Ireland Planning

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FREE GUIDE · REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Rural One-Off Housing, Local Needs & the Planning Process

From site selection to a final grant, step by step

County Development Plan rural housing and Local Needs policies, ribbon development, sightlines and road safety, EPA wastewater and percolation testing, and the full Irish planning process: Section 247 pre-planning, notices, submissions, Further Information, decisions, revised applications and appeals.



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INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Contents

01 The rural housing policy framework 3

02 Local Needs: who qualifies and how to prove it 4

03 Siting, design and ribbon development 5

04 Access, sightlines and road safety 6

05 Wastewater, percolation and the EPA Code 7

06 The process: from feasibility to lodgement 8

07 The process: submissions, FI and decision 9

08 After the decision: grant, conditions and appeals 10

09 Refusals: revised application or appeal? 11

10 Common mistakes and FAQs 12

11 Checklist, sources and contact 13

About this guide

Building a one-off house in the countryside is one of the most important planning decisions a family makes, and one of the most frequently refused. Success depends on matching the right applicant, the right site and the right design to the County Development Plan. This guide explains the rules and the full planning process, from first site visit to final grant.

PLANNING LAW IN TRANSITION · NOVEMBER 2026

The remaining parts of the **Planning and Development Act 2024** come into operation on **26 November 2026**, with new regulations. Applications lodged before midnight on 25 November 2026 continue under the **Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)**. Section numbers change under the 2024 Act, but most core concepts and time limits carry through. This guide uses the familiar 2000 Act terms and flags the main 2024 Act equivalents.

Important: please read

This guide is general information about the planning system in the Republic of Ireland. It is not legal advice and not advice about any particular property. Legislation, regulations, development plans and fees change, and every site is different. Always check the current position with your planning authority and, where relevant, a qualified professional before starting work, buying property or submitting an application. Information is correct at the time of writing, November 2026. Where this guide summarises legislation, the official text takes precedence.

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STEP 1 · POLICY

The rural housing policy framework

Rural housing policy operates at three levels: national, regional and county. The **County Development Plan** is decisive for individual applications.

Level	What it says (summary)
National Planning Framework (First Revision, 2025)	Supports single housing in the countryside based on **demonstrable economic or social need** in areas under urban influence, and on siting and design criteria elsewhere, while prioritising compact growth of towns and villages.
Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines (2005)	Still in force. Sets out rural area types, the concept of persons with a rural-generated housing need, siting and design advice, and the definition of ribbon development.
Draft National Planning Statement (2026)	A proposed Sustainable Rural and Gaeltacht Housing National Planning Statement is in preparation and will replace the 2005 Guidelines when finalised. Check its status.
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy	Regional growth priorities and settlement strategy.
County Development Plan	Maps rural area types, sets the Local Needs criteria, design guidance, wastewater and access standards. Some counties also publish a Rural House Design Guide.

Typical rural area types

Areas under strong urban influence

Commuter belts around cities and large towns. Strictest Local Needs tests. Typical in parts of Dublin's hinterland, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, and around Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

Stronger and structurally weaker rural areas

Policies vary from moderate restriction to support for new rural housing to sustain population. Siting and design remain decisive.

Other designations override area type: high-amenity landscapes, scenic routes, Natura 2000 sites, flood zones and areas around national roads. Gaeltacht areas may apply **language conditions** to protect Irish as a community language.

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STEP 2 · THE APPLICANT

Local Needs: who qualifies and how to prove it

In most rural areas under pressure, the council will ask whether the **applicant** has a genuine rural-generated housing need for that area. The criteria are set by each County Development Plan and differ significantly between counties.

Typical qualifying categories

- ✓ **Social need**: people who have grown up or lived for a substantial period (often 7 to 10 years or more) in the local rural area, including returning emigrants.
- ✓ **Economic need**: people whose work is intrinsically linked to the rural area, such as farmers, farm workers and some rural-based businesses.
- ✓ **Family landholding**: sons or daughters building on family land.
- ✓ **Exceptional health or care needs** requiring proximity to family.

Evidence councils ask for

- ☐ Proof of residence: school records, electoral register, utility bills, letters from a parish or GAA club.
- ☐ Employment evidence: Herd number, farm records, employer letters.
- ☐ Landholding: Land Registry folio and map.
- ☐ Confirmation the applicant does not own, or has not previously owned, a house in the area.
- ☐ A statutory declaration where required by the council.

Occupancy conditions

Permission granted on a Local Needs basis normally carries an **occupancy condition**, often requiring the applicant to live in the house as their principal residence for a period such as 7 years, sometimes secured by a **section 47 agreement**. These conditions concern the use of land and can be enforced at any time. They also matter on sale and mortgage.

LEGAL CONTEXT

Following the Court of Justice judgment in *Libert* (C-197/11, 2013) on residence-based housing restrictions, national and county policy has moved towards criteria based on demonstrable economic or social need. Expect evidence to be scrutinised, and criteria to change when a new plan or the National Planning Statement is adopted.

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STEP 3 · THE SITE AND THE HOUSE

Siting, design and ribbon development

A qualifying applicant still needs a suitable site and a well-designed house. Many refusals turn on **siting and visual impact** rather than Local Needs.

Ribbon development

The 2005 Guidelines describe ribbon development as **five or more houses** along any one side of a given **250 metres of road frontage**. Councils typically resist proposals that would create or extend a ribbon, though infill in an existing cluster may be acceptable.

Landscape and visual impact

- [ ] Avoid prominent ridges and skylines.
- [ ] Use existing hedgerows, trees and landform for screening.
- [ ] Keep the house close to the natural ground level; avoid large cut-and-fill.
- [ ] Check scenic routes, protected views and high-amenity areas in the plan.

Design principles

- ✓ Simple, traditional forms: narrow plan depth, pitched roofs, vertical windows.
- ✓ Local materials and finishes: render, stone, slate or dark tiles.
- ✓ Scale proportionate to the site and to nearby buildings.
- ✓ Follow the County Rural House Design Guide where one exists.

Other site constraints

- [ ] **Flood risk**: check the OPW flood maps and the plan's flood risk assessment.
- [ ] **Ecology**: proximity to SACs and SPAs; hedgerow removal; bats and birds.
- [ ] **Archaeology**: Record of Monuments and Places.
- [ ] **Replacement dwellings**: many plans support replacing or restoring vernacular houses, sometimes without a full Local Needs test.

> **Choose the site with the policy in mind**
>
> Where the family has more than one possible site, assess each one against access, wastewater, visual impact and ribbon development **before** commissioning a design. The best site on paper is the one that meets all four tests.

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STEP 4 · ROAD SAFETY

Access, sightlines and road safety

Traffic hazard is one of the most common reasons for refusing rural houses. A new entrance must give drivers emerging from the site **clear visibility** in both directions, and must not endanger other road users.

Issue	What to check
Sightline distance	Set by the County Development Plan according to the road class and speed. Longer distances are needed on faster roads. On national roads, TII standards apply.
Set-back ("x" distance)	The point behind the road edge from which visibility is measured, typically 2.4 to 3 metres.
Control of land	Hedges and banks within the sightline must be within your control or that of a consenting landowner, with consent in writing.
National roads	National policy restricts new accesses onto national roads outside 50 to 60 km/h speed limits. Exceptions are very limited.
Regional and local roads	Plans may restrict new entrances on strategic regional roads. Sharing an existing entrance is often preferred.
Gradient and drainage	Entrance gradient, surface water disposal (no run-off onto the road), and space for a car to wait off the road.

Practical steps

1. **Survey the sightlines** on site, using a measured topographical survey and a traffic speed survey where speeds are lower than the posted limit.
2. **Agree hedgerow set-back** with any neighbouring landowner and record consent in writing; replant native hedging behind the line.
3. **Show it on the drawings**: the site layout plan must show the sightlines, set-back and works required.

> **Removing hedgerows**
> Hedge cutting is restricted between 1 March and 31 August under the Wildlife Acts. Plan sightline works accordingly, and propose replacement native hedging.

STEP 5 · WASTEWATER

Wastewater, percolation and the EPA Code

Most rural houses rely on an on-site wastewater treatment system. The council will assess the site against the **EPA Code of Practice: Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Population Equivalent ≤ 10), 2021**.

1. **Desk study**: groundwater vulnerability, aquifer type, nearby wells and watercourses, and existing systems in the area.
2. **Site characterisation**: a competent, indemnified assessor visits the site and completes the EPA Site Characterisation Form.
3. **Trial hole**: to examine the subsoil, depth to bedrock and the water table, ideally observed when ground conditions are wet.
4. **Percolation tests**: T-tests (subsoil) and, where relevant, P-tests (topsoil) measure how quickly water drains.
5. **System selection and design**: septic tank or packaged treatment system, with a percolation area or polishing filter sized and located to meet the Code.

Separation distances

- ☐ From the house, site boundaries, roads and watercourses.
- ☐ From your well and neighbours' wells; the upslope or downslope position matters.
- ☐ Check the Code's tables before fixing the house position.

Common problems

- ✕ High water table or shallow bedrock.
- ✕ Site too small for the system and separation distances.
- ✕ Too many existing systems nearby, raising cumulative impact.
- ✕ Tests carried out in dry weather and not representative.

Test before you buy or design

A site characterisation costs far less than a refused application. Commission it **before** buying a site or fixing the house design. Where the site is marginal, raised or engineered percolation areas may help, but the Code's limits still apply. Water supply (public mains, group scheme or private well) should be confirmed at the same time.

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THE PLANNING PROCESS · PART 1

From feasibility to lodgement

The same core process applies to almost every application in Ireland: house extensions, rural houses, changes of use and commercial projects. The steps below use the 2000 Act terms, with 2024 Act notes.

1. **Feasibility review**: applicant eligibility (Local Needs), zoning and area type, planning history of the land, access, wastewater, landscape and designations. This is where most refusals are avoided.
2. **Pre-planning consultation** (section 247 of the 2000 Act; sections 89 to 90 of the 2024 Act): a meeting with the council's planner to discuss the proposal. Advice is not binding. Under the 2026 Regulations, if the council does not facilitate a requested consultation within 4 weeks, you may proceed to apply (other than for large residential developments).
3. **Surveys and reports**: topographical survey, site characterisation, sightline drawing, ecological or flood screening where needed, and a Local Needs supporting statement with evidence.
4. **Design and drawings**: site location map (with the site outlined in red and other landholding in blue), site layout plan, floor plans, elevations, sections and a design statement.
5. **Public notices**: a **newspaper notice** in an approved newspaper and a **site notice** on the site, visible from the public road. Under the 2001 Regulations the application must be lodged within 2 weeks of the newspaper notice, and the site notice must be erected in the same period and kept in place for 5 weeks after receipt.
6. **Lodgement and fee**: submit the application form and documents to the planning authority (online in most counties) with the statutory fee, currently €65 for a single house.

FROM 26 NOVEMBER 2026

New prescribed forms and site notice wording apply under the Planning and Development (Control of Development – Planning Authorities) Regulations 2026. Check that your notices and forms match the date of lodgement.

THE PLANNING PROCESS · PART 2

Submissions, Further Information and decision

1. **Validation**: the authority checks the application is complete and the notices are correct. Invalid applications are returned.
2. **Public submissions**: any person may make a written submission or observation within **5 weeks** of receipt (fee €20). Under the 2024 Act, submissions must include a prescribed declaration and be made by adults.
3. **Assessment**: the planner visits the site, consults internal sections (roads, environment) and prescribed bodies, and writes a report.
4. **Decision** within **8 weeks** of receipt. Under the 2026 Regulations a decision cannot be made until at least 6 weeks after receipt, and the period may be extended to 12 weeks by agreement.
5. **Further Information (FI)**: if requested (within the 8 weeks), the clock stops. Under the 2000 Act you have up to 6 months to respond; the council then decides within 4 weeks.
6. **Significant FI**: new public notices are required, and a further period for submissions follows.

Timeline at a glance

Stage	Typical timing
Feasibility, surveys and design	6 to 12 weeks before lodgement (site dependent)
Submissions period	Weeks 0 to 5 from receipt
Decision (no FI)	By week 8
Decision after FI	4 weeks after a complete FI response
Appeal window	4 weeks from the date of decision
Final grant (no appeal)	Shortly after the appeal window closes

Responding to Further Information well

Answer every item in order, with drawings and evidence, and avoid introducing unrelated changes. A strong FI response can turn a likely refusal into a grant. Clarification of FI may follow if a point remains unclear.

THE PLANNING PROCESS · PART 3

After the decision: grant, conditions and appeals

A **notification of decision to grant** is not yet a permission. The final grant issues only after the **4-week appeal window** closes without an appeal, or after An Coimisiún Pleanála decides any appeal.

Typical conditions on a rural house

- ☐ Occupancy condition or section 47 agreement.
- ☐ Sightlines and entrance works completed before occupation.
- ☐ Wastewater system installed and certified to the EPA Code.
- ☐ Landscaping and hedgerow replanting.
- ☐ Finishes, external lighting and boundary treatments.
- ☐ **Development contributions** under the council's scheme.

Before you start on site

- ✓ Discharge any **pre-commencement conditions** in writing.
- ✓ Lodge a **Commencement Notice** with the Building Control Authority between 14 and 28 days before starting.
- ✓ Arrange certification under the Building Control Regulations (one-off houses may opt out of statutory certification, but the Building Regulations still apply).
- ✓ Keep a site record of compliance with each condition.

Appeals in outline

The applicant, and any person who made a valid submission, can appeal to **An Coimisiún Pleanála** within 4 weeks of the decision. The Commission considers the application afresh (de novo). Under the 2024 Act, the Commission has a statutory objective to decide appeals within **18 weeks**, and adjoining landowners can seek leave to appeal in limited cases. Appeals add time and cost, so they are best used where the council's decision is clearly wrong.

DURATION OF PERMISSION

Permission normally lasts **5 years**. Under the 2024 Act, a duration of 2 to 10 years may be requested, and only one extension is allowed.

THE PLANNING PROCESS · PART 4

Refusals: revised application or appeal?

A refusal is not the end of the road. The right response depends on **why** permission was refused. In most rural cases, a well-prepared **revised application** is quicker and more likely to succeed than an appeal.

Reason for refusal	Usual best response
Design, scale or siting	Revised application with a redesigned or re-sited house, informed by pre-planning.
Sightlines or traffic hazard	Secure landowner consent for set-back, use a shared or alternative entrance, then reapply.
Wastewater	New site characterisation, alternative system or percolation area design, or an alternative site.
Ribbon development	Alternative site on the landholding, or a design that consolidates an existing cluster.
Local Needs not demonstrated	Stronger evidence, if it exists, in a new application; or reconsider whether the applicant qualifies.
Council misapplied policy	Appeal to An Coimisiún Pleanála within 4 weeks, with a clear planning case.

Why revise first

The council has told you what it needs. A revised application addresses it directly, often after a further pre-planning meeting, and keeps control with you.

When to appeal

Where the proposal complies with policy and the refusal is unreasonable, or the issue cannot be designed out. Third-party appeals against a grant also go to the Commission.

Refused, or worried about refusal?

Send us the Eircode, the planning reference and the refusal reasons. We will tell you whether a revised application or an appeal gives you the better chance, and why.

Request a refusal review → irelandplanning.ie/contact

Or call 01 223 2496 · info@irelandplanning.ie · Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

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AVOID THE PITFALLS

Common mistakes and FAQs

Common mistakes

- ✕ Buying a rural site before testing Local Needs, access and percolation.
- ✕ Assuming family land guarantees permission.
- ✕ Sightlines over hedges the applicant does not control.
- ✕ Percolation tests in dry summer conditions.
- ✕ An oversized, suburban-style house on an exposed site.
- ✕ Thin Local Needs evidence.
- ✕ Appealing a refusal that a revised design would fix.
- ✕ Out-of-date notices or forms around 26 November 2026.

Do I need to be from the area?

In areas under strong urban influence, usually yes, or have an economic need linked to the area. Criteria differ by county; read the current plan.

Can I sell the house later?

Occupancy conditions restrict this for a period. Check the wording, and ask the council how it handles requests to release a condition.

How long does the whole process take?

Allow 3 to 6 months from first survey to lodgement, 8 weeks to a decision, and 4 weeks for the appeal window, longer with FI or an appeal.

Is outline permission worthwhile?

It can test the principle on a site, but it adds a second stage. Under the 2024 Act, outline permission is limited to 4 housing units or fewer.

Can I build a cabin instead?

A Class 3A auxiliary dwelling must be within the curtilage of an existing house; it is not a route to a new rural house.

Thinking about a rural house?

Tell us the Eircode or townland, your connection to the area and the site. We will give you a clear view on Local Needs, access, wastewater and the planning route.

Request a site feasibility review → irelandplanning.ie/contact

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CHECKLIST, SOURCES AND CONTACT

Rural house: checklist

- [ ] Rural area type and Local Needs criteria checked
- [ ] Local Needs evidence gathered
- [ ] Ribbon development and cluster tested
- [ ] Landscape, scenic routes, Natura sites checked
- [ ] Flood maps and archaeology checked
- [ ] Sightlines surveyed and land control secured
- [ ] Site characterisation and percolation tests done
- [ ] Water supply confirmed
- [ ] Pre-planning consultation held
- [ ] Notices and forms correct for lodgement date
- [ ] FI response plan in place
- [ ] Commencement Notice and conditions diarised

Sources

- Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), sections 34, 37, 47 and 247; Planning and Development Act 2024 (incl. ss. 89 to 101, 361) and DHLGH commencement notice, 12 November 2026.
- Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (notices, FI); Planning and Development (Control of Development – Planning Authorities) Regulations 2026 (IPI summary).
- National Planning Framework, First Revision (2025).
- Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2005); draft Sustainable Rural and Gaeltacht Housing NPS (2026).
- Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines (2012); TII Publications (DN-GEO-03060).
- EPA Code of Practice: Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (PE ≤ 10), 2021.
- Court of Justice of the EU, Case C-197/11 *Libert* (2013).
- An Coimisiún Pleanála appeals guidance; Building Control Regulations.

PO

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