serve, and the adjoining boundary features.



A range of attractive front gates from around rural Northern Ireland.

# Creating appropriate **private** and **semi-private** spaces

There is a temptation to design to the minimum external space standards as set out in Planning Service Guidance. The pressure to minimize the provision of private external spaces is often compounded by the economics of providing social housing at a reasonable cost, within the constraints of budgets. In most rural social housing schemes there is no need to provide public open space. This increases the desirability of providing relatively generous private amenity space for each individual dwelling. Consideration should be given in the design and lay-out of external spaces to maximizing shelter, the movement of the sun throughout the day in different seasons, and privacy relative to public roads, footpaths, open spaces and neighbours.



A small space to the fronts of dwellings allows the residents to add their own touch, illustrated by this attractive little cottage in Cushundall, Co. Antrim.

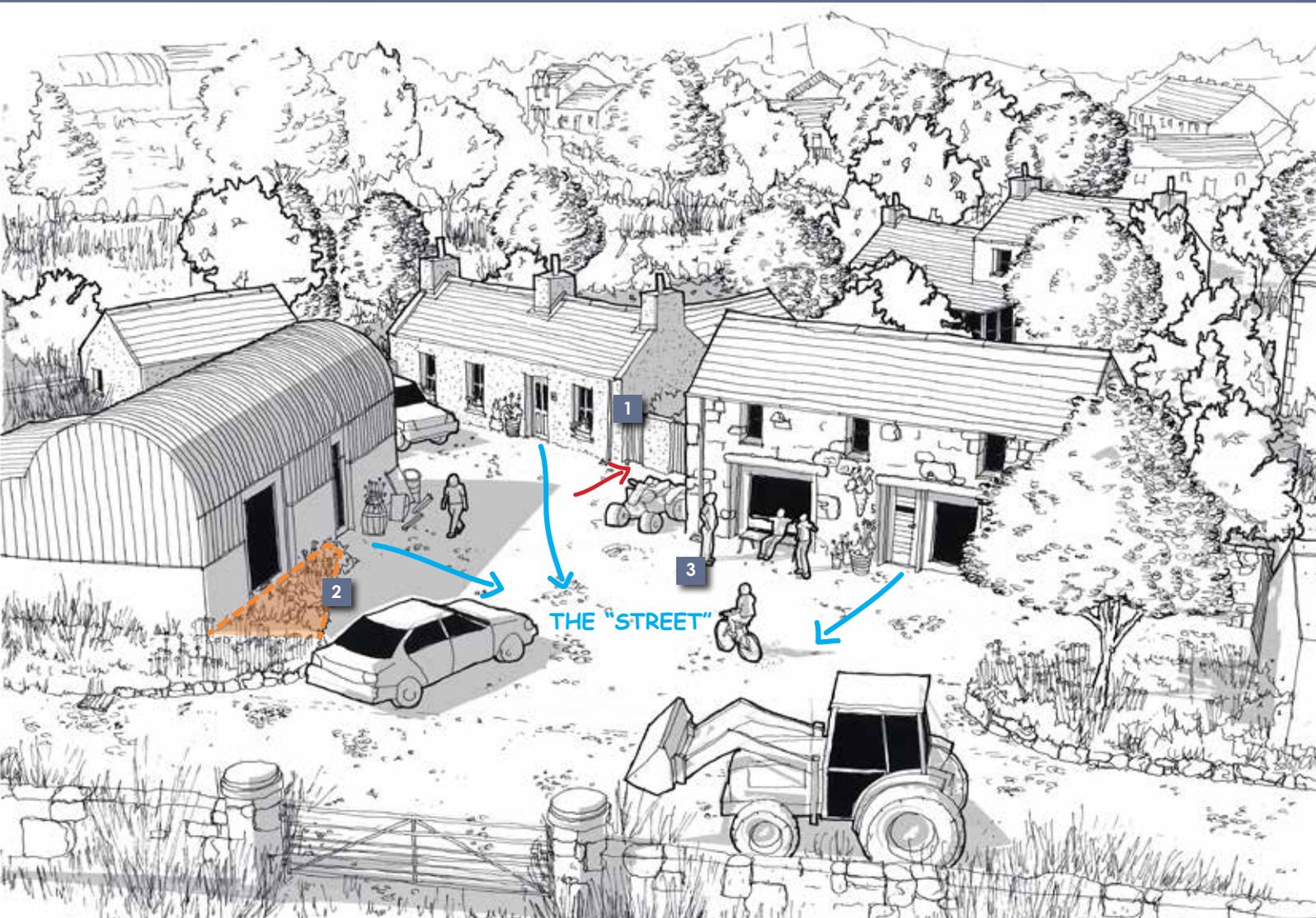
## Public aspects and front gardens

Front gardens are an important contributor to the appearance of the public realm as well as providing opportunities for social interaction. In some situations front gardens will not be provided, for example when aiming to replicate a "farm-yard" layout, where buildings directly open onto what is traditionally known as "the street".

**1 PROTECT PRIVATE AMENITY**  
Use an appropriate boundary treatment, to provide a clear definition of what is semi-public and private.

**2 DEFENSIBLE SPACE**  
Can be a small shrub bed, planter, wall or hedge, giving a degree of privacy.

**3 SPACE FOR INTERACTION**  
At the front of the dwelling allows the resident to place a garden seat and enjoy the morning sun.



Less formal public frontages at the notional scheme at Attical, Co.Down. The scheme replicates a farmyard layout, with paving and planters indicating semi-private front "gardens"/areas used for sitting out.

**Private aspects and rear gardens**

It is beneficial to provide a reasonable size, private external area to provide the opportunity for healthy out-door children's play, sitting out on a warm sunny day, drying clothes, storage of bulky household goods such as bicycles and other appropriate purposes.

With rural social housing, there are good reasons to provide larger gardens and yards than for urban sites. Not only is this more in character with a rural context but it responds more effectively to characteristic rural life styles. Rural dwellers often are involved in activities where it is beneficial to have a generous area of private and accessible space. These activities vary but can include space for bulky but relatively cheap and accessible local fuels such as wood and peat, the storage of building equipment/materials or equipment or space for a hobby such as collecting and maintaining motor cycles. In this context there is merit in including within social housing developments, appropriately sized, robust but modest cost, built storage in the form of a reasonable size shed in the rear garden/yard, accessible from the public road.

Within a higher density village development, smaller rear gardens may be appropriate. The size of the garden should reflect the size of the house type and its likely occupation. For example some elderly people may not be physically able to maintain a larger garden.

**1 ACCESS**  
 This should relate to the size of the dwelling. For example for elderly people, pedestrian only access may be sufficient. A larger family dwelling may require vehicular access to a rear shed, for work or leisure purposes.

**2 RAINWATER COLLECTION**  
 Often rural dwellings had a barrel which collected rainwater for re-use such as watering plants and livestock. The modern day equivalent is the Water butt.

**3 SECURITY/PRIVACY**  
 Often this needs a high boundary and gate, but sometimes a lower boundary is sufficient. A screen wall could provide privacy to a patio area then step down to a 1.2m high hedge for the remainder of the garden.



**4 CLOTHES DRYING**

A hardstanding area, allows a dry approach to a rotary or linear drying line even when the ground is wet.

**5 SITTING OUT**

A purpose built patio area is an attractive feature when located in a sun pocket and linked to the indoors (living or dining area) by patio doors.

**6 FUEL STORAGE**

Space for an oil tank and boiler or MVHR unit housed in a purpose built house. Also space possibly to provide storage for some wood chippings, logs or turf.

**7 VEGETABLE PATCH**

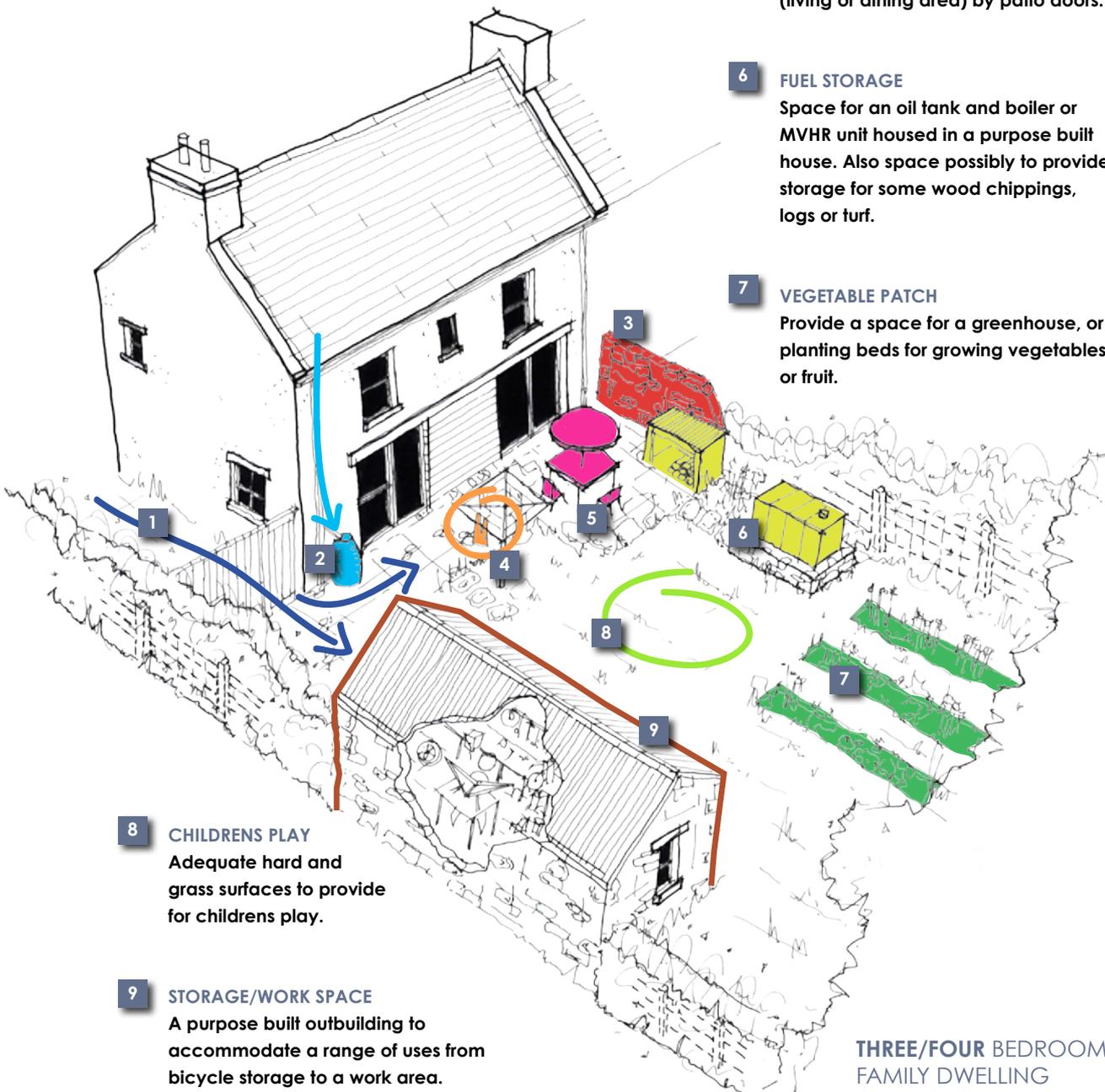
Provide a space for a greenhouse, or planting beds for growing vegetables or fruit.

**8 CHILDRENS PLAY**

Adequate hard and grass surfaces to provide for childrens play.

**9 STORAGE/WORK SPACE**

A purpose built outbuilding to accommodate a range of uses from bicycle storage to a work area.



**THREE/FOUR BEDROOM  
FAMILY DWELLING**

The requirements for rear amenity spaces at a smaller one/two bedroom corner dwelling and a larger three/four bedroom family dwelling.

# Integrating landscaping

The design process, from commencement, should carefully scrutinize all the natural assets of the site, including its vegetation. The objectives should include the maximum retention of existing vegetation, particularly of trees and hedgerows, provided they are in good condition and not approaching the end of their natural life.

New planting should be an integral element of any development, otherwise it is likely to retain a raw and harsh appearance, to the detriment of visual integration into the countryside. It provides change and interest with the passing seasons, adding colour and interest to life, enhancing human well-being.

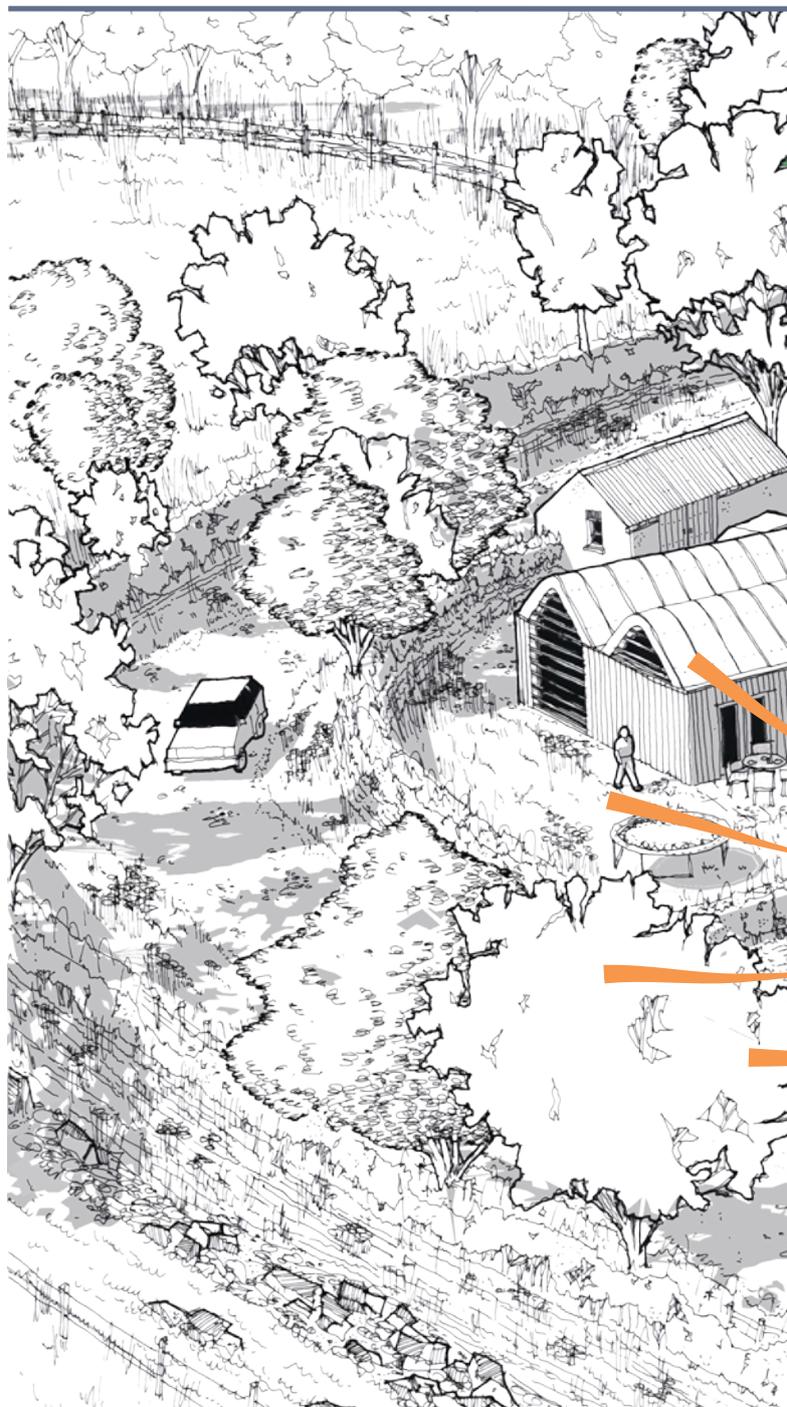
It is important that any trees are sufficiently separated from all proposed buildings and services so that they will neither be an actual or a perceived threat to the safety of buildings and their occupiers.

If appropriate indigenous species of trees, hedges, and shrubs are planted there should be no need for significant attention for generations to come. There is a wealth of advice available on species suitable for planting across the range of conditions and circumstances that will be experienced.

Maintenance of landscaping is a particularly important issue at social housing schemes. It is recognised that often residents do not have access to the appropriate tools or if elderly or living alone may not be able to upkeep their own patch. However initiatives such as tool hire and community gardening events managed and funded by Housing Associations could remedy some of these issues.

## 1 VISUAL INTEGRATION

Softening the visual impact of new development, not just the buildings but all the associated hard surfaces. Planting “in contact” with the buildings helps to connect them with the landscape.



**2 SHADE AND SHELTER**

In summer deciduous trees can block up to 85% of the sun's radiation, but in winter they permit up to 70% of the sun's energy to pass through their bare branches.

**3 ECOLOGY BENEFITS**

Appropriate landscape design enriches habitats and provides food, shelter & protection for a wide range of species, particularly garden birds by absorbing carbon out of the atmosphere, countering the effects of burning fossil fuels.



A new build notional scheme set within the rolling drumlin landscape of Co. Armagh, south of Tynan. Demonstrating the advantage of good landscaping in integrating clusters of social housing in rural environments.

# Enhancing the public realm

For developments of less 25 dwellings there is no planning requirement to provide public open space. This is not to say that its provision should not be considered for smaller developments depending on the circumstances of each site.

For example at the Rural Housing Association's scheme at the small "crossroads" settlement of Boleran, Co.L'Derry, the community has benefited greatly from the provision of a play park.

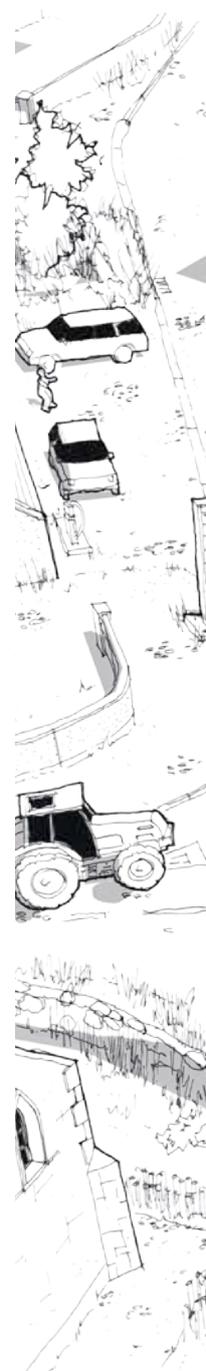
If public open space is provided it should be fully integrated into the layout, connected to any existing green network, be accessible, of high quality, overlooked and safe.

In rural areas the public realm can be greatly enhanced by the refurbishment, reuse or installation of items of particular rural character or association. For example local residents in co-ordination with the Rural Housing Association, refurbished and installed a traditional hand activated water pump in at a scheme in Drumquin, Co.Tyrone. Although it is inactive it provides an interesting and charming planter at the roadside.



- 1 LIGHTING**  
 Consider alternatives to standard streetlighting columns, such as wall mounted, hanging, or low level lights on columns.
- 2 LEGIBILITY AND SIGNAGE**  
 Minimise the use of traffic signs. Avoid visual clutter. The architecture of the road, not signs and signals, should dictate the speed of traffic. When signage is essential consider mounting on walls, trees or buildings.
- 3 LANDSCAPING**  
 Even within village core developments, "green" the streetscape by designing in shrub beds and street trees.

Generally there is less structured and formal planting at the more "rural" schemes.
- 4 PERSONALISATION**  
 Provide adequate space to allow residents to contribute to enlivening the streetscape, with items such as gardens seats, hanging baskets, window boxes, welcome trinkets, etc.
- 5 SURFACES**  
 Use a varied palette of materials to highlight priority for pedestrians and children's play or for vehicles.
- 6 USE**  
 Public realm includes a range of uses, such as play parks, formal gardens, allotments, playing fields, even a laneway leading to a feature.





The proposed public realm at the notional scheme at Attical, Co. Down. The scheme could be the mechanism to provide a children's play park at this settlement, benefiting the wider community.

# 06

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## Designing appropriate **buildings**

Considering **building form**

**Roofs**

**Chimneys**

**Dormer windows** and **skylights**

**Windows**

**Entrances**

The **building fabric** & **performance**

**Energy use** & **renewable** technologies

**Utilities**

**External** finishes

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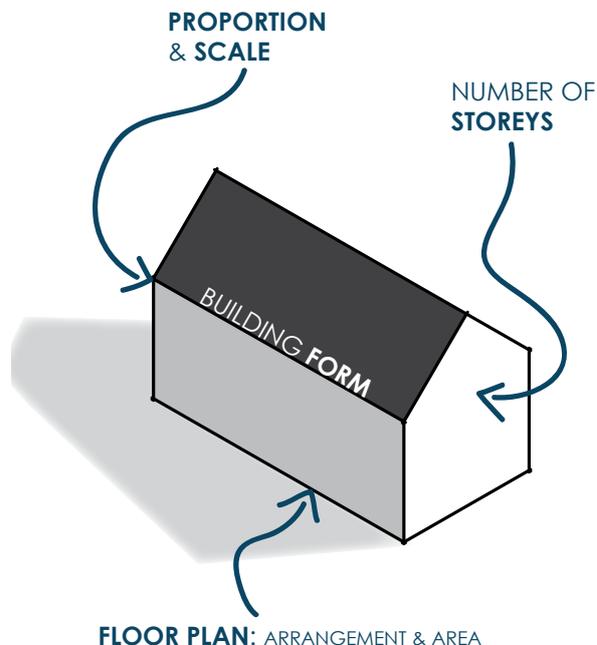


The "£25,000 Rural House", Co.Leitrim by Dominic Stevens Architect. An interesting philosophy was used in the design of this rural dwelling, which could be adapted to the construction of our rural social dwellings.

# Considering the **building form**

If the characteristic architectural form of the locality is not understood, championed and applied to the design from the outset, a scheme will never succeed in fully integrating within its rural environment. Generally, rural Ulster residential buildings should be arranged in a linear floor plan, at a human scale and height and well proportioned. In all solutions a common theme of simplicity is key.

It is often appropriate to use a range of simple forms as this approach can give a scheme the appearance that it has grown and adapted over time. Also varied forms and styles can better accommodate "personalisation" by tenants. This is not just the welcome addition of hanging baskets or maybe a red post box, but major alterations including porch extensions, and replacement doors and windows. If the building is already different from its neighbours, these changes will be much less noticeable. Residents often make such changes to differentiate their dwelling in those developments where standardised houses types were used throughout.



Vernacular dwellings at Tynan, Co. Armagh, demonstrating how a range of building forms have come together effectively to create a pleasant and attractive rural composition at the heart of the small settlement.

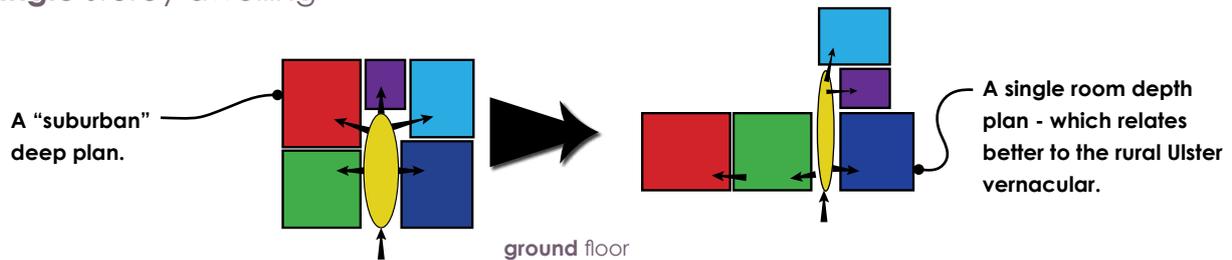


This affordable housing scheme at Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow by *Sean Harrington Architects* for *Wicklow County Council*, uses simple rural building forms to create varied built forms which are visually pleasing.

## Floor plans: arrangement

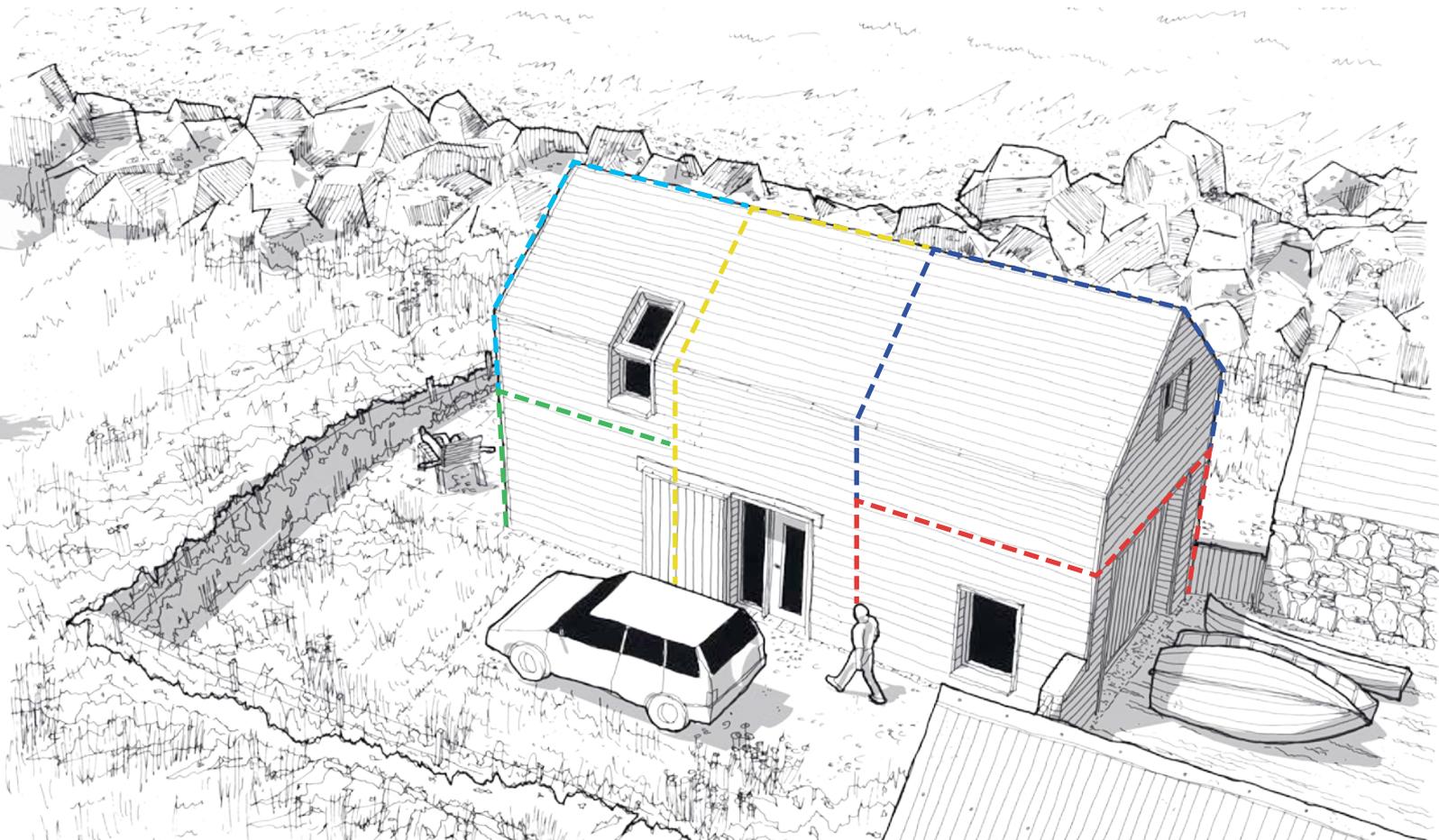
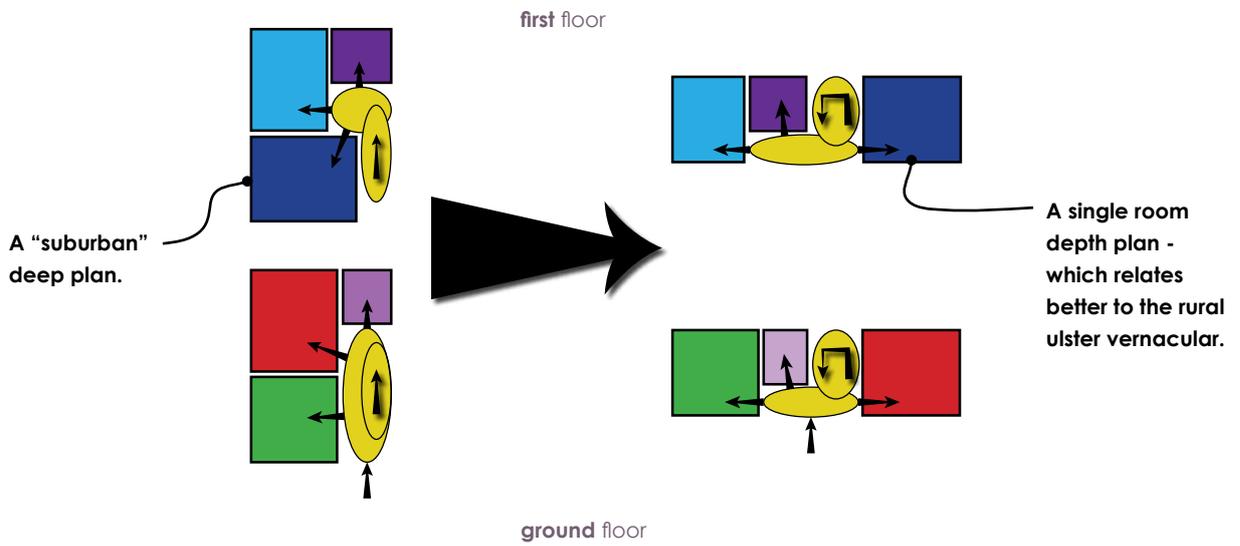
In the social housing sector the overall size of dwellings is normally relatively modest. The economics of site acquisition and provision of infrastructure have tended to result, increasingly over the years, in narrow frontage but deep designs, which can appear urban and incongruous in a rural context. These dwellings also tend to have high and bulky roofs. This is especially noticeable within the countryside but it also applies to many village locations. There is merit in reverting to houses with a wider frontage but less deep; which relate more to traditional rural forms, contributing to rural character. This also enables homes to be built with more natural light and enhanced sunlight benefits.

### single storey dwelling



Single storey single room depth cottage at a notional scheme at Attical, Co.Down.

## two storey dwelling

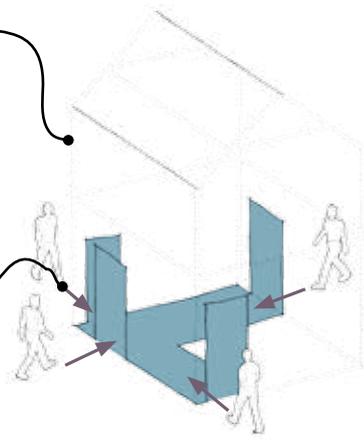


Two storey single room depth dwelling at a notional scheme at Mill Bay, Co. Antrim.

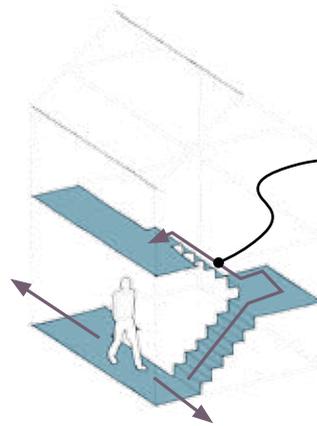
## create a dwelling core

A number of configurations are possible for access to the public road and into the private rear garden.

Direct entry to the kitchen/living area may be an option, as in the vernacular cottages of the west of Ulster.



EXTERNAL ACCESS



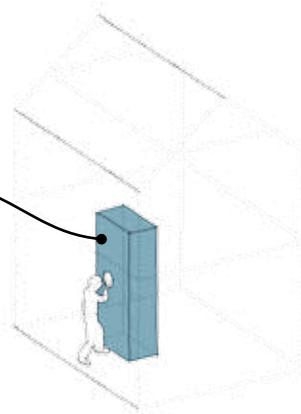
INTERNAL HORIZONTAL & VERTICAL CIRCULATION

Stairs can be "straight" flights or "dog legged". "Tapers" should be avoided.

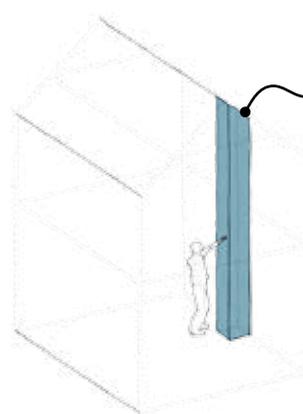
Stairs should be planned to facilitate the provision of a chair lift if this becomes necessary.

Uses:

- general storage;
- internal drying space.



STORAGE



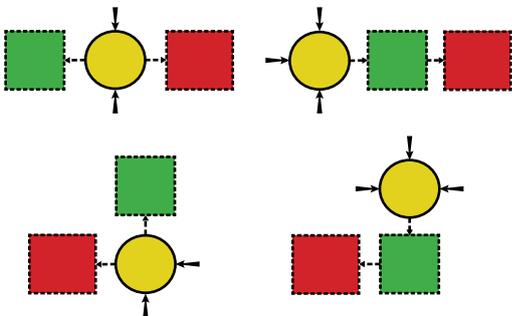
GROUP THE SERVICES

Uses:

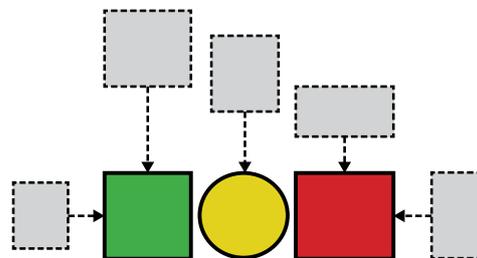
- stack ventilation;
- soil vent pipe;
- electrical;
- ducting;
- cabling;
- meters; and
- plumbing.

All accessible for maintenance.

The designer should aim, if possible, to create a dwelling core which can accommodate various functions. Habitable rooms can then be attached to this core to create various forms and layouts.



The flexibility of the core in terms of access and circulation means a single room depth dwelling can be orientated to relate effectively to most site layouts.



The layout becomes almost modular resulting in easily designed, constructed, extended & adapted "blocks".

**Floor plans: areas**

In terms of efficient and comfortable internal layouts, a major obstacle for quality sustainable social housing design is the restrictive area bands for the various accommodation types, as generally new dwellings are being built to the minimum areas. Space standards were set a number of years ago and require updating to relate to contemporary space needs. For example a recent requirement of social housing is future ground floor shower rooms, which require a considerable amount of space which would have previously been used within living, kitchen and dining areas.

A 5 to 10% increase in floor area would significantly improve the layouts of the dwellings, whilst maintaining compact form and affordability, and making it simpler to achieve rural forms.

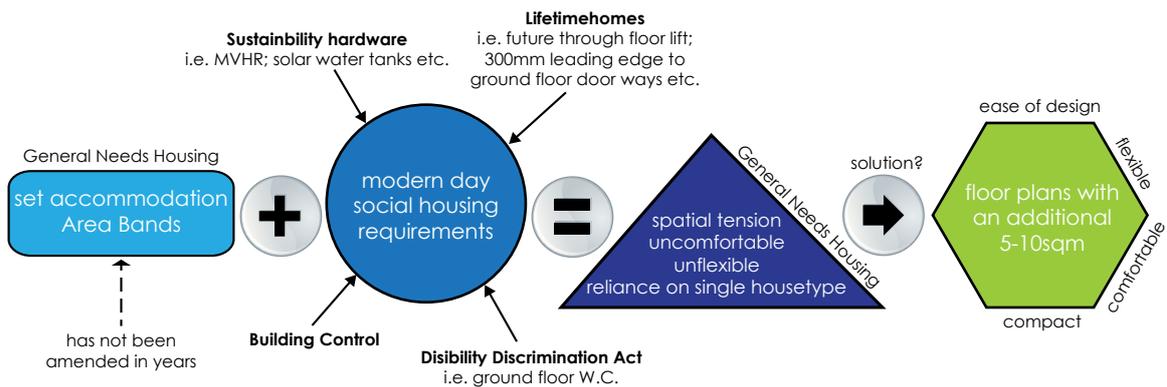
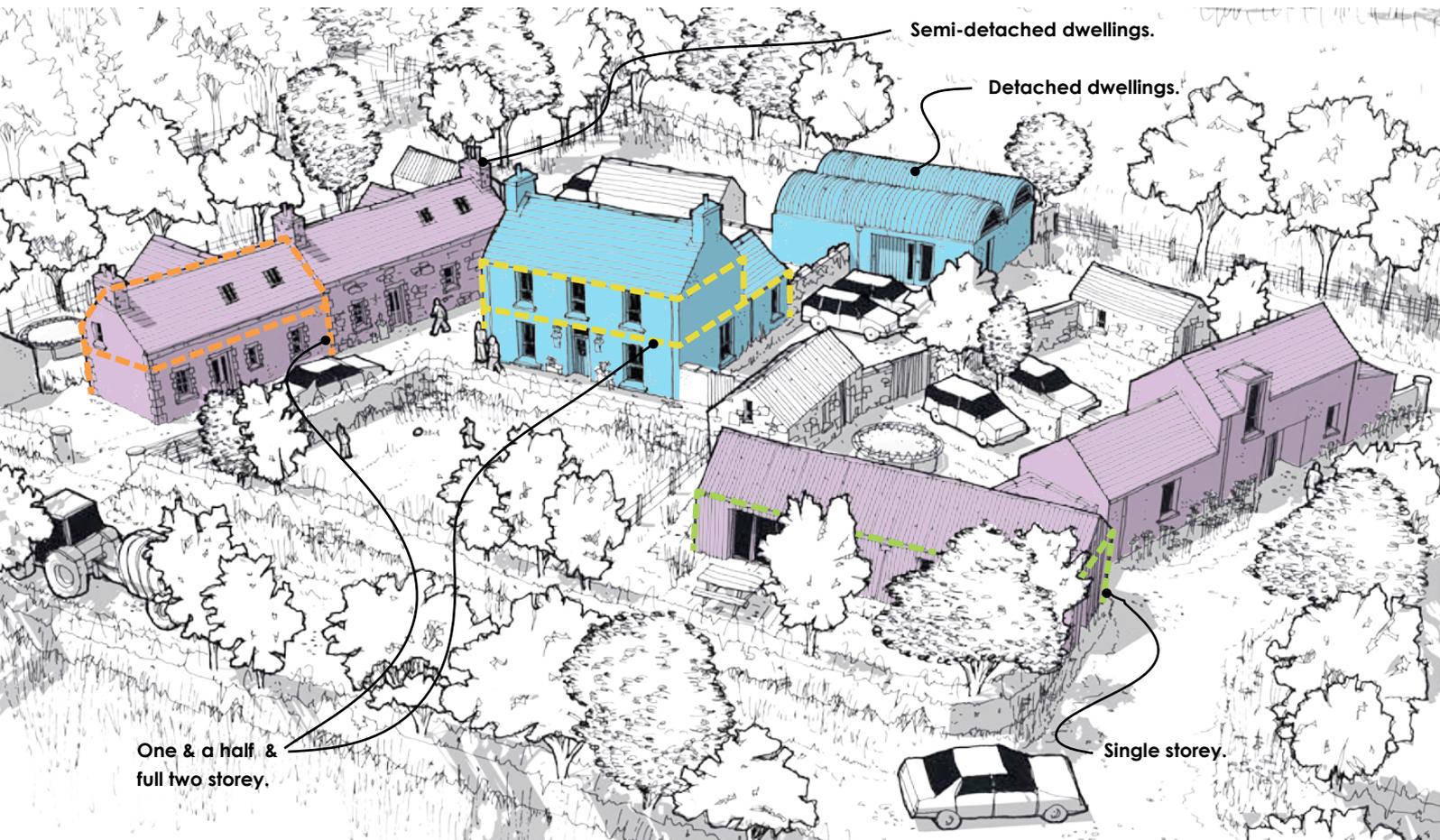


Diagram illustrating the demands on the internal layouts of rural social housing. Demonstrating the conflicts of providing quality flexible spaces and meeting statutory requirements, within the restrictive defined area bands.

**Dwelling type: configuration & number of storeys**

In terms of rural vernacular forms, semi-detached two storey types were rare with detached buildings more common. "Clachans" often were of only single storey detached buildings. "Farm complexes" typically had "the detached farmhouse" surrounded with single storey outhouses. Therefore a development of exclusively semi-detached or terraced two storey dwellings characteristics of the past generations of rural social housing provision often sits uneasy within the rural setting. Intelligent design and layout in rural social housing schemes, however, may create opportunities for some "attached" dwelling types with a range of heights which are not suburban in appearance or nature.



A notional scheme at Moneydig, Co.L'Derry, demonstrating the attractiveness of using a range of dwelling types, including semi-detached, detached, single, storey and a half and two storey configurations.

At settlements, particularly village cores, the two storey semi-detached or terraced form is often more common and the added height contributes effectively to the enclosure of space and can give structure to more formal places. Single storey, detached dwelling construction can be more expensive than two storey "attached", however the single room depth form of this type of house is more common and typical within our rural environments. The range of single storey detached forms achievable within the parameter of social housing area bands, adds particular interest to new build schemes outside the settlement core. There is an underlying issue of available and affordable sites within smaller settlements and dispersed rural communities, which can lead to poorly designed schemes with an inappropriate high density of development. Layouts in these places should generally not be as dense as those within villages, resulting in a place for the single storey detached typology. Occasionally, 3 storey dwellings may work at higher density locations within village cores.

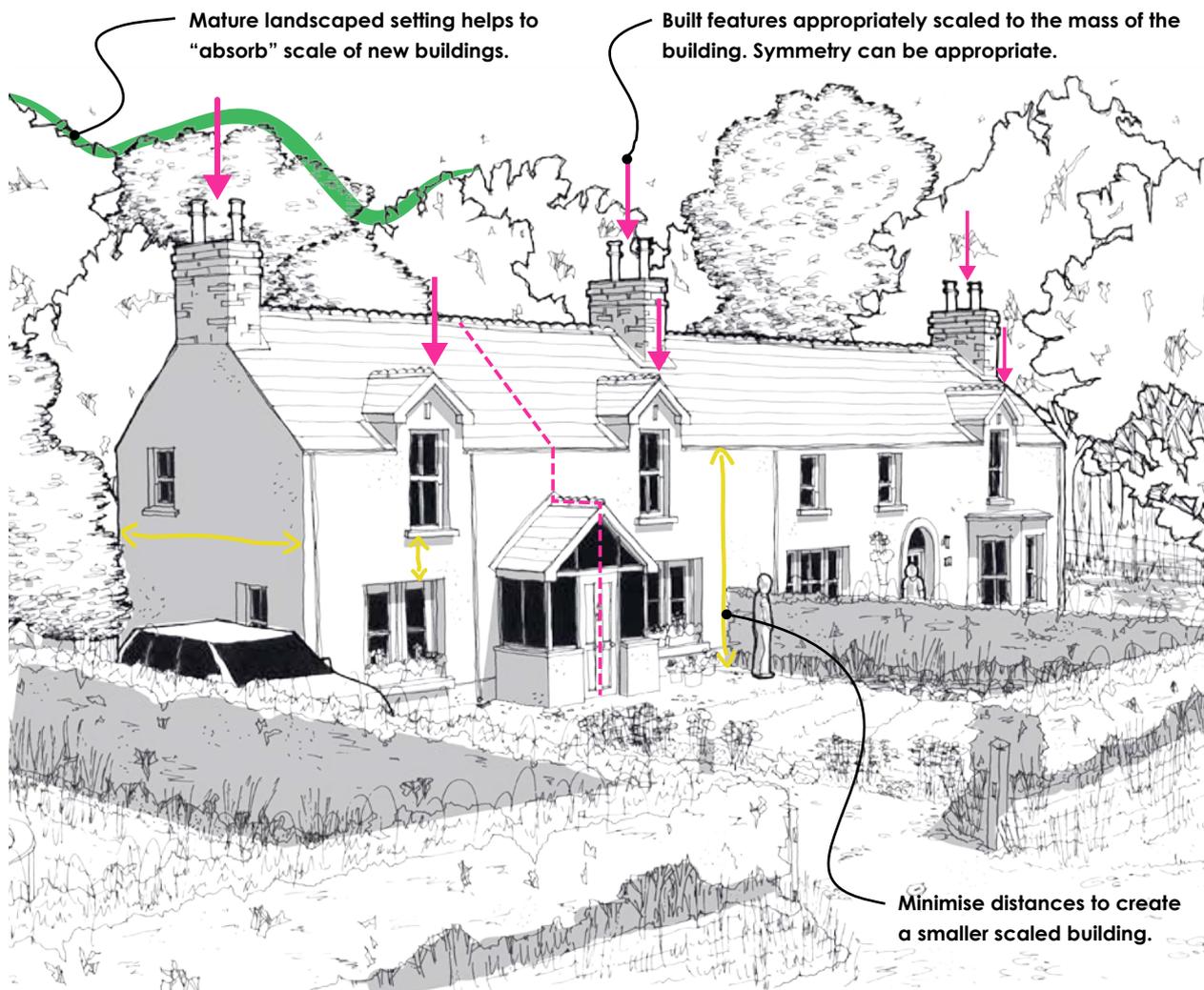
## Scale and proportion

Dwellings should be scaled appropriate to their setting. Large buildings require more space around them, whereas the relationship of small buildings and their surroundings can be more compact. They can be positioned closer to the road and have less dominant landscaping features.

With regards to the built elements of a dwelling, good scale and proportion are both necessary. Key to this are:

- narrow plan types with shallow gables;
- high solid to void ratios;
- building heights relative to openings (vertical emphasis);
- Minimising the distance between ground and first floor windows; and
- simple symmetry or rhythm of architectural features.

Good scale and proportion contribute to a scheme's ability to create a place where a human is not dominated by the built environment around them.



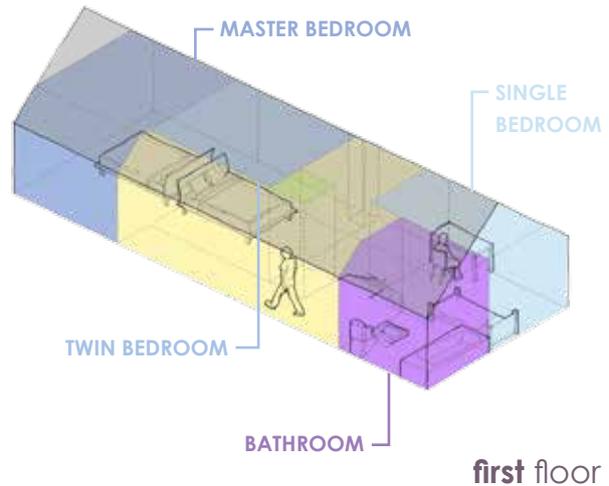
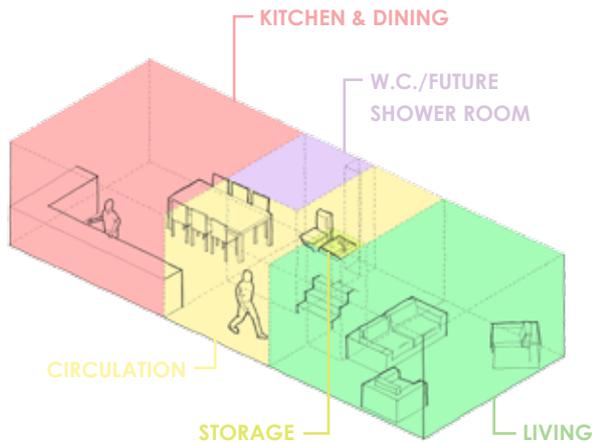
"Country cottages" at a notional scheme at Tynan, Co. Armagh, demonstrating the attributes of good proportions and designing to a human scale.

**Building form: bringing it all together**

How the rooms are arranged, their size, the dwelling type used, the number of storeys, the building's proportions and scale, ultimately determines the form of the dwellings.

The following examples suggest a range of appropriate solutions showing how the rooms and spaces required in rural social houses can relate to each other whilst creating an overall simple shape for the dwelling.

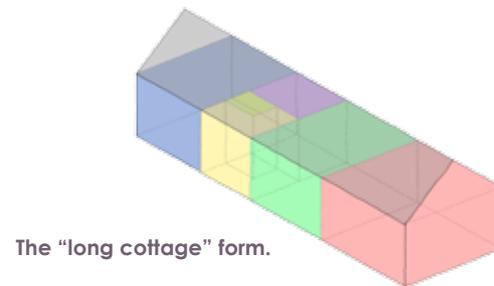
**ground floor**



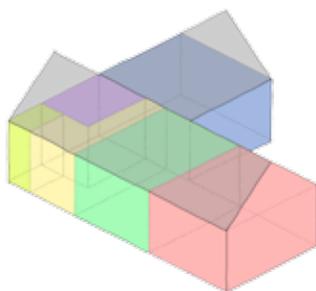
**single storey: 2person, 1bed** (approx. 55m<sup>2</sup>)

Potential tenants can be single adults, often elderly, where a larger dwelling is inappropriate and more expensive to maintain.

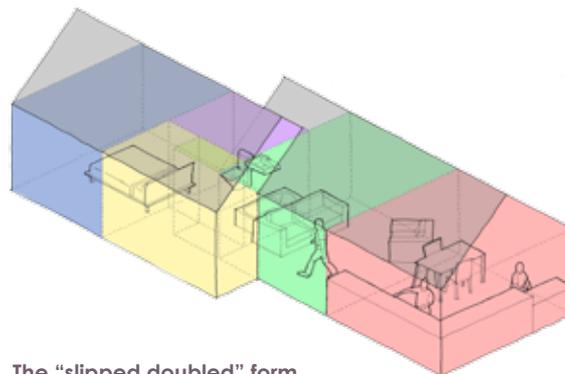
Generally in rural areas, apartments are neither appropriate nor desirable. It is therefore appropriate to provide one bedroom units in small single storey cottage form with a small garden.



The "long cottage" form.



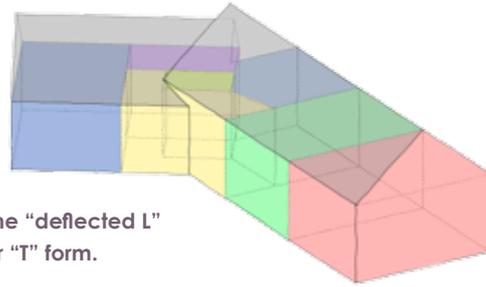
The "L" or "T" form.



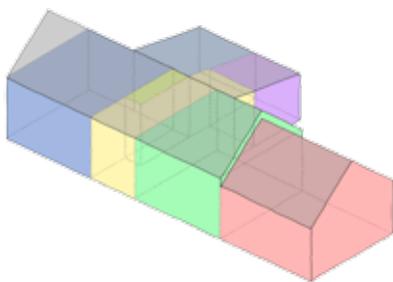
The "slipped doubled" form.

**single storey: 3person, 2bed** (approx. 65m<sup>2</sup>)

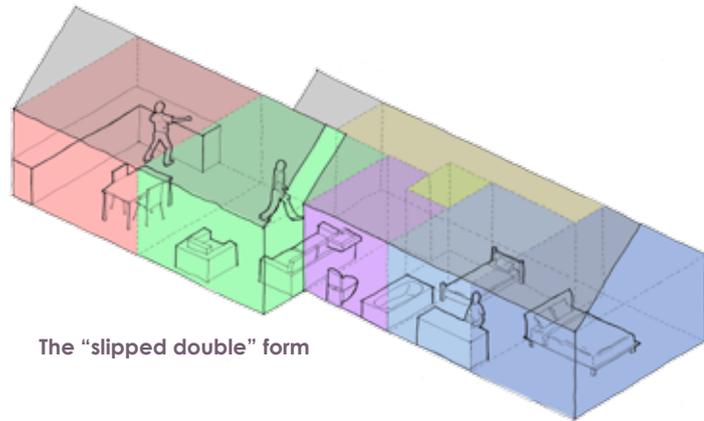
A two bedroom house provides greater flexibility for the tenant and the landlord, it is a good option for accommodating single child families and elderly couples who may have relatives including grandchildren staying over. Again it is entirely appropriate to provide private amenity space which can be accessed from a number of rooms due to the single room depth plan.



The "deflected L" or "T" form.



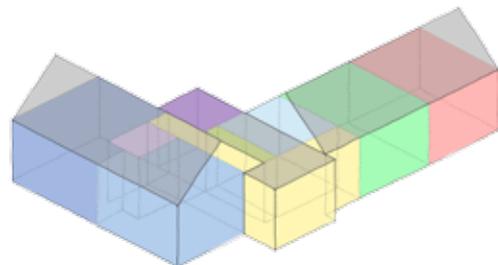
The "combined long" form



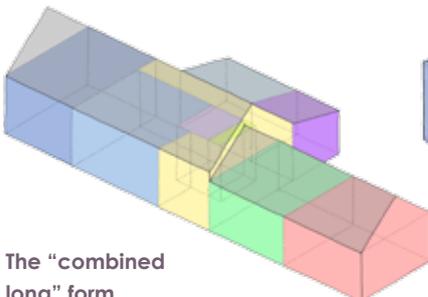
The "slipped double" form

**single storey: 5person, 3bed** (approx. 85m<sup>2</sup>)

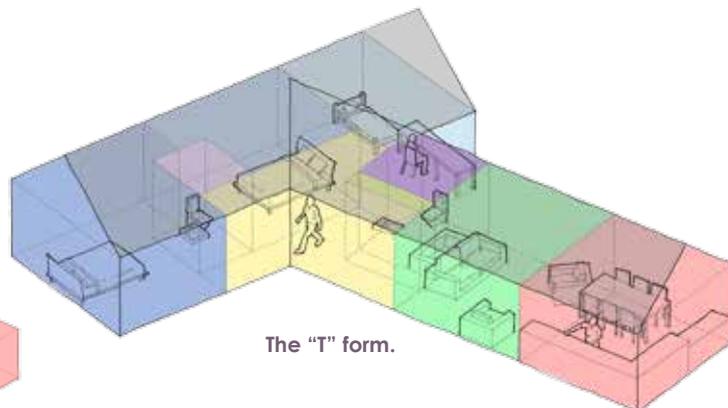
A single storey dwelling with a floor area larger than that required for a 3bedroom house becomes inefficient and almost inevitably involves long passage ways. Configuring the layout into a combination of smaller linked components often helps to break down the overall mass.



The "L" form.



The "combined long" form

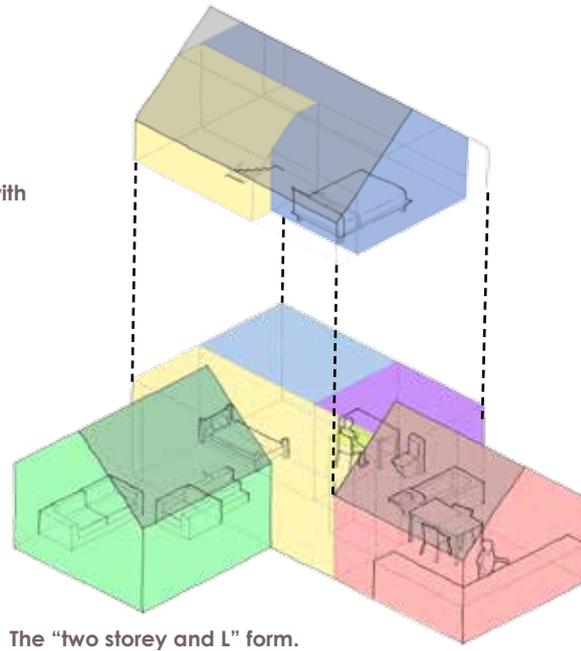
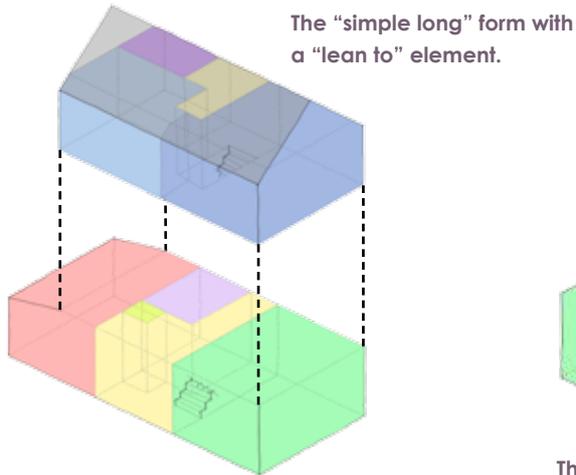


The "T" form.

**One and a half/ two storey:**

**3person, 2bed** (approx. 75m<sup>2</sup>)

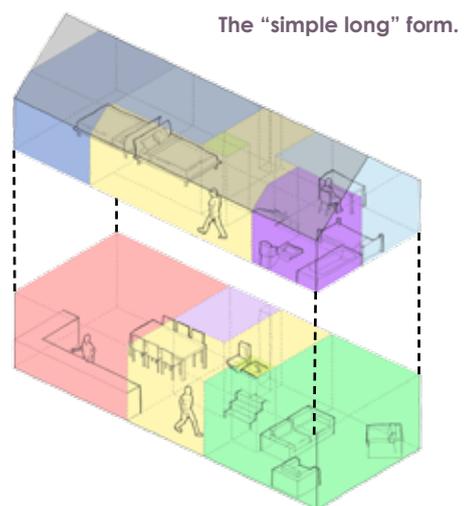
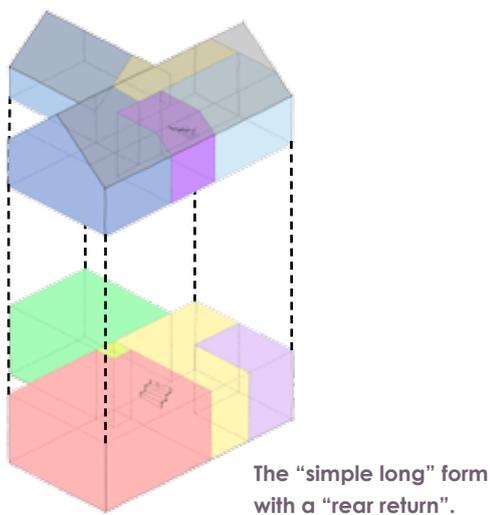
Rural social dwellings do not have to be exclusively single or two storeys. Often a combination can work best, with additions linked to the main one storey and a half or two storey element.



**One and a half/ two storey:**

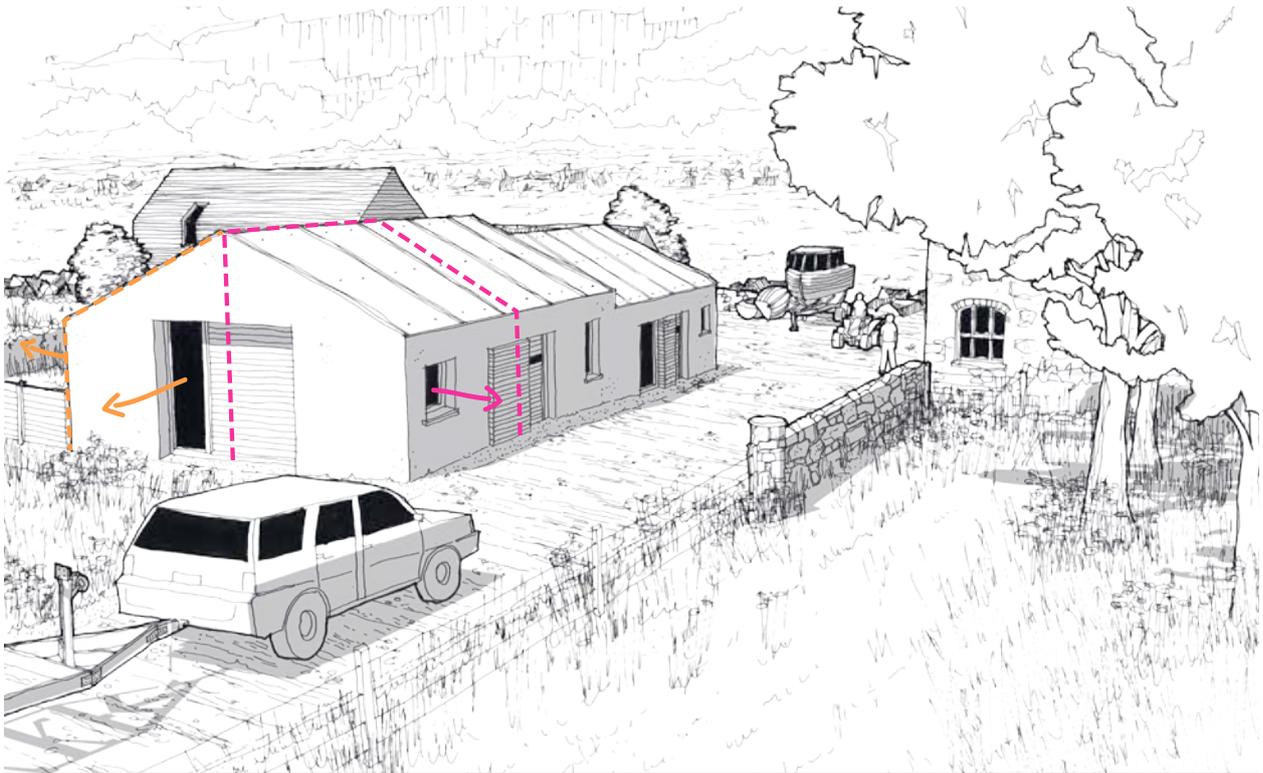
**5person, 3bed** (approx. 95m<sup>2</sup>)

A three bedroom house is generally more efficient within a storey and a half or two storey layout. Services, storage and circulation can be clustered at the core running through both floors. Generally, they are better value for money as less sub-structure is required than a single storey dwelling of equivalent floor area.



### Where the **deep plan** dwelling is **appropriate**

Deep plan (two room depth) dwelling types can occasionally be an appropriate form in rural Northern Ireland. Generally the form works best either as small, one bedroom, single storey, cottages or as a terrace of three to six one and a half/ two storey dwellings, creating a long rectangular form; and not the "box" suburban form of semi-detached dwellings. Suitable locations include within village cores, particularly at infill sites and sometimes at roadside sites. Exceptionally at coastal locations they can be evocative of fishermen's cottages.

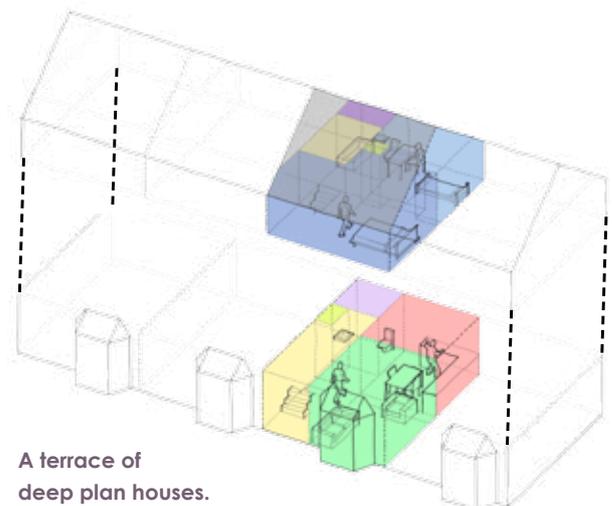


Single storey deep plan dwellings at a notional scheme at Mill Bay, Islandmagee, Co.Antrim. The form of these units replicates the out buildings of the oyster fishery that previously occupied the site.

In terms of deep plan form, two bedroom houses work best as their gable depths are still relatively shallow, at up to 8m. These dwellings can also be storey and a half, keeping ridge heights low if required.

When creating this long deep rectangular form it can be desirable to punctuate it with rhythmic built elements such as bay windows, chimneys, or stepping up or down, in order to avoid long featureless roof lines and facades.

This dwelling type is more appropriate at infill sites within village cores. The designer will have to be mindful that issues such as carparking and access to the rears of the dwelling will need particular attention.



A terrace of deep plan houses.

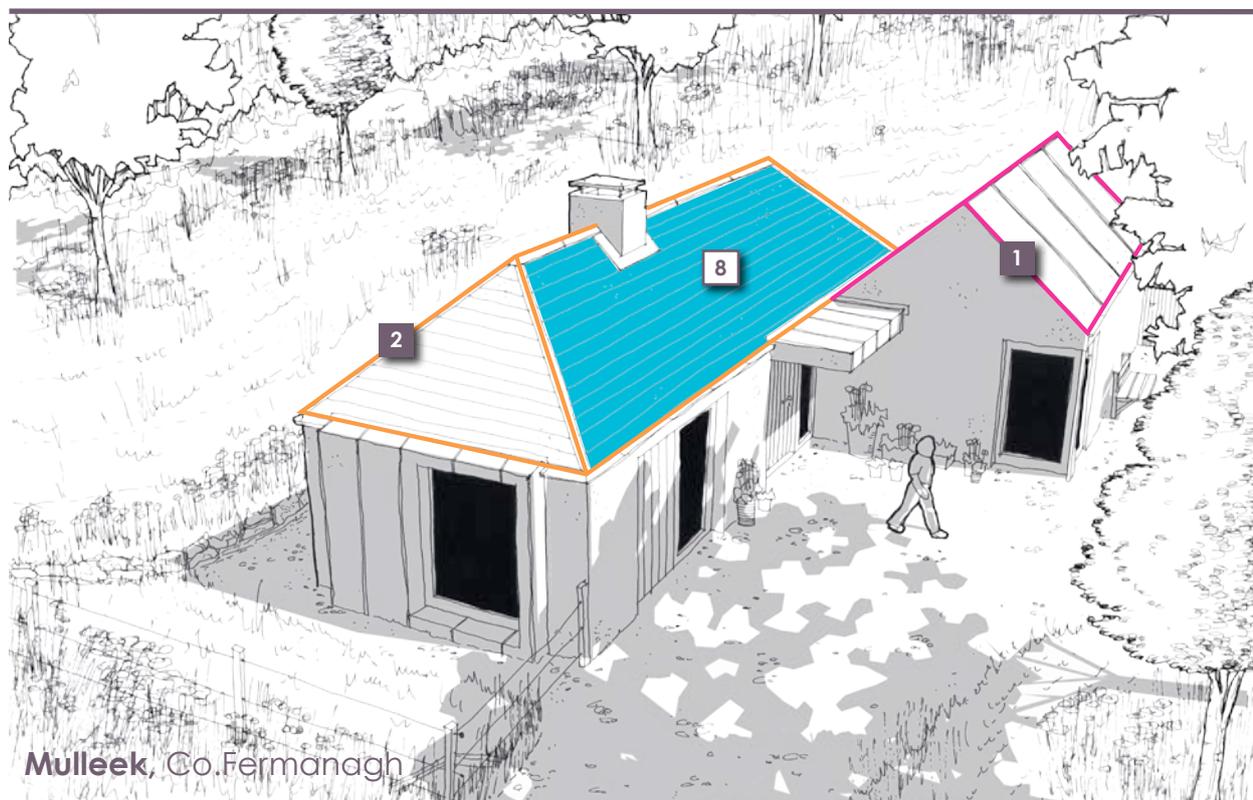
# Roofs

Generally in modern house building there is a loss or poor imitation of many of the Region's traditional roofing details. This is the result of the ability to build wider span roofs; the rising costs of materials such as slate; the increased availability of cheap uPVC eaves and concrete tile alternatives; and deeper roof build up due to increasing insulation requirements. The challenge for the designer is to ensure that design pitfalls are avoided and the roof detail complements the form, proportions and style of the building, whilst meeting modern standards.

## forms

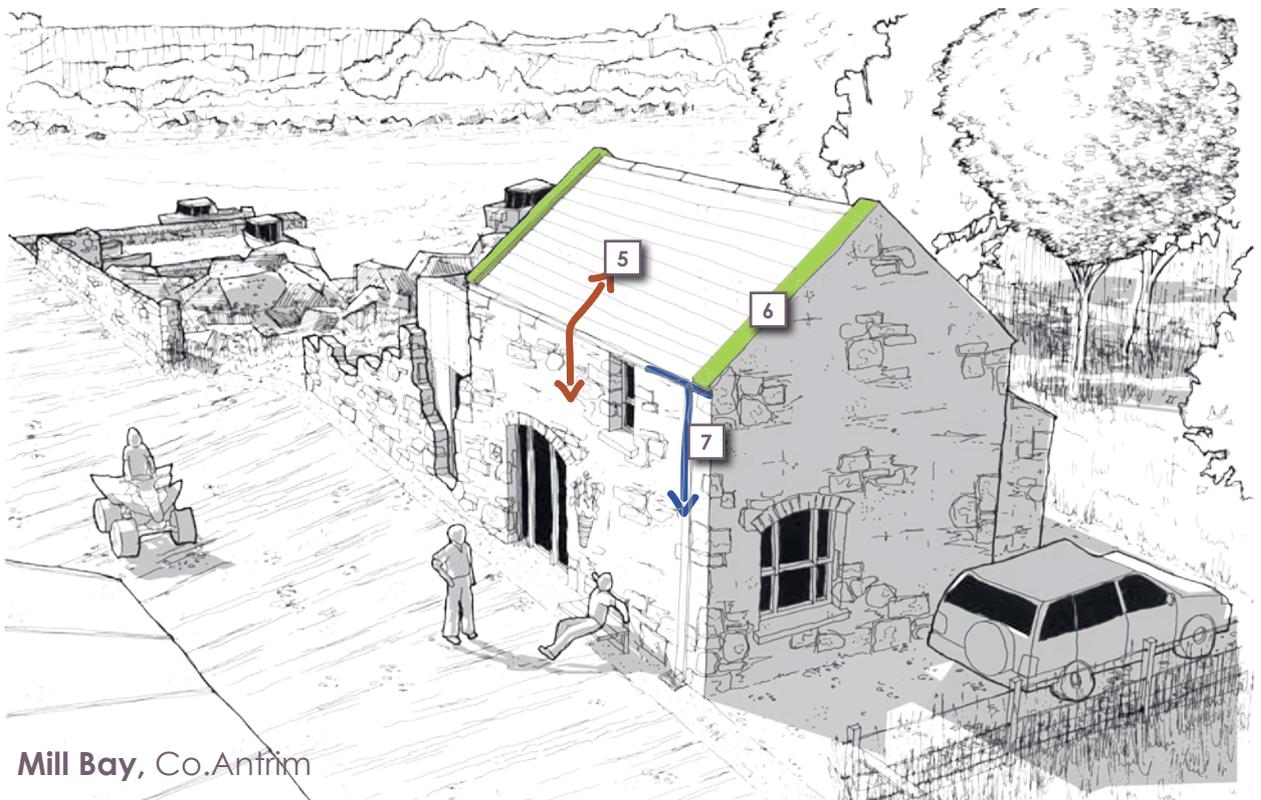
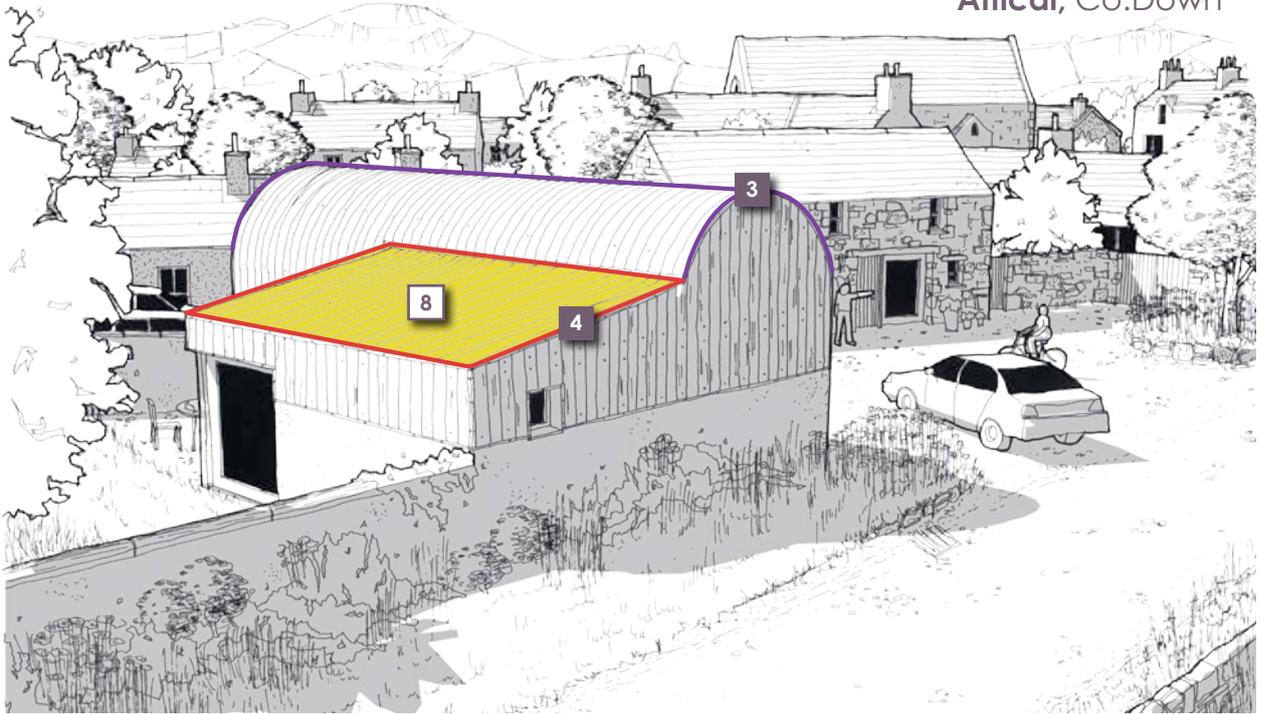
- 1 GABLE FORM**  
 Normally spanning 4-7m at 35-45 degrees.
- 2 HIPPED FORM**  
 Common in Co. Fermanagh.
- 3 BARREL VAULTED**  
 Replicates the traditional farm shed.
- 4 MONO PITCH/FLAT**  
 Best used on secondary elements.
- 5 "CLIPPED" EAVES**  
 Simple and neat.
- 6 CONCRETE SKEWS**  
 Common in coastal areas.
- 7 RAINWATER GOODS**  
 Simple round profiles work best.
- 8 MATERIALS**  
 Slate common, but others available.

## details



A range of common rural roof forms and details at notional schemes throughout the Region.

Attical, Co.Down



Mill Bay, Co. Antrim

# Chimneys



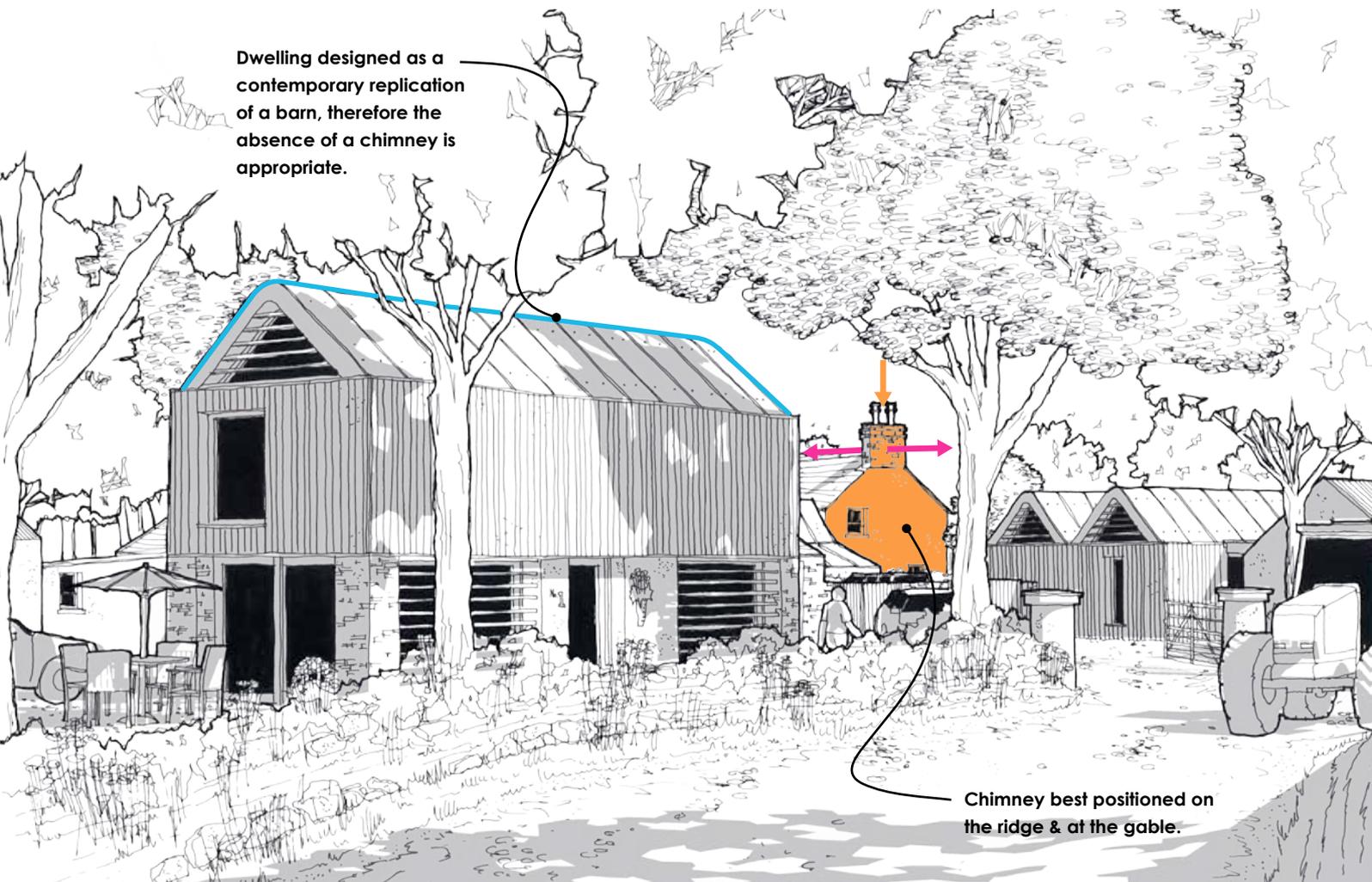
A Contemporary interpretation of the rural chimney at an affordable housing scheme at Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow by Sean Harrington Architects for Wicklow County Council.

Chimneys contribute greatly to the roofscapes of our settlements and rural environments. They provide visual interest to the observer in their rhythm, scale and proportion, and give punctuation and variation of colour and material to long horizontal roof ridges. Chimneys have been a mainstay of our rural built environment since building began, and are a valuable design element.

With increasing standards of sustainability, including alternative heat sources and the need for "air-tight" buildings there is a trend towards excluding fireplaces in modern social housing. The hearth however has a particular social importance to rural dwellers, as it was the epicentre of the rural life. Hence it is desirable if possible to retain in some form, such as with a sealed woodchip system.

There is also a particular issue with traditional styled rural social houses built without a chimney, which immediately identifies the dwellings as social stock. A contemporary design can however be well composed without a chimney.

If the chimney is not required as a functional element, generally some form of equivalent vertical form is desirable to complement the horizontal alignment of the roof. The designer should carefully consider the alternatives such as ventilation stacks, sunpipes, flues for burners/boilers or to accommodate soil vent pipes. There needs to be thoughtful placement of these, and their size and detailing.



Dwellings at a notional scheme at Tynan, Co. Armagh. Demonstrating how contemporary dwellings can look appropriate without chimneys, whilst a dwelling designed to replicate a traditional house should have them.

# Dormer windows and skylights

Although additional half storeys were common particularly in the rural Ulster vernacular, dormer windows were not a widespread feature. Single storey rural cottages were generally enlarged either by adding single storey ancillary wings or slightly raising the roof of the main building to enable the insertion of a first floor. Small windows were often inserted within the gable walls or at a low level on the front or rear elevation. Within our villages and small settlements, dormer windows were sparingly used, sometimes set into the slope of the roof.

Within our rural landscapes and villages it is appropriate to respect the context and reduce the bulk and scale of new dwellings. A compromise can be the construction of "storey and a half" dwellings to provide the desired floor space as an alternative to "full two storey" dwellings. Dormer windows and skylights are a particularly useful architectural element in achieving this aim whilst providing adequate daylight, ventilation and means of escape to the rooms they serve. Like chimneys, dormer windows provide character, add visual interest and punctuation to the horizontal forms of the main roof structure and reduce the building's perceived mass and scale. A proliferation of dormers on a single or group of buildings can however, be detrimental to the overall streetscape making it "over fussy". Where it is important to maintain an uninterrupted roof line, rooflights are an alternative to dormer windows. In the social housing context the designer needs to carefully consider their use, due to design challenges such as appropriate handle heights and fenestration.



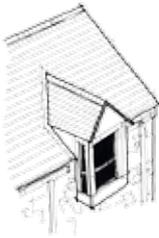
skylights

Affordable housing scheme at Isle of Gigha, Scotland by CP Architects for Fyne Homes, demonstrating contrasting solutions between the vernacular and contemporary for getting daylight into "the room in the attic".

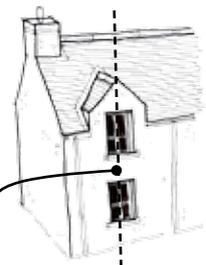
### dormer window options



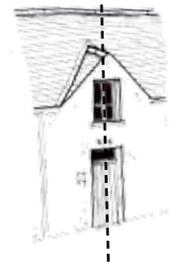
Dormers should be a minor incident within the roofs, no wider than that necessary to accommodate a 1m window, and certainly not wider than the ground floor elements. Roof pitches should be the same as the main roof.



Projection and location away from the exterior wall is acceptable. They should normally be finished in a contrasting material i.e. timber or slate but not uPVC.



They should be located at least 3/4 of their width from the main roof verge, and generally centre with ground level openings.



A contemporary dormer window on a dwelling at a notional scheme at Moneydig, Co.L'Derry. This feature is designed to replicate a high level door which could often be found on barns throughout rural Ulster.

# Windows

The position and size of window openings are vitally important to the perception of a building externally as well as its internal functionality.

Historically, the building of the Region's rural cottages was dictated by limited construction technology and minimizing costs resulting in small openings supported by simple stone or timber lintels, with robust timber frames regularly divided into small, easily replaced panes. Externally, this composition gives the buildings a strong, sturdy and attractive appearance which consolidates their place in even in the most exposed locations. The small openings however limit the penetration of light into the interior and restrict ventilation.

Openings on buildings within small settlements and villages were generally dictated by the streetscape.

Traditionally windows were made of painted timber which had several advantages including depth of profile, freshness of colour and the use of natural resources and craftsmanship.

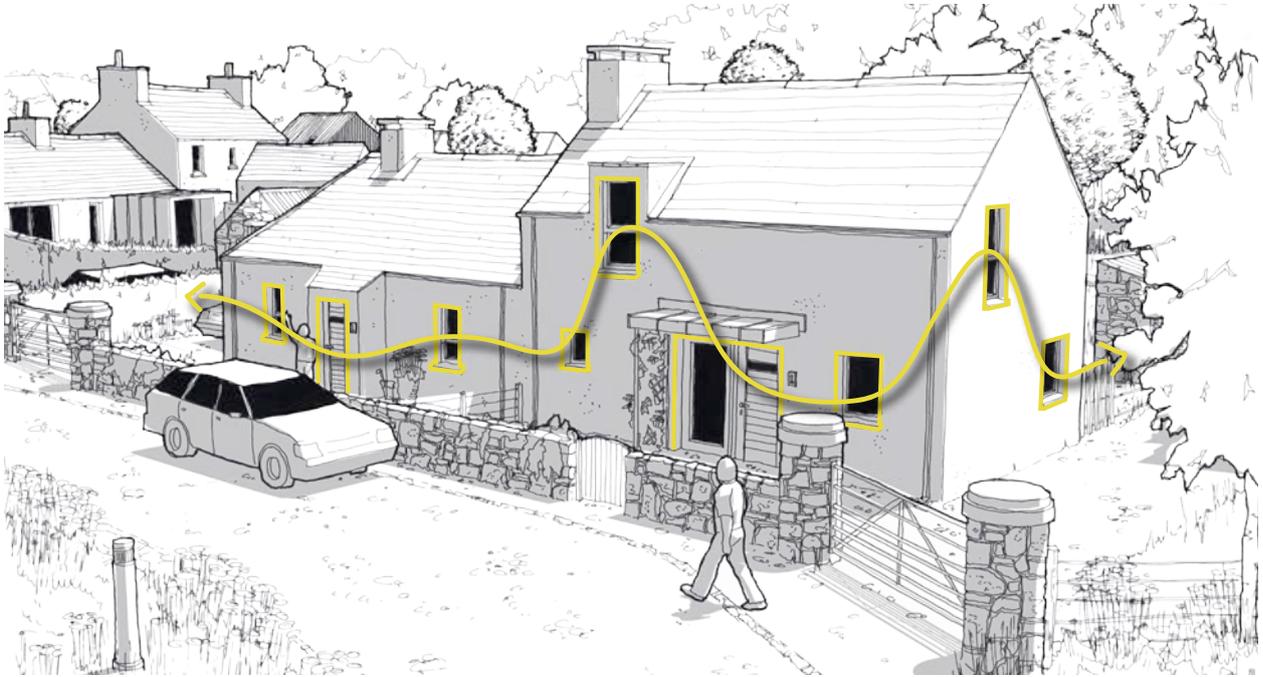
The designer of modern rural social housing must balance the visual advantages of high solid to void ratios and good proportions with current ventilation and daylighting requirements and affordability. Other factors to be considered include the requirement for safety glazing.



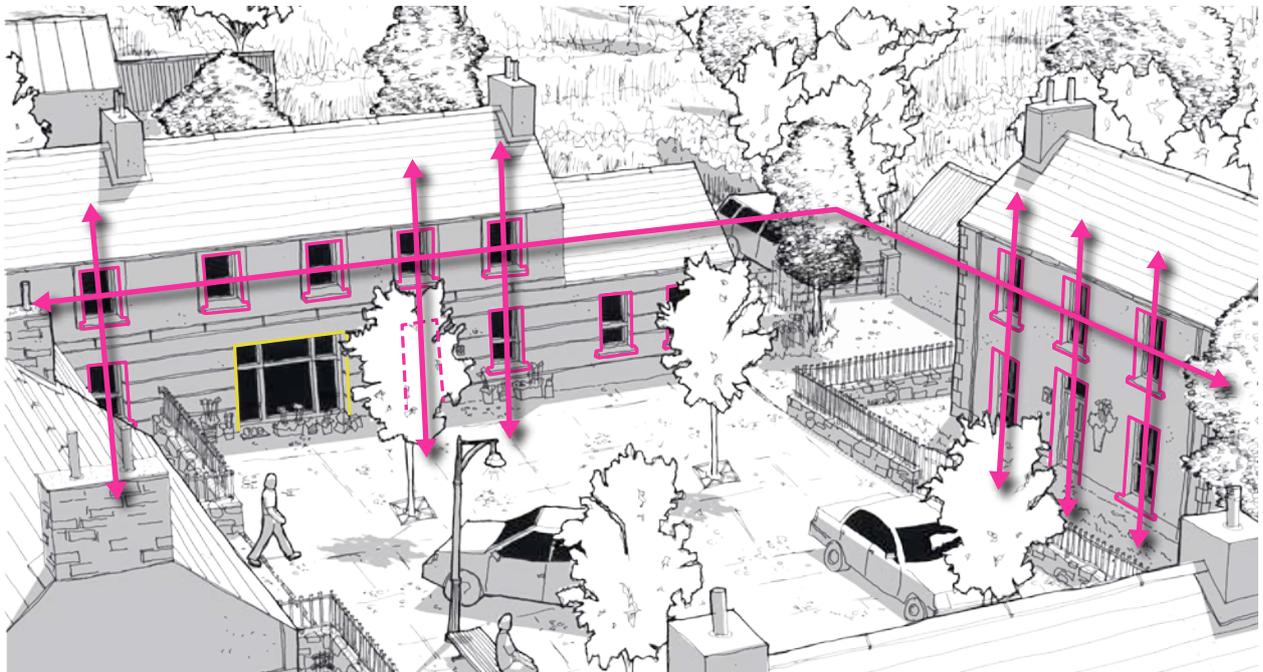
An attractive traditional painted timber sliding sash window in a cottage at Bushmills, Co.Antrim.

## Rhythm

In dispersed rural settlements, irregular patterns of windows and a variety of sill/head levels can contribute to a more informal appearance which relates to the varied character of much of our local countryside.



Our villages are often characterised by a unified streetscape created by regular window shapes, sill levels and head heights. Good infill development will respond to and build on these existing rhythms.



Illustrations demonstrating the rhythms created by different window positions, at a notional scheme within the dispersed rural community of Mulleek, and within a more structured environment within the village of Pomeroy.

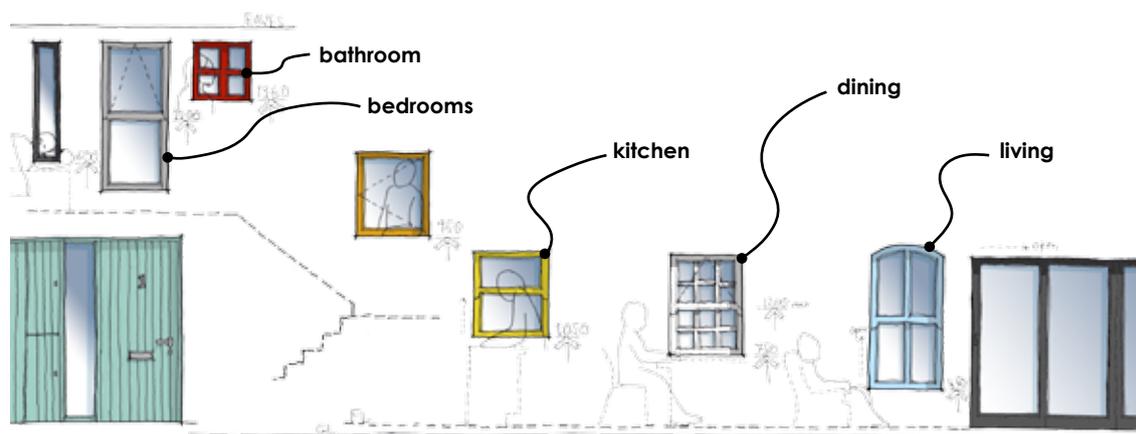
## Size and shape

In new-build rural social housing the size and shape of windows will be determined by the following three factors:-

### Fenestration and openable lights

Traditionally, windows openings were relatively small (usually less than 1.0m x1.8m). Window frames were divided into small rectangular panes using fine mullions and transoms, with the most common historic form of the double-hung sash window. In our rural landscapes a vertical emphasis on openings and individual panes is preferable. Larger horizontal window openings can be subdivided into a number of vertical elements. Contemporary windows forms can be successfully incorporated into rural social housing with careful composition and detailing. For example solid side-opening ventilation panels can be used to bring a variety of colour and texture to the elevations.

Opening sections of windows significantly impact upon its appearance but provide essential functions such as natural ventilation and means of escape. A *Lifetimehomes* requirement for social housing is to provide at least one openable section per habitable room, capable of approach by a wheelchair user.



### Daylighting requirements

Good daylighting reduces lighting costs and enhances the occupants' sense of well-being and satisfaction. Comfortable levels are generally achieved in dwellings if windows are around 20% of the floor area of the room. BS8206, Code of Practice for Daylighting, recommends minimum daylight levels of:



## Solar gain

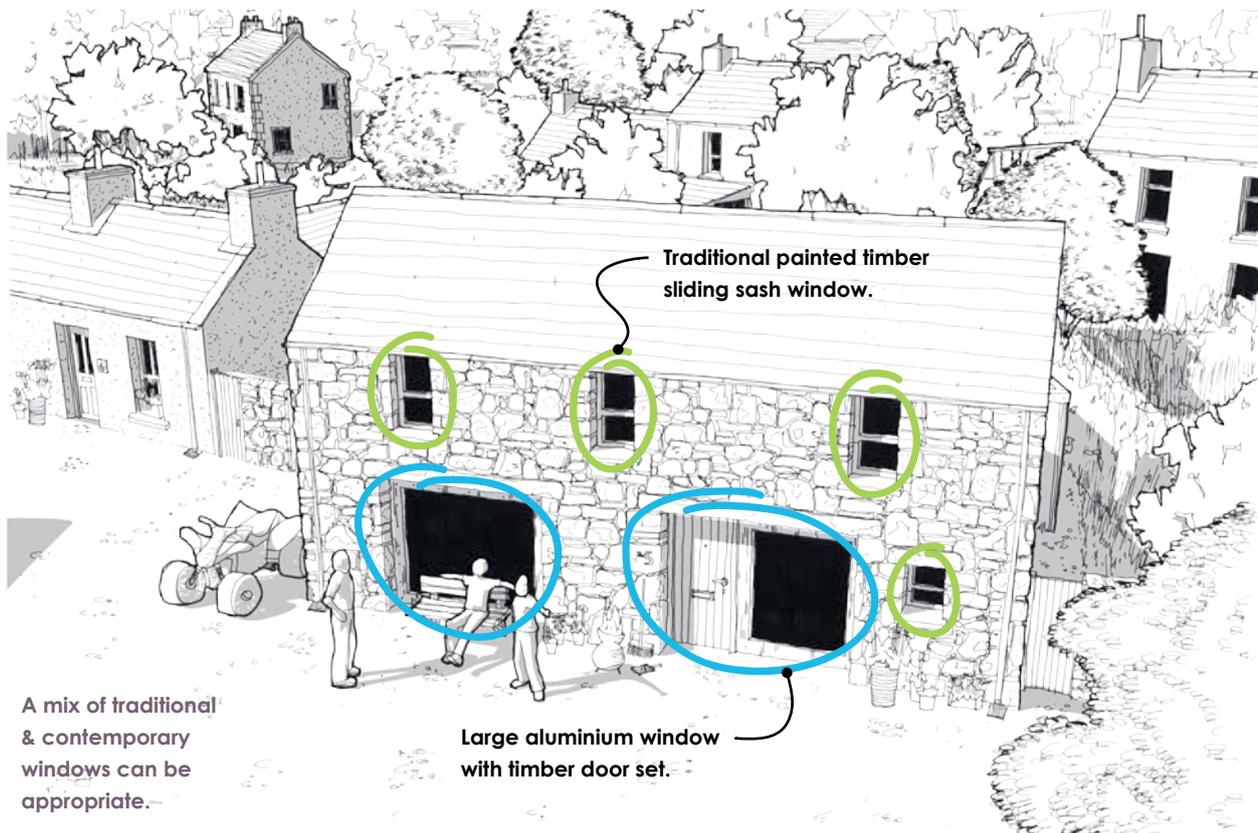
The size of the window should be determined by the orientation. In this example the larger openings are due south, to maximise solar gain. Smaller windows are due north, mainly for overlooking of the adjacent lane-way and to reduce heat loss. This works well because the building is a single room depth.



A notional dwelling at Mulleek, Co.Fermanagh, demonstrating the appropriate sizing of windows in relation to orientation.

**Materials and decorative details**

Windows should be made out of high quality materials, both in terms of appearance and performance. The most appropriate window type for the rural context is timber sliding sash, which is more expensive, but good quality uPVC sliding sash alternatives are available. Poor quality "2D" or "flat" looking uPVC casement windows should be avoided, especially when "false" glazing bars are used. Aluminium can be a good option for a high quality, contemporary look.



A mix of traditional & contemporary windows can be appropriate.

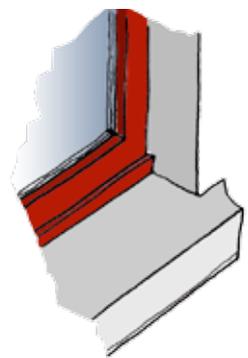
Large aluminium window with timber door set.

A dwelling designed to replicate a farm "outbuilding/barn" at Attical, Co.Down, showing the use of large modern windows on the ground floor paired with smaller more traditionally framed windows on the first floor.

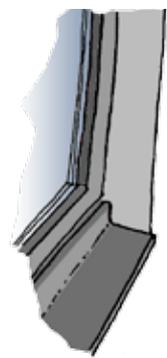
Our damp climate encouraged the use of architectural details that project water away from window openings.

Plaster drip mouldings and deep, heavy concrete or stone sills contribute to a sense of robust solidity. If common in the locality it can be a charming touch to paint the sill & window surround matching colours (if the windows are white) normally earthy or bold bright colours.

Contemporary slim-line aluminium sills look good with matching aluminium window sets when aiming to achieve a contemporary look.



Robust & "chunky" concrete sill with painted timber window.



Slender aluminium sill looks appropriate with matching window.

A variety of decorative surrounds can be used to articulate window openings creating simple, rhythmic patterns on reveals and lintels, including:

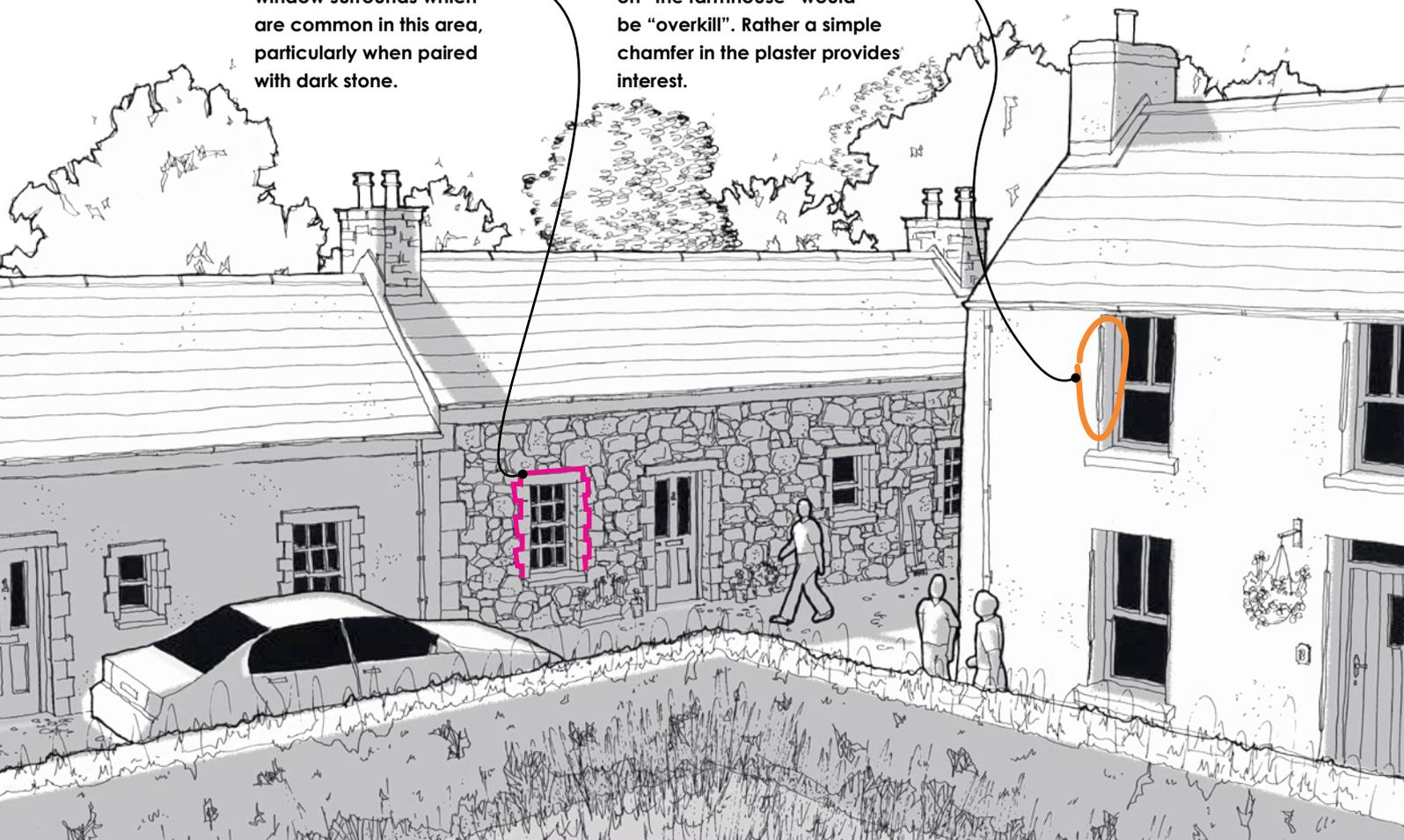
- coloured bricks and brick slips;
- coloured or textured plaster bands and lintels;
- keystones; and
- ornamental crests can also be used.

Designers should be careful to respect the immediate built context when detailing decorative banding, sills and lintels to ensure that the elevations do not become overly 'fussy' and over-elaborate. These elements tend to work best when used sparingly.



This cottage has red brick window surrounds which are common in this area, particularly when paired with dark stone.

Replicating the brick surrounds on "the farmhouse" would be "overkill". Rather a simple chamfer in the plaster provides interest.



Dwellings replicating a farmhouse and cottages at Moneydig, Co.L'Derry. Dark stone buildings with red brick window surrounds are common in this area. The farmhouse does not necessarily need any window decoration.



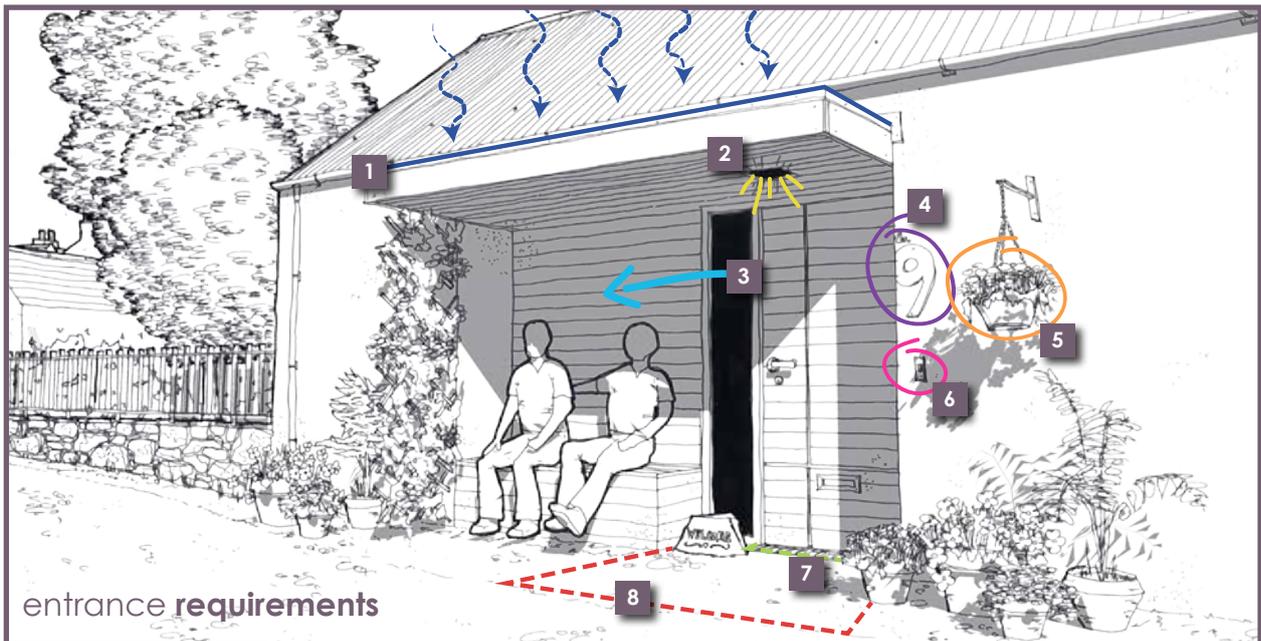
A front door of considerable character within the conservation area of Gracehill Co. Antrim.

## Entrances

As with all elements of vernacular cottages in the Ulster countryside, simplicity of the entrance was key. Doors tended to be plain, sheeted or panelled timber without glazing lights, however colour was used to express individuality. Entrances tended not to have projecting porches or canopies. Access into the internal rooms directly from the front door were common-place and occasionally smaller cottages would have stone "cheeks" providing basic shelter at the front door.

Larger farm houses and country dwellings occasionally had well proportioned, pitched, mono-pitched or flat roofed porch structures, sometimes with large glazed elements that sat proud of the main front facade.

In our villages, entrances were sometimes more elaborate with ornate ironmongery, fan lights above or to the side, and plaster surrounds.



entrance requirements

**1 WEATHER PROTECTION**  
If provided, should be an integral part of the design, not a bolt on.

**2 ILLUMINATION**  
Provided by external light.

**3 VISION PANEL**  
Allowing occupants to view callers.

**4 HOUSE NUMBER**  
Allowing ease of identification for callers.

**5 PERSONALIZATION**  
Around door and on external walls for hanging baskets etc.

**6 DOOR BELL**  
Located between 1000mm & 1200mm for comfortable use.

**7 WATER EGRESS**  
Protected by water channel or gradient on approach.

**8 ACCESSIBILITY**  
1200 x 1200mm level entrance platform at threshold.

A notional dwelling at Pomeroy, Co.Tyrone, demonstrating the requirements for entrances for rural social housing.

front doors



back & patio doors



# Building **fabric** and performance

A sustainable rural house should encompass the Passive House principles, where the building is designed and built to a very high standard to achieve a healthy and stable internal environment. An effective building fabric is essential for this.

## 1 THERMAL MASS & INSULATION

Thermal mass will store heat, and a well insulated envelope will minimise heat loss and contributes to comfortable conditions all year round.

A Medium Weight Dwelling (blockwork inner walls with concrete ground floor) can out perform a Light Weight Dwelling (timber stud inner walls with concrete ground floor) by around 7%. Thermal mass also reduces the risk of summer overheating by reducing peak temperatures. The thermal mass area should be around six times the size of windows.

Regarding insulation, the basic rule is to wrap the building continuously on all sides, including the ground floor slab with insulation which will need to be 150mm PIR Insulation Board in walls and floor, and 300mm to 400mm in the roof.

## 2 AIR TIGHTNESS & VENTILATION

Even if a dwelling is very well insulated, heat will be lost if there are gaps in the building fabric where air can escape.

To comply with the current Building Regulations, dwellings with an as-built air leakage test of less than  $3\text{m}^3/\text{hr}/\text{m}^2$  require additional ventilation to be installed whereas dwellings designed to have air leakage of less than  $5\text{m}^3/\text{hr}/\text{m}^2$  also require whole house mechanical ventilation installed. Mechanical heat recovery systems can recover heat lost through ventilation by extracting heat from exhaust air and using it to pre-heat incoming air, and work better in dwellings with very low air leakage rates (around  $3\text{m}^3/\text{hr}/\text{m}^2$ ). The designer must choose a ventilation and air tightness strategy from the onset, taking into account their effectiveness, controls, future maintenance and running costs.

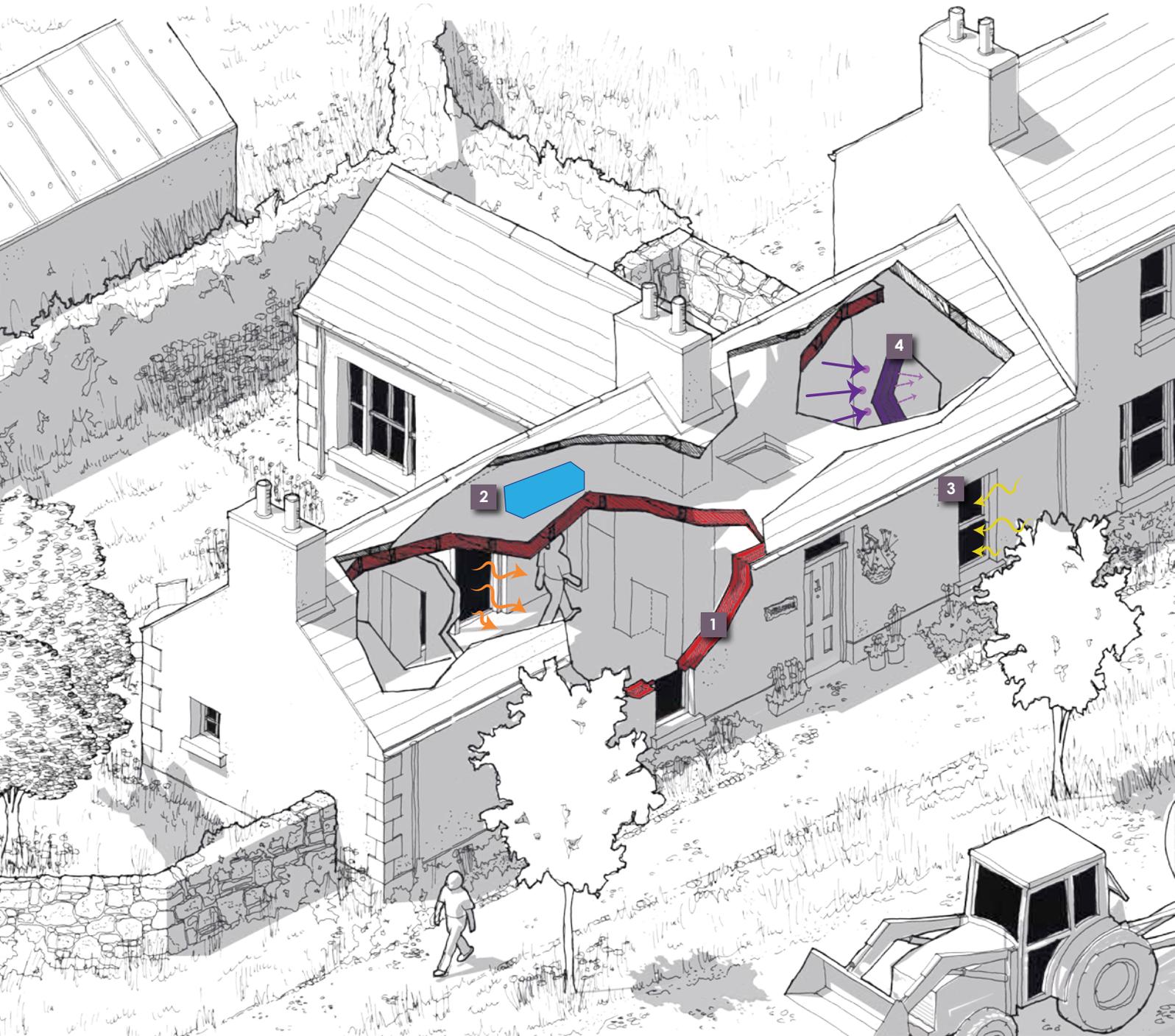
Single room depth dwellings have the ability to achieve cross ventilation and give more flexibility in placing and sizing windows to take advantage of solar gain.

## 3 GLAZING

"A" rated windows allow more free energy into the dwelling than is lost through the window. As most of this heat is generated in the summer when it is not needed, triple glazing windows with a lower u-value perform better.

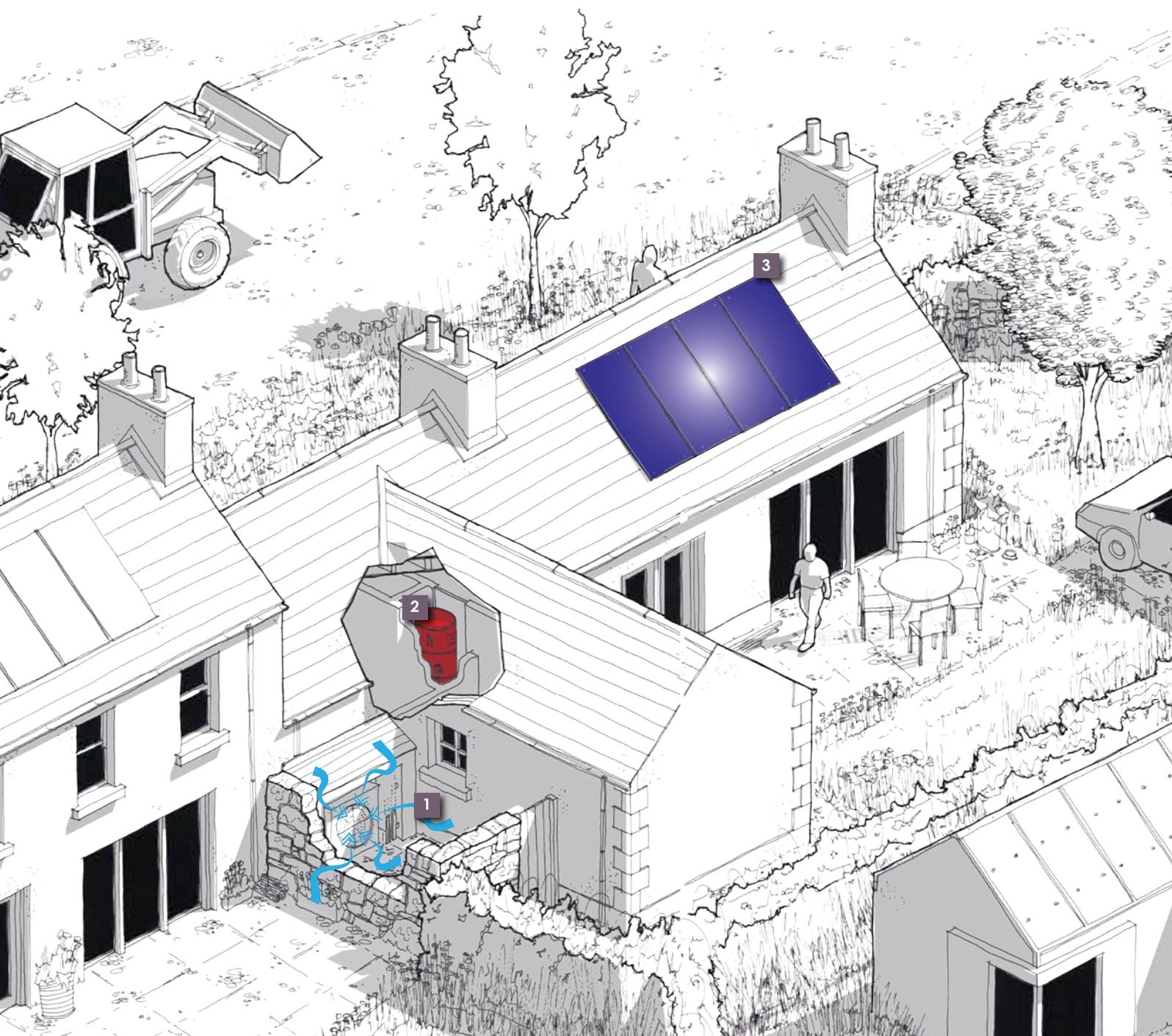
## 4 ACOUSTICS

Party walls with 150mm dense blockwork cavity walls can achieve sound reduction levels twice those of the Building Regulations whilst allowing walls to be chased for the installation of services. The combination of these party walls and triple glazed windows to isolate external noise will greatly enhance the occupant's comfort.



A dwelling at the notional scheme at Attical, Co.Down, demonstrating the key features of good building fabric and performance in new-build rural social housing.

# Energy use and renewable technologies



A dwelling at the notional scheme at Attical, Co. Down, demonstrating the use of appropriate renewable technologies in new-build rural social housing.

The Northern Ireland Energy market is planning to move from 10% of electricity generated from renewable sources in 2010 to around 40% in 2020. The Energy mix is also expected to move to a mix of natural gas, wind and photovoltaic panels. The cost of Electricity and Gas is projected to rise by about 30% and 20% respectively in real terms by 2020.

Dwellings should be designed to allow for the future installation of renewable technologies as they become more cost effective and allow dwellings to reduce their carbon footprint and minimise the impact of future fuel price rises.

### 1 HEAT PUMP

**Air to Water Heat Pumps are expected to become the primary heating source for dwellings as costs falls, efficiencies improve and grid electricity becomes decarbonised. Dwellings should allow for the future conversion to heating systems that can utilize 'free' electricity from PV systems through the use of technologies such as heat pumps, etc.**

Heat pumps operate more efficiently when running at lower temperatures, and therefore require larger radiators than fossil fuel systems like gas or oil. With a highly insulated fabric with high thermal mass, the pump can heat the house during the day and the heat will be retained into the evening when the occupants often return.

### 2 SOLAR HOT WATER

**Solar Thermal Systems provide around 20% of hot water in the winter months and can provide all the hot water supply in the summer months.**

A Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme is expected soon and will improve the long paybacks for technologies such as solar thermal panels.

### 3 PHOTOVOLTAIC PANELS

**These are now a cost effective renewable technology using subsidies from the NIROC scheme with paybacks within 7 to 10 years depending on the system, its cost, specification, size and orientation. By 2020 as costs are expected to continue to fall, PV systems should be cost effective without subsidy.**

For an intermittently occupied dwelling, Peak Electrical Demands are generally in the early morning and in the evening, whereas Peak Electrical Supply is at mid-day. Therefore only 40-50% of the output of PV Systems supplies electricity to the dwelling with the remainder exported to the grid. Increasing the demand for electricity around mid-day by timing more appliances to run at this time or by converting the electricity generated to heat through an immersion heater element will lead to a more cost effective use of the technology.

# Utilities

The provision and connection of utilities can greatly impact on how a social housing scheme visually integrates.

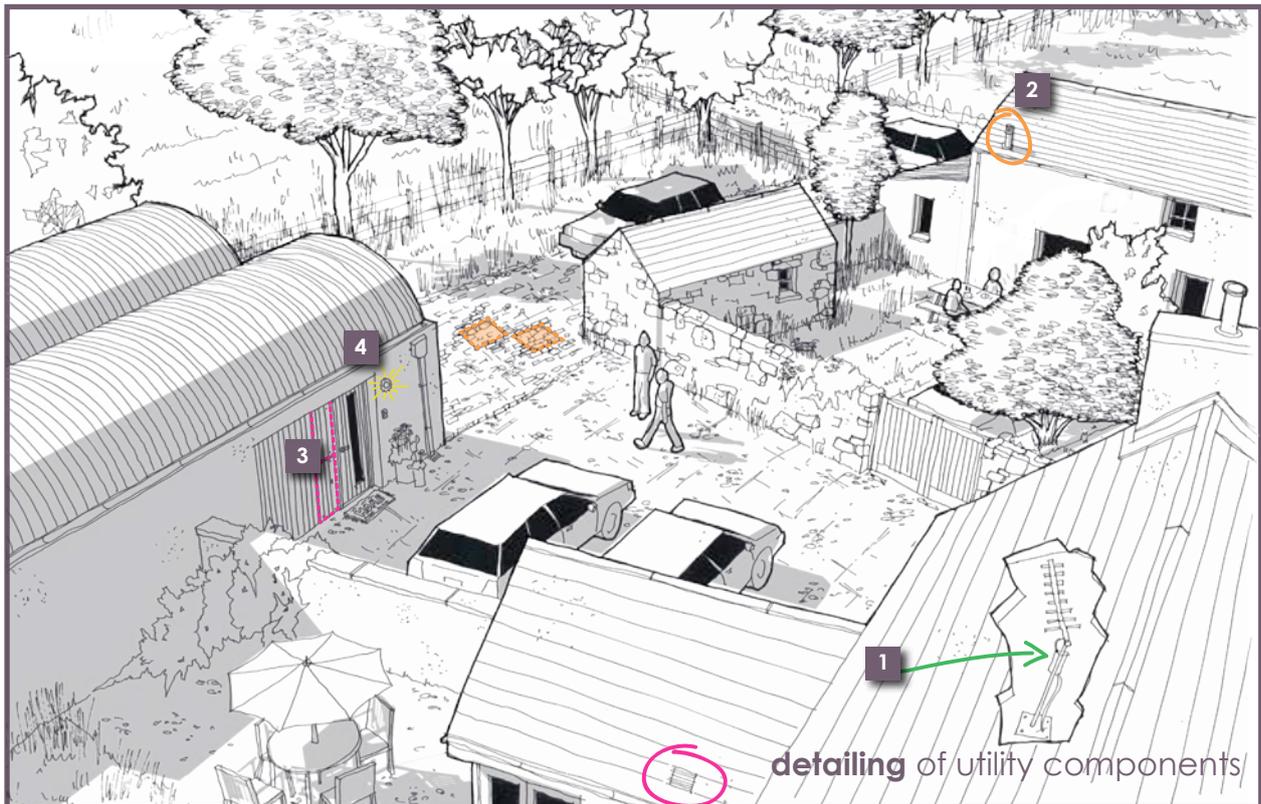
Often difficulty in easily accessing basic infrastructure, such as drainage, electricity, water and broadband can add considerable financial cost to the development of rural housing. Therefore the provision of services to rural housing needs to be as efficient as possible, but avoiding "cheaper" but less sensitive solutions.

Many "off the shelf" utility components as found throughout rural Northern Ireland are often "stuck on" to the exterior of buildings, appearing as after-thoughts, such as gas intakes, meter boxes and satellite dishes.

The designer's aim should be, where possible to hide or disguise. Where appropriate traditional rural materials for construction should be used when such infrastructure would otherwise be highly visible.



Westview Terrace, Sion Mills, Co. Tyrone, with its Conservation Area character diminished by the clutter of prominent satellite dishes and television aerials.



detailing of utility components

**1** SATELLITE DISHES & AERIALS

In the future the need to use satellite dishes may decrease due to the popularity and advancement in technology of streamed services. This however will require considerable improvement of broadband services to many rural communities.

Traditional aerial systems often function effectively within attic spaces. Where this is not possible, communal satellite or aerial systems are an option. Management of the system will need careful consideration, due to maintenance, ownership, security and performance issues.

**3** SERVICE METERS, INTAKES & VENTS

These should be located out of sight in purpose built joinery or cladding incorporated as part of the dwellings facade, and be accessible. Vent outlets in roofs should either be grouped and incorporated in chimney features or located on rear slopes.

**2** DRAINAGE (INC. EXTERNAL PIPES)

Ideally manholes should be located within an area of hard surface, not areas of shrubs or grass, reducing accessibility and the attractiveness of the landscaping. Avoid a proliferation of manholes, which create difficulties in cutting paviers and kerbstones and can result in messy filling with concrete.

Although impacting on ease of access for maintenance, soil plumbing looks better if run internally, rather than “crawling” across external facades. If necessary, external placement should be simple and on rear elevations.

**4** LIGHTING

All too often, standardized external light fixtures are used on social housing schemes, a detail which can indicate the tenure. There is merit in using fixtures that complement the style of the dwelling’s architecture, either period or contemporary. Variations can be used throughout individual schemes.

A notional scheme at Moneydig, Co.L’derry, demonstrating how good detailing can resolve issues related to utility components.

# External finishes

## roofs

- 1 SLATE**  
Generally the most appropriate option. More expensive, but with a slim profile rarely achieved by alternatives.
- 2 CORRUGATED METAL**  
Useful when aiming to replicate farm outbuildings.

## eaves & rainwater goods

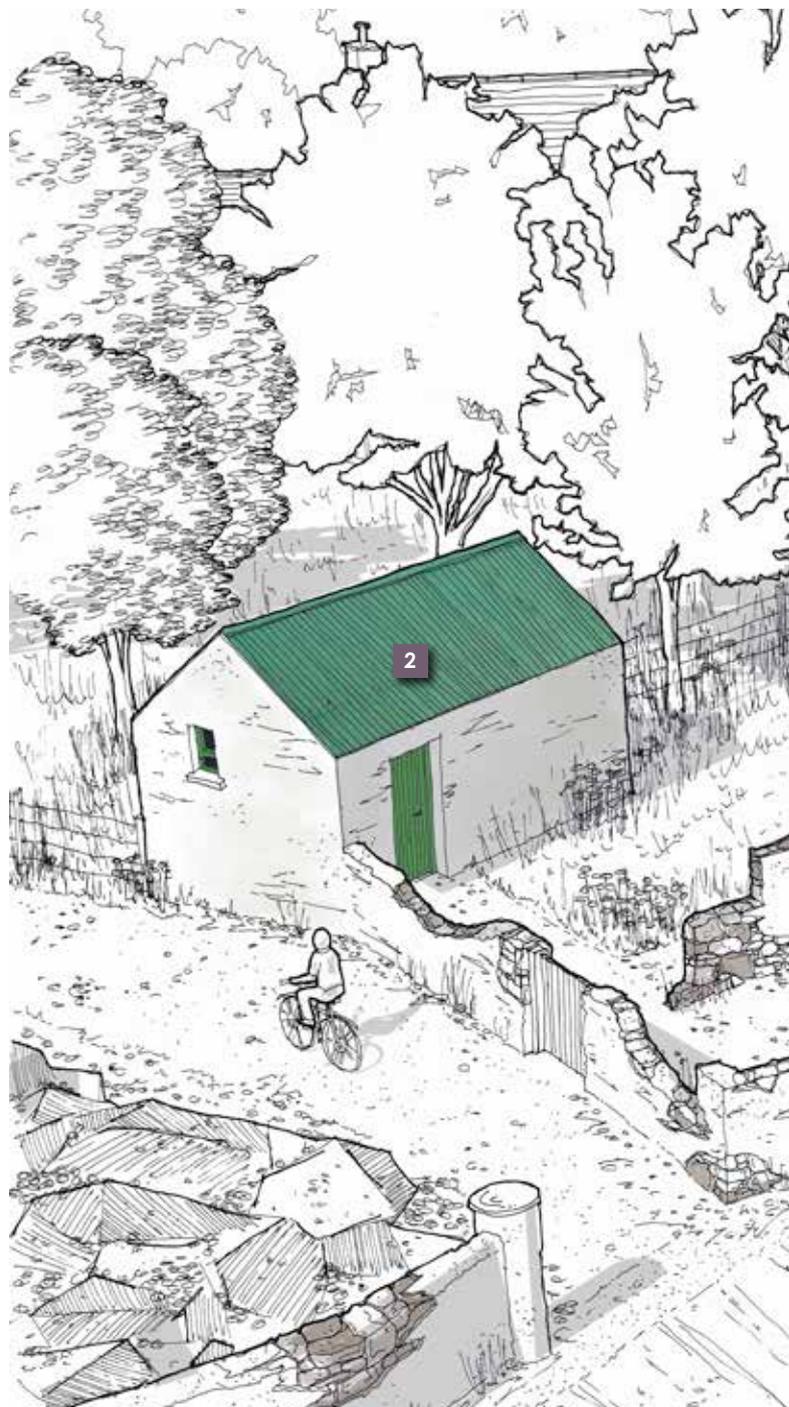
- 3 ALUMINIUM**  
Best used for guttering as easily formed. Alternatively UPVC, if coloured black, is OK for downpipes but should not be used for eaves.
- 4 TIMBER**  
When painted can be good for oversailing eaves.

## walls

- 5 RENDER**  
Smooth or rough - wet or dry dash, whitewashed.
- 6 STONE**  
Many types and styles used throughout the Region.
- 7 BRICK**  
Generally in villages, however some grander country dwellings may have brick features.
- 8 CLADDING**  
For example, timber shiplap, fibre conc. panels etc. Again, useful when replicating outbuildings.

## doors & windows

- 9 TIMBER**  
Timber is best for traditional designs, however some good uPVC alternatives are available.
- 10 ALUMINIUM**  
An appropriate contemporary alternative.



Materials should be linked to the place, reflecting certain rural area's particular identity. Buildings were historically constructed and finished from locally sourced materials (e.g. almost all of Co. Antrim is an area of basalt, where many buildings were constructed of its dark stone). A real effort should be made by the designer to select appropriate materials and ensure they are detailed to maintain the traditions and character of the locality. Maintenance; durability; fitness for purpose, sustainability; and value for money should all be fully considered.



A dwelling and outbuilding at a notional scheme at Mill Bay, Co. Antrim, highlighting the range of building materials appropriate to this coastal rural setting.





