

Childcare Demand Assessment

**For a
Strategic Housing Development**

**By
Ravala Limited**

**at
Newtown, Marsh Road and McGraths Lane/Railway Terrace,
Drogheda, Co. Louth**



August 2019

1.0 Introduction

The proposed Strategic Housing Development includes a childcare facility (919.5sq.m) over three floors to contain 14no. rooms for children ranging in age from 0-5years. The total number of children estimated to be provided for could be 120 children. This would depend on the age of the children and the type of services provided e.g. full time, part time or sessional. This is in keeping with the recommendations of the Childcare Facility Guidelines (2001) that provide a benchmark of one childcare facility for 20 children for every 75no. dwellings.

Pursuant to Article 285 (5) (b) of the Planning and Development (Strategic Housing Development) Regulations 2017, the Notice of Opinion on ABP Case Ref. 302215-18, required the undertaking of a Childcare Demand Report outlining the anticipated demand likely to be generated by the proposal and the capacity of existing childcare facilities in the vicinity to cater for such demand. This report addresses this request.

2.0 Childcare Demand Generated by the Proposed Development

The proposed strategic housing development will consist of 450 No. dwellings. Of the 450 dwellings proposed, there are 91 No. 1 bedroom units, 276 No. 2 bedroom units, with the balance of 83no. consisting of 3 bedroom units.

Having regard to the dwelling mix proposed the majority of the development is likely to accommodate families and as a result is likely to generate additional childcare demand.

According to the 2016 Census single person households now account for 24% of all households. Applying this ratio to the proposed development, it is assumed that of the 450 dwellings proposed at least 342 will be occupied by 2 or more persons.

Based on the assumption that 342 No. dwellings will be occupied by families and assuming the average family contains 1.38 children (Census 2016) (i.e. persons aged between 18 and under) of which 30 per cent are children between 0-4 years old, then the proposed development will potentially yield a potential population of 472 No. children of which approximately **142 would be of pre-school going age i.e. aged between 0-4.**

The most recent Quarterly National Household Survey module on childcare (Q3 2016 update) identifies that the percentage of pre-school children that are minded by a parent is 62 per cent with only 19 per cent of pre-school children availing of non-parental childcare that includes services such as crèches/Montessori/playgroup or after-school facilities.

The total number of children of pre-school age estimated to be generated by the proposed development is 142. Presuming that only 19% of pre-school children will use a formal childcare service such as a crèche/Montessori/playgroup/after-school facility would result in a demand of just 27no. childcare places. This does not take into consideration the use of crèche/Montessori/playgroup/after-school facility by primary school children, of which 8% use such a facility (Q3 2016 update).

The child places generated by the proposed housing is just one consideration in support of the proposed childcare facility. The proposed development also contains offices and commercial units. Employees of these elements of the proposed development could also avail of the proposed childcare facility. Depending on the final occupier, the office development proposed (1,902.8sq.m) could provide accommodation for c.160 employees¹ with an additional potential 60 employees in the neighbourhood units. The Drogheda Transport Development Area lands are also bound by employment generating lands to the north. It is submitted the proposed crèche is well located to the north of the application site being both in proximity to employment generating lands and on a transport route into Drogheda which would be convenient for employees in the town centre who live the surrounding neighbourhoods.

In addition, the application site is adjacent to a permitted residential development to include 133no. dwellings. No crèche is provided as part of this permitted development. By applying the same statistics to this development, it is estimated that 102 of these permitted dwellings could be occupied by families and could generate 141 children, of which **42 would be preschool age**.

The proposed development could generate a pre-school population of 143. Adjacent permitted residential development could add another 42no. pre-school children. In addition to this, employment uses proposed as part of the SHD could provide employment for c.220 persons in addition to employment generating lands to the north in the future. It is reasonable to assume that some of these employees may choose to avail of childcare in proximity to their workplace.

3.0 Demographics and Demand

The 3-5 year cohort represents the largest cohort of children in a childcare setting. According to the most recent report on Early Years Services by Pobal², Louth has 59% capacity for the population of 3-5 year olds in the County. This is in keeping with National capacity which also averages at 59%. According to this report, while capacity has increased from the previous year, the increase is lower than the overall growth in the number of children enrolled indicating the availability of places is decreasing overall in the sector. This fact is acknowledged in the National Planning Framework which states that childcare provision is reaching capacity and sustained investment is needed especially in areas of population growth to increase capacity (para.6.5).

¹ Employment Density Guide, 3rd ed, 2015

² Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017/2018

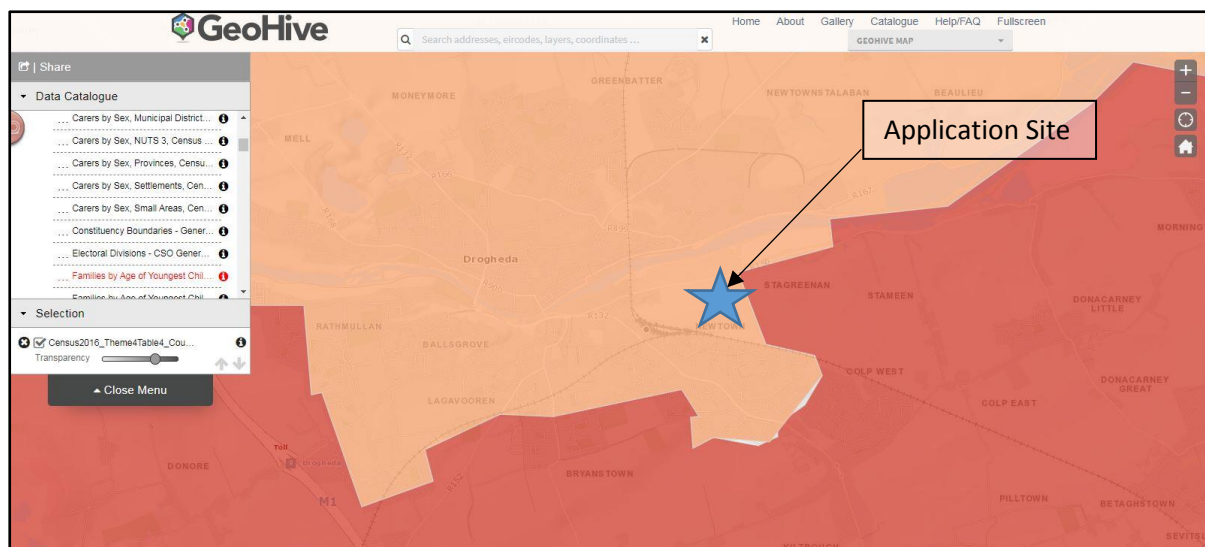


Figure 1: Extract taken from Geohive illustrating Families by age of youngest child aged 0-4 (preschool)

Census 2016 results indicate that lands to the south of Drogheda have a higher percentage of pre-school children than the town centre and lands north of the town. This area of the town is characterised by recent housing developments and has a choice of primary schools which makes it attractive to young families. Small Area Population Statistics indicate families with children with a child aged 0-4 years, represent 31% of families with children in Drogheda. This is higher than the national average figure of 29%. In addition, 1,461 of families in Drogheda are classified as Early School (age 5-9 years). Children of this age avail of afterschool clubs included in the services offered by childcare facilities. According to Pobal, children aged 5-6 are most sought after places in private childcare after children under 12 months based on waiting lists.

The most recent Quarterly National Household Survey module on childcare (Q3 2016 update) states that when asked what type of childcare was desired by households with pre-school children that they were not already using, 44% stated 'Crèche/Montessori/playgroup/after-school facility'. This increased to 59% of households with primary school children. It is submitted that this form of childcare is clearly popular and the preferred method of childcare other than parental care.

According to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, it is expected that the number of children will continue to increase until the mid-2020s and decline only slowly thereafter (para.9.5). This means that the continued provision and enhancement of facilities and amenities for children and young people, such as childcare, is a priority will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

Drogheda has been identified by the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy as a Regional Growth Centre which is set to reach a population 2031 and grow to City status. The provision of childcare facilities such as the one proposed will support future growth.

4.0 Existing Childcare Facilities in the Vicinity of the Application Site

As illustrated by Figure 2 below, the immediate area in which the application site is located does not feature any childcare facilities. The closest childcare facility accessible by foot via McGraths Lane is located in Wheaton Hall c.1km or 15 minute walking distance from the south of the site. Peter Pan is located just over 1km walking distance on the Bryanstown Cross Route. These services are c.3km by road. It is c.5km to the closest service to the east.

Childcare facilities within 1.5km radius of the application site have been examined as part of this assessment. The selection of childcare facilities takes account of journey to work patterns and what would be a realistic option for childcare for future residents of the proposed development. For example, while a 1.5km radius takes in facilities to the north of Drogheda including the Ballymakenny Road for example, these have been excluded from the assessment as their location is not along a main commuting route and does not contain a significant employment area which would draw residents in this direction.

Details of the services in the area were provided by the Louth and Meath Childcare Committees. Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Reports were consulted to identify capacity within the existing facilities. A survey was undertaken by email to verify capacity within the same facilities (copy at Appendix A). Nine childcare providers were contacted and a response was received from three – Playmates Montessori (Magdeline Street), The Grange (Grangerath) and Cuddles (Deepforde) as follows-

	Playmates	The Grange	Cuddles
Maximum Number of Children your facility can accommodate	22	98	52
Current number of children attending your facility	22	70	41
Number of children on waiting list	0	10	13
Estimated capacity for 2019-2020	22	80	57

Table 1: Response to Survey

As noted by Early Years³ waiting lists can be used as a measure of demand but they are not always accurate as parents may put their child on a waiting list with more than one provider. It is also widely recognised that the childcare industry is suffering as a result of a lack of qualified staff and the inability to hold on to staff. This may be the reason why existing facilities are not catering for their maximum capacity rather than an indication of lack of demand. For example, 26% of providers surveyed by Pobal had at least one staff vacancy with more than half stating that they had difficulty recruiting suitably qualified staff. It is submitted that the survey, while the response rate was low, demonstrates that existing childcare facilities are running at or near capacity.

³ Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017-2018

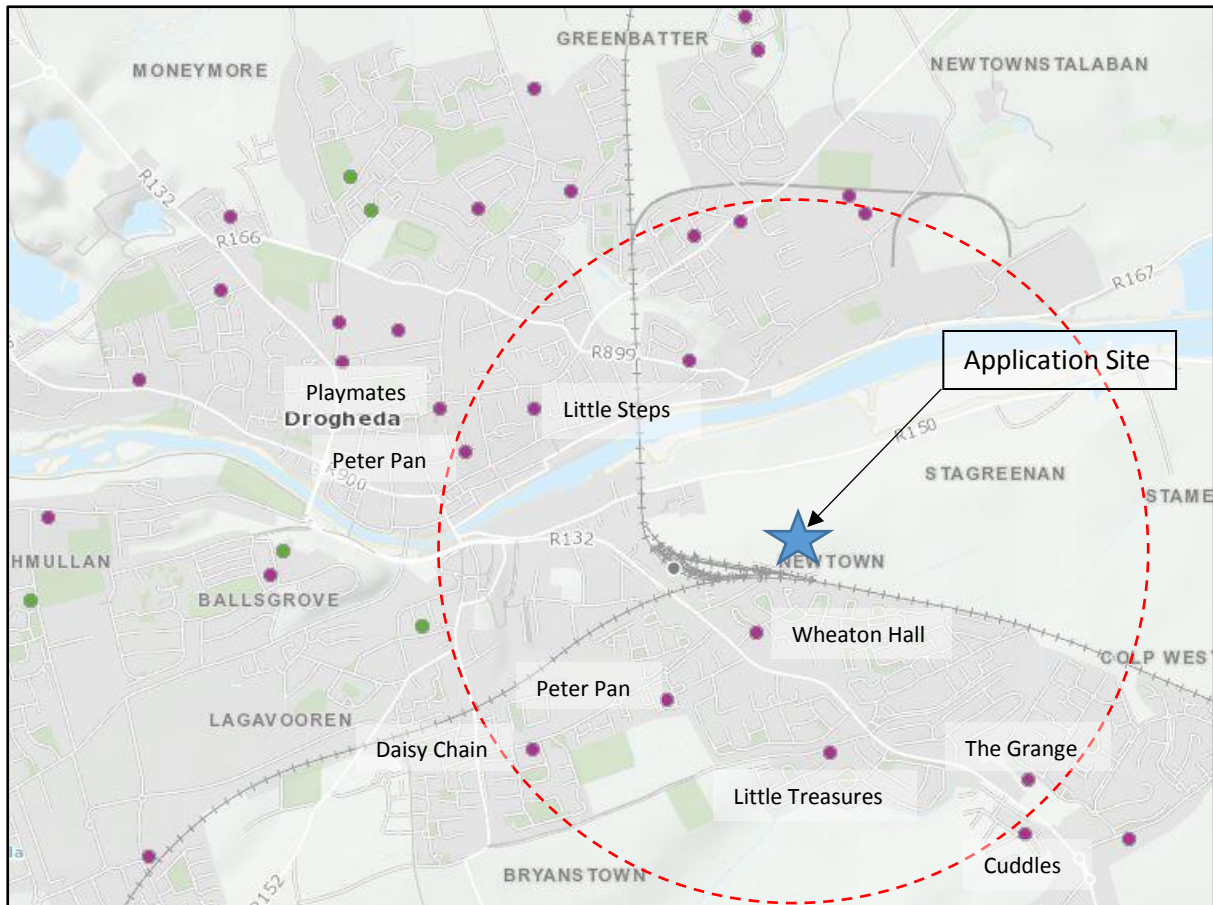


Figure 2: Approximate 1.5km radius from application site (Map source: www.pobal.ie)

Name of Childcare Facility	Address	Service			Maximum Capacity*	Enrolled**
		Full Time	Part Time	Sessional		
Wheaton Hall	Wheaton Hall	x	x	x	50	
Peter Pan	Bryanstown Cross Route	x	x	x	90	
The Grange	Grangerath	x	x	x	98	70
Cuddles Crèche	Deepforde	x	x	x	52	41
Little Treasures	Blackbush Ave	-	-	x	25	
Daisy Chain	Blackbush Lane	x	-	-	70	
Peter Pan	William Street	x	x	x	65	
Playmates	Magdeline Street	-	-	x	22	22
Little Steps Crèche	Oulsters Lane	x	x	x	26	
					Max: 498	

*Information taken from Tusla Inspection Reports ** Result of Survey

Table 2: Capacity of Childcare Facilities within 1.5km of application site

5.0 The Childcare Facilities Guidelines (2001) and Circular PL3/2016

The Childcare Facilities Guidelines outline the preferred location for childcare facilities and the level of provision recommended. Appendix 2 of the Guidelines states that *“planning authorities should require the provision of at least one childcare facility for new housing areas and other areas of residential development unless there are significant reasons to the contrary. For housing, a benchmark provision of one childcare facility per 75 dwellings is recommended”*. The Guidelines elaborate on the level of provision that may be required stating, *“the threshold for provision should be established having had regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas”*.

Section 3.3 of the Guidelines outlines specific locations where childcare facilities would be preferable. The proximity to public transport is also stated as a deciding factor to encourage sustainable modes of transport. Both New Residential Areas and Employment Areas are listed as suitable locations for childcare facilities.

It is submitted that the location of a childcare facility within the proposed Strategic Housing Development which contains a mix of uses in proximity to a public transport corridor and employment lands is appropriate.

The Government announced their intention to revise the Childcare Facilities Guidelines in their Circular PL3/2016. In the meantime, having regard to the extension of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme in 2016 which provides free childcare from age three until children go to primary school, and the roll out of the National Childcare Scheme from October 2019, the Government encourages an increase in capacity to facilitate the expansion that will be required to cater for the predicted demand for this service.

6.0 Conclusion

It is submitted that the proposed childcare facility is located in an area that is currently not well served by existing childcare facilities and where there will be demand for a childcare facility in the near future. Drogheda is a Regional Growth Centre and the proposal is a sequential development to the existing urban area that is well connected to the town centre and surrounding residential areas. The provision of the proposed childcare facility in this location will support the development of a new neighbourhood. The survey has identified some capacity within existing childcare facilities to cater for demand from phase one of the proposed development. As the new neighbourhood becomes established in addition to the construction of permitted development of 133no. houses under P.A. Ref. 17/387, the crèche facility will be provided as part of phase II. The provision of the childcare facility in phase II also support the expansion of employment on site with the provision of offices.

APPENDIX A

Ms.P.Kelly,
Cuddles Crèche,
Deepforde,
Dublin Road,
Drogheda,
Co.Meath.

12th of December 2018

Dear Ms.Kelly,

We are currently preparing a planning application for housing that includes a childcare facility and have been requested by An Bord Pleanála to undertake a survey of the capacity within existing childcare services in this area of Drogheda. We would appreciate your feedback to the questions below.

- Maximum number of children your facility can accommodate (please include all children whether full time/part time/sessional) _____
- Current number of children attending your facility _____
- Age groups catered for: 0-12months 1-3yrs 3-5yrs 5yrs+
- Estimated capacity for 2019/2020 _____
- How many children are on your waiting list if you have one? _____

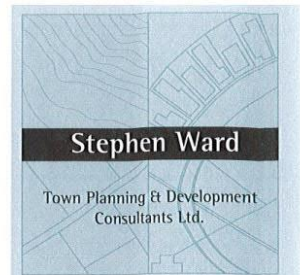
This information will form part of a planning application which is a public document. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

Many Thanks,



Judith Horgan

Note: By email



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