
School Capacity Assessment

Residential Development

Lands at Rathmullan Road, Rathmullan,
Drogheda, Co. Meath

Trailford Ltd

September 2019



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1.0 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Hughes Planning and Development Consultants, 70 Pearse Street, Dublin 2, on behalf of our client, Trailford Limited. The report has been prepared in response to An Bord Pleanála's notice of Pre-application Consultation Opinion in relation to the proposed Strategic Housing Development on lands at Rathmullan Road, Rathmullan, Drogheda, Co. Meath.

Following consultations with Meath County Council, a request to enter into pre-planning consultations with An Bord Pleanála was submitted and a pre-planning consultation meeting was facilitated on 20th February 2019.

An Bord Pleanála subsequently issued a Notice of Pre-Application Consultation Opinion on 11th March 2019. This opinion requested the provision of 11 no. items of specific information, pursuant to article 285(5)(b) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended by the Residential Tenancies Act 2016). One of these items of specific information, Item No. 11, was an assessment of the capacity of schools in the area.

2.0 Site Location and Description

The subject site consists of a large parcel of land, c. 26.2 ha in size, located within the south western environs of Drogheda, Co. Meath, c. 1.7km from the centre of the town, and is situated adjacent to the Meath-Louth County Border. The site has road frontage along Rathmullan Road on the eastern boundary of the site, with this road continuing along the southern boundary of the site. The site is situated within a distance of between 25 and 70 metres of the M1 motorway on its western boundary, and the northern extent of the site is situated within a distance of between 40 and 50 metres from the southern bank of the River Boyne, with the site elevated c. 10 metres above the riverbank. The site adjoins the buffer zone which protects the monuments of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth.

The topography of the land is undulating. The site predominantly slopes gently towards the River Boyne, with a steep embankment leading down towards the road which runs alongside the River Boyne. Due to the fall of the land, the site is set above the adjoining M1 Motorway and smaller rural road to the north adjoining the River Boyne.

The subject land was formerly associated with agricultural use. The site comprises 2 no. large fields and one grazing field, with associated farm buildings used for cattle. There is significant planning along the western boundary which provides an appropriate screen to the M1 Motorway.



Figure 1.0 Aerial view of subject site (red outline) in the context of the receiving environment with existing housing developments 'Riverbank' and 'Highlands' shown in blue and yellow.



Figure 2.0 Aerial view of the subject site, red outline, within the context of wider Drogheda.

As illustrated in the above photographs, the site is situated within close proximity of the Drogheda Town Centre and a number of existing residential developments, including 'Riverbank' and 'Highlands'. These developments a mix of semi-detached and terraced dwellings and duplex apartments.

3.0 Proposed Development

The proposed development, as designed by NDBA Architects, involves the demolition of 2 no. existing sets of farm buildings on the subject site and construction of a residential housing scheme comprising 509 no. dwellings, 152 no. apartments (providing a total of 661 no. residential dwellings) and neighbourhood centre, comprising of a creche, a café and a retail unit, on the 26.2Ha site.

The total number of units within the proposed development is 661 no. units. Excluding the 1 bed units (13 no.) there are a total of 648 no. units considered appropriate for families. Based on the average family size of 2.75 it can be considered that the proposed development will result in 1782 no. persons. According to Census 2016, the average family in the State contains 1.38 children (0-18 years old) and so the proposed development would theoretically accommodate 894 no. children.

According to the 2016 Census, approximately 8% of the population of Drogheda was of primary school age (5-12) and approximately 13.5% of the population of Louth was of secondary school age (13-18). Applying this rate to the projected population of 1782 no. persons, the proposed development would accommodate 142 no. primary school aged (5-12) children and 240 no. secondary school aged (13-18) children. With a 10-year permission being applied for and the proposed phasing of the development, the arrival of these children on site will not occur simultaneously but rather over a 10-year period.



Figure 3.0 Site layout of proposed development of 661 no. residential dwellings

4.0 Previous Planning History and Policy Direction

The subject site was the subject of a previous planning application, Reg. Ref. SA60260. Please refer to Section 4.1 of the Statement of Consistency and Planning Report, prepared by Hughes Planning and Development Consultants, which accompanies this application for further details.

At the time this application was being considered, An Taisce in their referral response raised issues in respect of school capacity. In response to the concerns raised by An Taisce, the grant of permission previously issued by Meath County Council for the subject site, on 20th July 2007 under Reg. Ref. SA60260, included a condition requiring the reservation of land for a primary school. The above development was subsequently appealed to An Bord Pleanála by third parties, under An Bord Pleanála Ref.: PL 17.224875. The following comments were made by the Planning Inspector:

'Should the Board be minded to grant permission, I recommend that the crèche, together with units 7-25 and 107-121 should be omitted. I note that the terms of Condition 2 of the planning Authority's decision to grant permission also requires the omission of these units. This would allow the applicant to prepare an overall plan which would inform subsequent applications for the crèche, school or residential development, and retail centre.'

Following the recommendation of the Inspector to grant permission, the decision of Meath County Council was upheld by An Bord Pleanála on 31st October 2008 with revised conditions. These revised conditions included the following amendments to the proposal approved by Meath County Council:

- Reduced the development to 556 no. units, comprising 370 no. houses and 186 no. apartment/duplex units;
- The crèche building was omitted from the scheme and a separate application for a crèche requested to be lodged under a separate heading;
- The area occupied by omitted unit Nos. 241-266, 320-367, 483-491, and 505-508 (inclusive) were replaced by an area of public open space; and
- Noise mitigation requirements were set out for houses nearest the M1.

It is noted, with regards to the revised conditions, that the recommendation of Inspector, in respect of the omission of units 7-25 and 107-121, was not pursued by the Board. Moreover, following the conditions outlined in the Board's Order to grant permission contained no further reference to the provision of a national school on the application site.

5.0 Current Planning Policy Context

5.1 Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019

Chapter 3.4 of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 is concerned with settlement strategy and housing in Meath. The following objective sets out the rationale for this report:

Objective SSOBJ6 *To have regard to capacity in social infrastructure, when assessing applications for residential development. Planning applications for 200 or more dwelling units must be accompanied by a report identifying the demand for school places likely to be generated by the proposal and the capacity of existing schools in the vicinity to cater for such demand and an audit of the social infrastructure and community facilities available to serve the proposed development.*

A School Capacity Assessment, is particularly pertinent for the subject development in light of the previous planning application, Reg. Ref. SA60260, considered in relation to the subject site.

The Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 notes significant capital investment in educational facilities announced by The Minister for Education and Skills in January 2012 and the subsequent construction of 40 no. new schools (20 no. primary schools and 20 no. second level schools) to be opened by the start of the 2017/2018 school year. This investment also included extensive renovation/extension works to existing schools within Meath. The subject site was not identified as a future school site in the current Development Plan.

It is noted that Drogheda has been earmarked for a multi-million-euro special school campus in the near future. The special school campus is to be introduced on 4.5 acres of land on the Cement Road in Drogheda (marked in orange in Figure 9.0 below) and will serve St. Ita's on Crushrod Avenue and St. Mary's Special School in Drumcar and will meet the needs of children in Drogheda, Mid and North

Louth, Meath and North County Dublin. In addition, an Educate Together post primary school was recently constructed in Drogheda (completed in summer 2019) and has a capacity for 600 pupils.

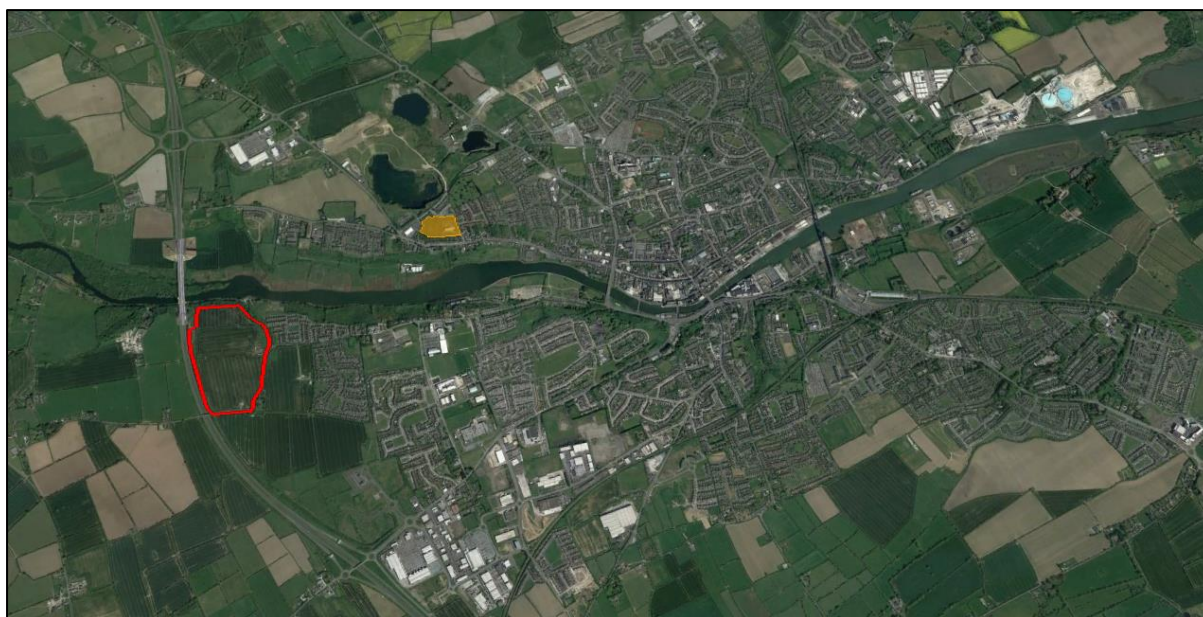


Figure 4.0 Location of planned special school campus (orange outline)

The Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 has provided direction regarding the future provision of educational facilities in the south Drogheda area and the subject site has not been identified as a potential future school site. It is considered that the concerns raised regarding school capacity, at the time Reg. Ref. SA60260 was being determined in relation to the subject site, have been addressed by the new schools and improvements to existing schools rolled out in the intervening period.

5.2 Southern Environs of Drogheda Local Area Plan 2009-2015

The Southern Environs of Drogheda Local Area Plan 2009-2015 is the statutory document for the planning and development of the area in which the subject site is found.

The Local Area Plan for the Southern Environs of Drogheda 2009-2015 provides statutory and strategic framework for the orderly and sustainable development of the Drogheda Environs area situated in the administrative area of Meath County Council. This policy included the following guidance regarding the provision of educational facilities:

'The Department of Education and Skills has advised that lands should be reserved for a primary and post primary school in the south Drogheda environs. Lands have been identified in Bryanstown for this purpose.'

'The need for appropriately sized schools to be located in the Bryanstown area has been recognised and is reflected in the land use zoning objectives for the area. In total three potential sites are provided. The smallest sites could accommodate a primary school and the larger sites could provide for an education campus containing a primary school, post-primary school and associated adult education facilities. The lands identified with a G1 'Community Infrastructure' land use zoning objective are identified in this regard although other uses other than education can also be considered on same.'

As noted, the Planning Authority has identified the need for new schools in the LAP area and has identified Bryanstown as a suitable location for these facilities. As shown in Figure 5.0 below, the provision of schools has been planned for close to the subject site but the subject site has not been identified as a potential school site.

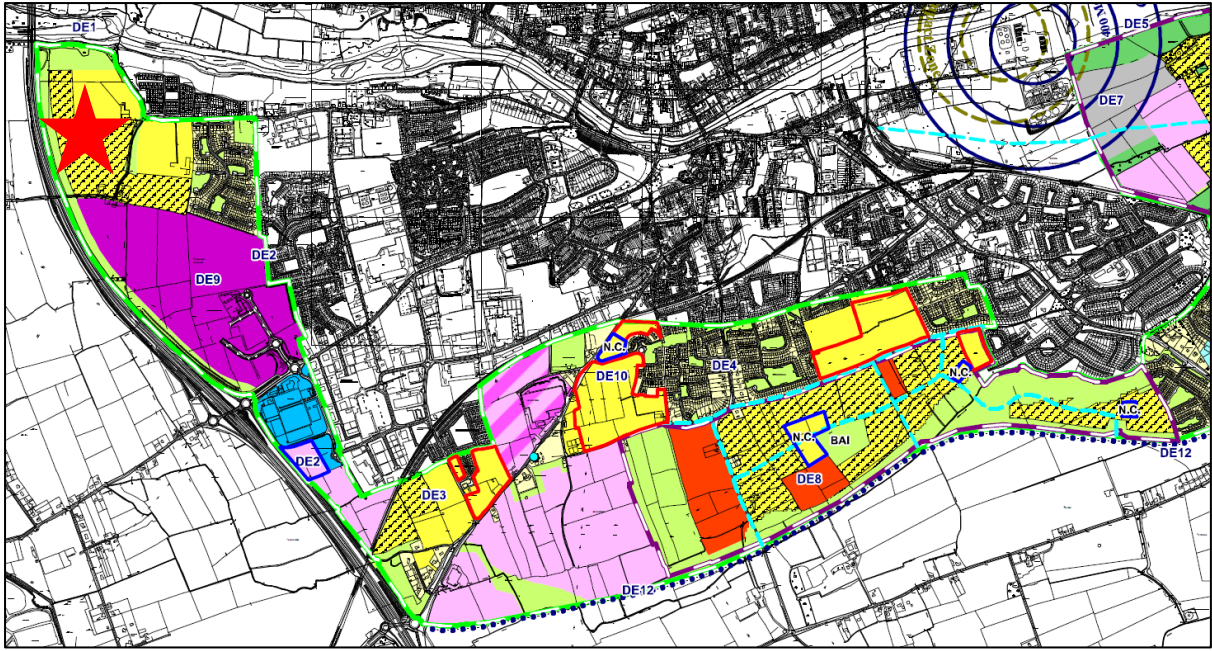


Figure 5.0 Lands zoned G1 (red areas) are reserved for educational facilities, subject site identified by red star

6.0 Existing Schools Provision and Capacity

The proposed development site is located on the edge of Drogheda which contains a number of primary and post primary schools (as shown in Figure 6.0 below).



Figure 6.0 Aerial map showing primary schools (blue), post primary schools (yellow) and post primary schools under construction (yellow/white) - subject site identified by red star

A number of these schools have been newly opened or increased in size since Reg. Ref. SA60260 was decided upon, including:

- St Joseph's Secondary School, Newfoundwell Road, which has completed a substantial building programme which doubled their floor space;
- St Mary's Parish Primary School, Bryanstown, which first opened its doors in September 2012; and
- St. Joseph's National School, Mell, which moved into a newer building in 2011.

These newly opened and extended schools have sufficient capacity to cater for the needs of the proposed development and the surrounding area more broadly. We note the current capacity of the individual schools within Table 1.0 and 2.0 below and overleaf.

6.1 Primary Schools

Currently there are 13 no. primary schools across Drogheda and 4 no. in the immediate vicinity of the subject site. The total student capacity of local primary schools is 5640 no. pupils with 273 no. of these places vacant. This information was acquired by contacting each school directly and by accessing school lists on the Department of Education's website.

Primary Schools in Drogheda			
School No.	School Name	Current Capacity	Current Enrolment
1	Presentation Girls Primary School	320	290
2	St. Brigid's and St Patrick's National School	640	561
3	St. Joseph's National School Mell	320	307
4	St. Joseph's C.B.S.	500	297
5	Scoil Aonghusa	220	220
6	St. John's National School	465	450
7	St. Mary's Parish Primary School	988	1103
8	Le Cheile Educate Together N.S.	440	437
9	St. Peter's National School	112	91
10	Marymount National School	300	290
11	Aston Village Educate Together N.S.	415	410
12	St. Paul's National School	465	458
13	St. Oliver's N.S.	455	453
Total		5640	5367
Total Existing Primary School Capacity		273	

Table 1.0 Current capacity and enrolment figures for primary schools in Drogheda

The existing capacity in primary schools in Drogheda is sufficient to serve the estimated 141 no. primary school aged (5-12) children which are expected to reside on the subject site once the development is completed.

Further to this, the above capacity calculation does not factor in additional schools due to come on stream in the near future.

6.2 Post Primary Schools

Currently there are 7 no. post-primary schools across Drogheda and 1 no. in the immediate vicinity of the subject site. The total student capacity of local post-primary schools is 6339 no. pupils with 788 no. of these places vacant. This information was acquired by contacting each school directly and by accessing school lists on the Department of Education's website.

Post Primary Schools in Drogheda			
School No.	School Name	Current Capacity	Current Enrolment
1	St. Joseph's CBS	900	789
2	St. Mary's Diocesan School	840	840
3	Our Lady's college	954	941
4	Sacred Heart Secondary School	635	635
5	Drogheda Grammar School	360	351
6	St. Oliver's Community College	1375	1325
7	Ballymakenny College	675	670
8	Educate Together	600	0
Total		6339	5551
Total Existing Primary School Capacity		788	

Table 2.0 Current capacity and enrolment figures for post primary schools in Drogheda

The existing capacity in secondary schools in Drogheda is sufficient to serve the estimated 237 no. secondary school aged (13-18) children which are expected to reside on the subject site once the development is completed.

7.0 Future School Needs

The Department of Education and Skills prepared a report titled 'Projections of Full-time Enrolment Primary and Second Level, 2017-2035' on the projections of full-time enrolment in schools across Ireland.

7.1 Primary School Enrolment Projections

With regards to primary schools, the report predicts that primary school enrolment will reach its peak in 2019 before steadily decreasing between 2020 and 2035 as shown in Figure 7.0 below. The expected decrease is a result of the fall in births experienced since 2009.

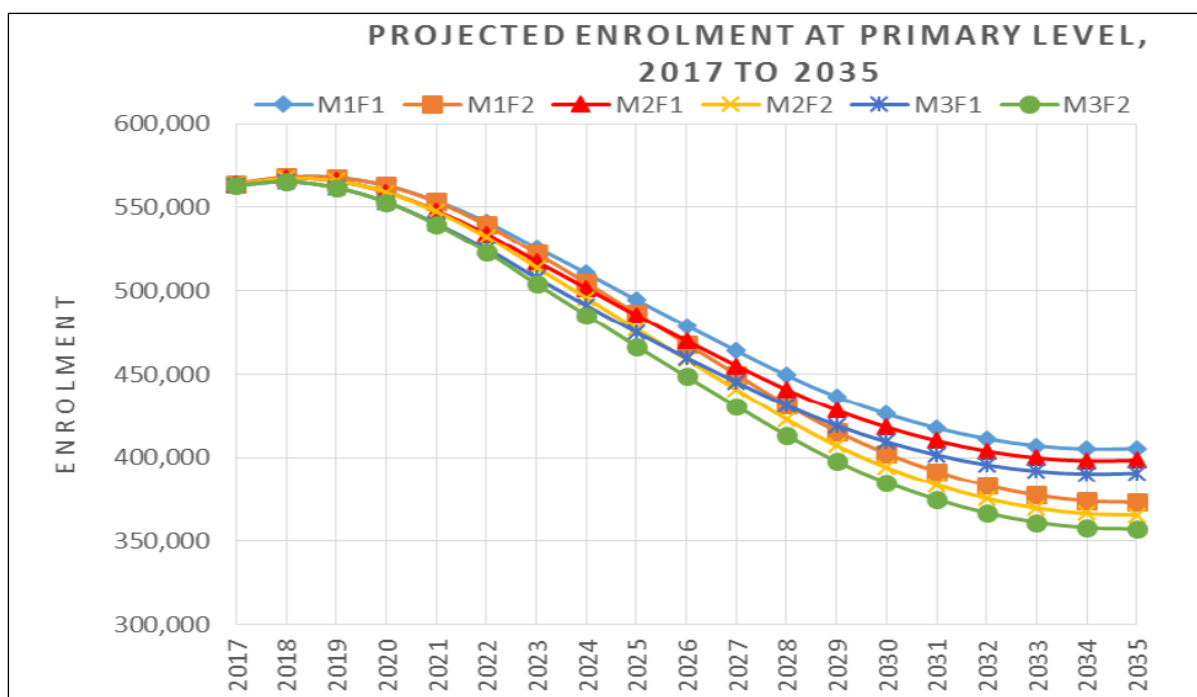


Figure 7.0 Projections show a decrease in primary school enrolment between 2020 and 2035

7.2 Post-Primary School Enrolment Projections

With regards to secondary schools, the report predicts that post primary school enrolment will reach its peak in 2025 before decreasing between 2025 and 2035 as shown in Figure 8.0 below. The predicted increase in post primary students is due better retention of students. The expected decrease is a result of the fall in births experienced since 2009.

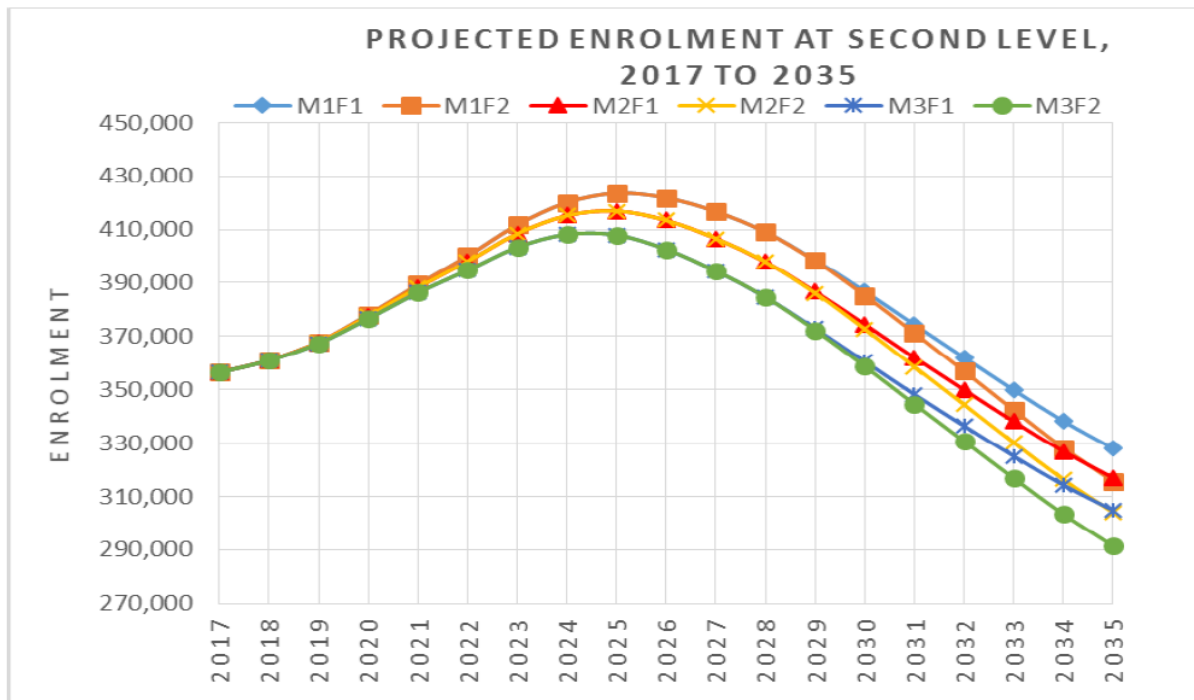


Figure 8.0 Projections show a decrease in post primary school enrolment between 2025 and 2035

7.3 Outcome

In light of the above, it is anticipated that the capacity of primary and secondary schools in Drogheda will increase further in the near future. This will in turn improve availability of school places for residents of the subject development and the surrounding area more broadly.

8.0 Conclusion

Having regard to the foregoing, it is considered that the likely demand for school places resulting from the proposed development can be adequately absorbed by the existing available school places at both primary and post-primary levels within the School Planning Area the application site is located and the wider catchment.

Further, known school expansion projects and future school provision within the area will increase the availability of school places in the short to medium term while an overall reduction in the enrollments in primary and post-primary schools is forecast between 2020 and 2035. During the same time period, a decrease in primary and post-primary school enrolment is anticipated as a result of the fall in births experienced since 2009.

It is submitted, on the basis of the existing provision of educational facilities, the capacity of these facilities and the future development of further purpose-built educational facilities, the provision of a school on the subject site is not necessary.

Kevin Hughes MIPI MRTPI
Director - HPDC Ltd.