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Chapter 1
Site Selection

The guidance document **Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities (QHfSC)** sets out in a comprehensive manner the key considerations regarding site selection, and these are updated and summarised in this chapter. It is accepted that there may be legacy sites already in the ownership of local authorities, but when considering a particular site for potential purchase a local authority will need to properly and fully evaluate its potential for successful development. The evaluation of the site should include, but is not limited to, the considerations discussed below.

1.1 Sustainable Community Proofing

1.1.1 Proximity to Facilities/Amenities

In addition to having an appropriate zoning for residential development, the site should be located close to as wide a range of facilities as possible, with the general minimum proximity to a school, shop and means of public transport.⁴ It is normally accepted that a ten-minute walk's distance, or about one kilometre, is the standard for what is considered proximate.⁵ Out-of-sequence development at a remove from the existing town or village built fabric, so called 'leapfrogging', is not consistent with planning policy⁶ and should be avoided.

From these requirements, it can be seen that peripheral locations are not generally supported, as their development is inconsistent with planning guidance

and can place an unreasonable burden on residents who may not have access to private transport. Consistent with the *Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework (NPF)*, town centres, brownfield sites and other locations with easy access to facilities are favoured.

When considering the development of social housing in a small town or village, in addition to need, the local authority should be mindful of the extent to which facilities are available for tenants who may not have access to private transport. This is an even more important consideration in respect of housing for older people⁷, who need easy access to a wide range of facilities.

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5 For instance, *Design Standards for New Apartments* characterises 1.5 km as an acceptable walking distance to city centres but sets the boundary for a reasonable walking distance as 1.0 km, the standard adopted here. In larger cities a walking distance of 1.5 km is acceptable consistent with the concept of the 15-minute city.

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7 Age Friendly Ireland's guidance on access to facilities for older tenants is discussed in Section 5.2.3 below

3.6.10 Small Towns and Villages

- 3.6.10.1 The principles of urban design, perimeter blocks and quality of the public realm are just as applicable to small towns and villages. These are defined in SRDUA as having populations of between 400 and 5,000 persons. Traditional buildings in Irish towns and villages generally follow the principle of public front and private back, and deliver active frontage to the public realm by way of front doors and windows facing the street. All new housing developments in these locations should follow these principles.
- 3.6.10.2 Small towns and villages are usually two-storey and sometimes three-storey in scale, and frequently comprise terraced forms. As need in such towns and villages is likely to be limited, social housing interventions in such locations are likely to be small-scale infill developments,³⁶ and such social housing would be expected to adopt the terraced form and building height of the surrounding buildings.
- 3.6.10.3 The principles of privacy and fine grain are equally applicable in small towns and villages, though it is accepted that street widths may be such that more reliance may need to be placed on street trees to achieve a good sense of enclosure.

- 3.6.10.4 It is also accepted that a small town or village, the typical 'sráidbhaile,' may not have developed much in locations other than its main street, and as such may not as yet have delivered perimeter blocks or even engaged with turning corners. Nevertheless, in order to best facilitate future development, infill developments in such locations must be mindful of the principles outlined above in this regard.
- 3.6.10.5 As discussed above, different considerations of density may apply in such locations, although SRDUA notes there may be some opportunities for improved densities. Similarly, consideration should be given to what might be an appropriate setback (if any) from the footpath, but local example may provide some guidance as to what is acceptable and in keeping with the context. Economic layout and design is still the most important consideration, however.
- 3.6.10.6 Some examples are provided here of local authority proposals for social housing in small towns that adopts these principles, in particular the use of a perimeter block arrangement.



Local authority social housing forming a perimeter block with back to back gardens in the block centre. Riverside Kells, Cooney Architects.

³⁶ Note that SRDUA also places limits on the size of any single residential development in such small towns and villages. For villages below 400 persons, SRDUA limits any one development to 10-12 new dwellings.



Walk up duplexes, Ballincollig, Co Cork. Tony Dennehy Architects



Duplex and apartments at Dun Sli, Portmarnock, BKD Architects, Courtesy Cluid AHB

4.4.3 It can be seen from these diagrams that a combination of house types, duplexes and small walk-up apartments in the region of two to four storeys can achieve densities in the region of 40-50 dph, and this is the range that should be aimed for in appropriate locations, as summarised in the table in Section 3.5.3.2 above. As noted on that table, there are some locations, in particular in small towns and villages, where lower densities are considered acceptable.

In town, neighbourhood and city centres, and along public transport corridors, it is expected that densities higher than 50 dph will normally be required, but these necessitate purpose-designed apartment buildings, which will be considered later in this chapter.



Walk up Social Apartments, South Dublin Co Co. Sean Harrington Architects.

4.4.4 The diagrams also illustrate a number of factors, as advocated in both DMURS and QHfSC, that contribute to an economic layout, which in turn delivers an increase in density. These include:

- Using terraced forms.
- Ensuring that back gardens are sized so the setback between opposing windows at above ground level do not generally much exceed the required 20 - 22 meters.
- Ensuring that street widths do not generally exceed the 3-1 width-to-height ratio.
- Using integrated apartments and duplexes for variety and increased density.
- Providing on-street parking at a reasonable level (slightly > 1 per dwelling).
- Having a joined-up movement system that avoids the need for land-wasting turning circles.
- Ensuring that block dimensions arise from optimal dimensioning of each element, (i.e. garden, dwelling, privacy strip, street width, etc.), as set out in Section 3.6.2.8 above.



Terraced Forms, Social Housing, Riverside, Kells, Cooney Architects.

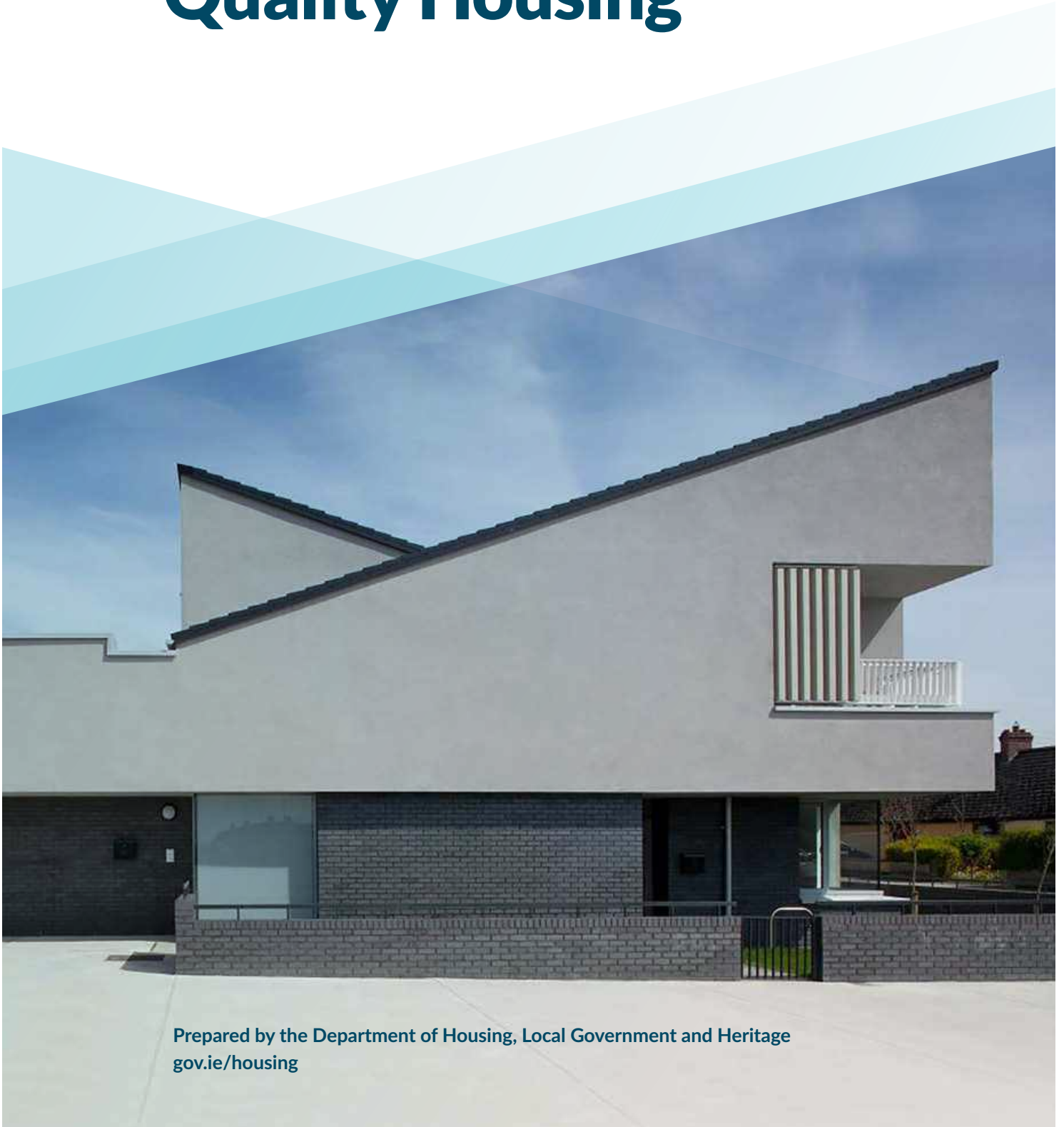


On street parking, Social Housing, Carrick. Donegal Co Co Architects' Department.



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