

### 3.0 EXAMINATION OF ALTERNATIVES

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter of the EIAR was prepared by Patricia Thornton and John Fleming.

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Annex IV (2) of the amended EIA Directive (2014/52/EU) notes that the following is required in relation to the consideration of alternatives in the preparation of an EIAR:

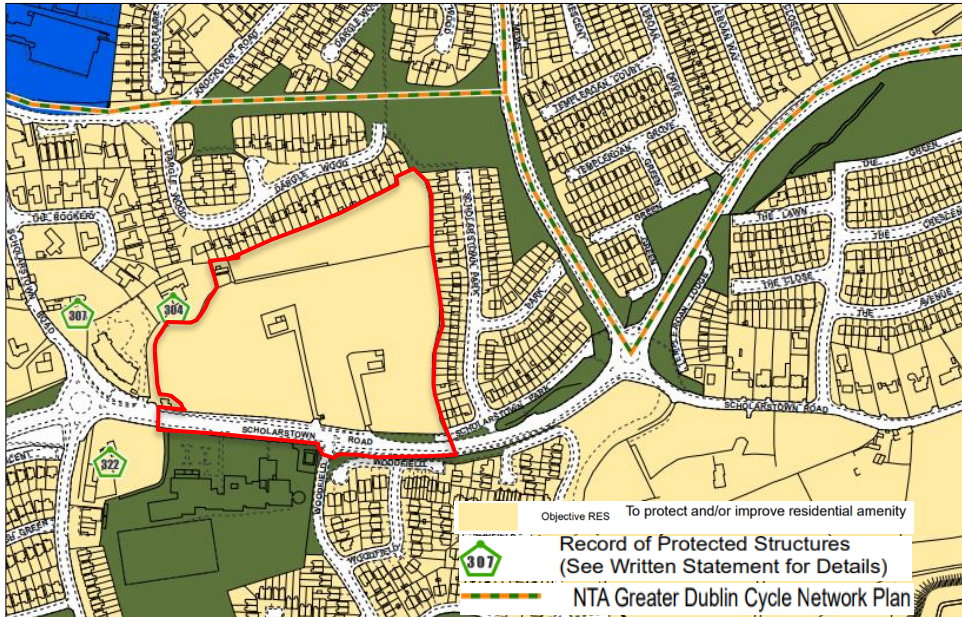
*'A description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the person or persons who prepared the EIAR, which are relevant to the proposed development and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the proposed development on the environment.'*

This chapter sets out the reasons why the proposed layout was chosen and provides details of alternative layouts considered throughout the design process. In addition, this chapter discusses alternative locations, alternative processes and alternative mitigation measures associated with the proposed development.

#### 3.2 Justification for the Proposed Development

##### 3.2.1 Designations Pertaining to the Subject Lands

The subject lands are zoned Objective 'RES' in the *South Dublin County Development Plan 2016 – 2022*, where the stated objective aims 'to protect and/or improve residential amenity' (see Figure 3.1 below).

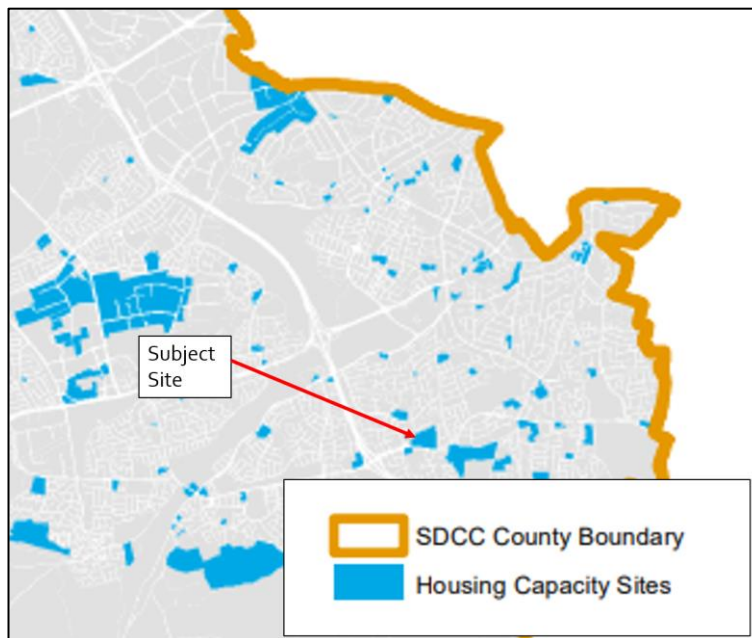


**Figure 3.1: Zoning Map with Subject Site Outlined Indicatively in Red**

(Source: *South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2016 – 2022, Map No. 6*)

Under this zoning, residential use is permitted in principle and café/restaurant and shop-local are both open for consideration.

The site is identified as a 'Housing Capacity Site' in the *South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2016 – 2022* (see Figure 3.2 below) which indicates that the site is suitably designated for residential development and is capable of providing increased heights and density.



**Figure 3.2: Housing Capacity Sites within South Dublin County Council**

(Source: *Map 1.3 of South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2016-2022, Annotated by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2019*)

The site is suitably and expressly designated for residential development and the scheme attempts to respond to the current housing demand context and shifts in planning policy. It is therefore considered that the proposed development is appropriate for the subject lands having regard to the zoning objective and the 'Housing Capacity Site' designation pertaining to the lands.

### **3.2.2 'Do Nothing' Alternative**

If the site remains in its current form (2 No. detached dwellings and outbuildings), this would represent an inefficient use of scarce urban land (density of 0.37 No. dwellings per hectare) within an existing built up residential area, particularly having regard to the zoning of the site and the 'Housing Capacity' designation pertaining to the lands. There is a dearth of large sites such as the subject site within residential areas which are suitable to principally provide residential units.

In addition, the site would not be opened up to the public as the proposed development provides a link between Scholarstown Road and the public open space in Dargle Park to the north-east of the site, therefore the permeability of the area would not be improved if the development does not proceed, which is considered a slight negative impact.

In conclusion, the proposed development will provide much needed housing units in an existing residential area in addition to small scale local services such as the retail units and café/restaurant units. If the development does not proceed this would not represent the sequential development of South Dublin and 590 No. households would not be catered for.

## **3.3 Consideration of Alternatives**

### **3.3.1 Alternative Locations**

The overarching vision of the Applicant and the Design Team since the outset of the project has been to develop a high-quality residential scheme on zoned serviced land. It was decided throughout the design stage that an element of commercial floorspace would be required as part of this large residential development to serve the new dwellings and to create legibility for the scheme. Therefore, as part of the development, some 2 No. local retail units have been provided in addition to 2 No. café/restaurants and a creche.

Having regard to the zoning objective of the subject site and the 'Housing Capacity Site' designation pertaining to the lands, alternative locations were not considered. The site's designation in addition to its location close to the urban core, public transport and services and facilities has influenced the site's principal residential use along with the scale, height, and massing considered appropriate for the subject site.

### **3.3.2 Alternative Layouts**

The scheme has been designed by John Fleming Architects and is presented in the Architectural Drawings and Design Statement which should be read in conjunction with this Chapter of the EIAR.

The proposed scheme which is guided by current national, regional and local policy will appropriately assimilate into the surrounding context to provide a sustainable residential and commercial development in close proximity to public transport, services, facilities and employment locations. In summary the proposed layout of the scheme has fully considered the site's surrounding context by positioning the highest forms (part 4 to part 6 No. storeys) at the least sensitive locations within the site (centre of the site and fronting Scholarstown Road), transitioning to 2 and 3 No. storeys around the perimeter of the site adjacent to existing dwellings.

Having regard to large extent of the subject lands and the location of the lands in close proximity to public transport and a wide range of services and facilities, it is considered that the design response provides a contemporary architectural solution that maximises the development potential of the subject lands in the interests of sustainable development. The design has sought to respond to the locational characteristics of the site proximate to low density houses yet provide a development that also responds to the site characteristics and opportunities presented by a very large underutilised plot that is positioned on a key arterial route within South Dublin.

The subject layout has evolved since the initial design stage subsequent to a significant number of design team meetings and in response to pre-planning meetings with South Dublin County Council and An Bord Pleanála. Please see below the earlier design iterations for the subject lands prepared by John Fleming Architects:

**Layout No. 1 – 286 No. units**

The initial draft sketches for the development of the subject lands were undertaken to establish the nature and extent of the development that could be realised on this site which encompasses a large developable site area of 5.35 hectares (larger site area incorporating Scholarstown Road extends to 6.05 hectares).



**Figure 3.3: Layout No. 1**

**(Source: John Fleming Architects)**

The scheme predominantly incorporated semi-detached homes with town houses and a small number of apartments. Smaller pocket parks were proposed throughout the site rather than a large central open space. From the outset, the location of the main vehicular entrance from Scholarstown Road was established and the need to provide a set back from the setting of Ros Mor House Protected Structure and to retain trees along Scholarstown Road were determined as key design requirements for the layout of the development.

**Layout No. 2 – 309 No. units**

This option examined an arrangement of various house types, including conventional 3 and 4 No. bed houses along the northern and eastern boundaries, with terraced town houses and duplexes in the centre of the site, and taller apartment blocks facing Scholarstown Road to the south.



**Figure 3.4:** Layout No. 2

**(Source:** John Fleming Architects)

This sketch scheme was produced in advance of the purchase of the 'Maryfield' dwelling towards to south-east of the site. This proposal showed many positive features, however the existence of the house and driveway protruding onto the site was identified as a difficulty. It was also considered that a density of 59 No. units per hectare was too low for the subject lands (site area excluding Maryfield at the time was 5.2 hectares). The potential to provide a connection from the north-east of the site with the public open space in Dargle Park was investigated here for the first time.

**Layout No. 3 – 302 No. units**

This alternative layout involved rotating the apartment blocks fronting Scholarstown Road (as shown in Layout No. 2) by 90 degrees to minimise north facing units. This created canyon open spaces with little amenity at ground level due to the parking requirement, even with the provision for a basement included in the design. Similar to layout No. 2, the Maryfield dwelling was excluded from the site area and the density provided was considered unsuitable (58 No. units per hectare).



**Figure 3.5: Layout No. 3**

(Source: John Fleming Architects)

**Layout No. 4 – 473 No. units**

In consulting with the engineers, it was determined that a larger area of open space was required at the north of the site to facilitate percolation. In addition, the need to provide a wayleave over an existing 1200 mm diameter surface water drain along the eastern boundary of the site was incorporated into the layout, by proposing a road and open space along this portion of the site. This layout contains only two typologies (houses and apartments) and generally utilises the layout of 1 No. apartment block plan repeatedly but overall, it was considered to poorly address the opportunity of the site.



**Figure 3.6: Layout No. 4**

(Source: John Fleming Architects)



**Layout No. 5 – 456 No. units**

In this proposal the idea of developing a combination of Build-to-Sell houses and apartments, and Build-to-Rent apartments was first examined. The Build-to-Sell units are coloured orange and blue and the rentals are coloured pink. This design provided the opportunity to create a large central open space, focused on the large oak tree, with the rental apartments located around the features. The existing Maryfield house is now incorporated into the overall scheme, and a larger area to the north east is provided for the open space and percolation. The density of this layout was considered more appropriate for the subject lands (85 No. units per hectare) however it was considered that the large extent of the lands could absorb additional units.



**Figure 3.7:** Layout No. 5

(Source: John Fleming Architects)

**Layout No. 6 – 428 No. units**

This alternative considered the presentation of shorter gables to the site boundaries. These blocks were deemed to be too large and the quality of the open space was considered poor. The idea of creating a local service centre was also explored for the first time in this design iteration. It was considered that the scheme layout didn't provide an appropriate urban edge onto Scholarstown Road.



Figure 3.8: Layout No. 6

(Source: John Fleming Architects)

**Layout No. 7 – 508 No. units**

The creation of a large central open space surrounded by apartments with townhouses along the eastern boundary is beginning to reflect the final proposed layout. The larger quantum of commercial development was reduced after the Section 247 pre-planning meeting with South Dublin County Council. The idea to provide a purpose-built amenity block was first considered in this design iteration.



Figure 3.9: Layout No. 7

(Source: John Fleming Architects)

**Layout No. 8 – 602 No. units**

The option of a very rigid 'grid design' was explored in this iteration with the provision of a central open space. Views to the mature trees from the entrance created an axis that orientated the scheme. The amenity block was relocated to the central open space. While the scheme was ordered, the open space along the north and east boundaries lacked definition.



Figure 3.10: Layout No. 8

(Source: John Fleming Architects)

**Layout No. 9 – 498 No. units**

In this design iteration, the apartment blocks aligned the perimeter boundaries to create a larger central open space with a feature amenity building. The lack of a transition here between the houses to the north and the apartment blocks have informed the final design layout.



Figure 3.11: Layout No. 9

(Source: John Fleming Architects)

**Layout No. 10 - 594 No. units (Pre-Application Stage with An Bord Pleanála)**

The design presented at pre-application stage to An Bord Pleanála was informed by various design determinants such as the need to provide smaller-scaled buildings along the adjoining residential boundaries. The creation of a large open space with a distinctive amenity block is a key feature of this layout (which ultimately informed the final layout – layout No. 11). The importance of the axial view to the existing mature trees on entry to the development was considered important and is also retained in the final layout.



Figure 3.12: Layout No. 10

(Source: John Fleming Architects)

This design solution consists of two principal typologies: low-level buildings around the northern, eastern and western perimeter, where the development adjoins existing low-density housing and a Protected Structure 'Ros Mor House'; and taller apartment blocks in the centre of the site, and fronting onto Scholarstown Road, arranged around a large central open space. This placement of three-storey duplexes and apartments along the northern and eastern boundaries allows for a gradual transition from the existing two-storey developments to the taller six-storey apartment buildings of the proposed development. Ultimately this layout was moderately revised to form the current design layout subject of this proposed application (see layout No. 11 below)

### Layout No. 11 – Final Layout

The final design is informed by the examination of the various alternatives and is principally similar to layout No. 10 which was presented to An Bord Pleanála at pre-application consultation stage, given the Board did not request any design changes.



Figure 3.13: Layout No. 11

(Source: John Fleming Architects)

The principal changes incorporated into the scheme layout since pre-application stage with An Bord Pleanála include the following:

- Block A9 at the south-western corner of the site was reduced by 1 No. bay, removing 2 No. apartments which has allowed the access road to be widened in the south west corner;
- Block C2 was set back further at 4<sup>th</sup> floor level, in addition to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor setback as it was considered to provide a better transition from the gate lodge of Ros Mor House;
- The amenity building was refined in the central open space;
- Surface parking was reduced to prevent the development becoming car dominated; and

- A management suite and café/restaurant were inserted to the ground floor of C<sub>3</sub> to promote activity adjacent to the entrance of the development and providing an active frontage to Scholarstown Road. The height of C<sub>3</sub> was increased from part-4 to part-5 storey to part-5 to part-6 storey as it was considered this provided an improved architectural composition along Scholarstown Road.

In summary, having regard to the neighbouring residential dwellings to the north, east and west of the site, it became apparent throughout the design process that the need to position the lowest forms of the development along the adjoining residential boundaries was critical. The creation of a large open space with a distinctive amenity block is a key focus of the scheme and will provide an attractive environment in the centre of this new development. The importance of the axial view to the existing mature trees on entry to the development was retained as a key element of this final design layout.

The proposed design solution consists of two principal typologies: low-level buildings around the northern, eastern and western perimeter, where the development will abut the existing low-density housing; and taller apartment blocks located at the least sensitive positions towards the centre of the site and fronting onto Scholarstown Road which are arranged around the large central open space.

Lower 3 No. storey units are located on the perimeter at the interface with Ros Mor House and existing housing on the northern, eastern and western boundaries. A 2 No. storey retail and café/restaurant building is located in at the south-east corner of the site also adjacent to residential dwellings. This placement of 3 No. storey duplexes and apartments along the perimeter boundaries allows for a gradual transition from the existing 2 No. storey developments to the taller part 6 No. storey apartment buildings within the proposed development. The final layout has been considered carefully and audited to ensure it complies with the design principles, policies and objectives laid out in the various guidelines. The design solution has allowed a high-density layout to be achieved while respecting the setting and amenity of the adjacent residential dwellings.

### 3.3.3 Alternative Processes

The proposed development includes the provision of 590 No. residential units (480 No. Build-to-Rent and 110 No. Build-to-Sell units), commercial floorspace and associated development. Therefore, as the development proposes in excess of 100 No. residential units, it is mandatory that the planning application is lodged as a Strategic Housing Development Planning Application to An Bord Pleanála, under the *Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016*.

### 3.4 Alternative Mitigation Measures

The mitigation measures outlined throughout the various EIAR chapters are considered appropriate for the proposed development therefore no alternative mitigation measures were considered in the preparation of this chapter.



### 3.5 Cumulative Impacts

Each design iteration comprehensively considered any potential impacts on neighbouring developments, modulating the edges of the scheme to provide an appropriate transition to its direct context. This has resulted in the positioning of the lower scaled elements of the scheme at the northern, eastern and western boundaries of the site ensuring that an appropriate design response has been provided to minimise the cumulative impact of the development with neighbouring developments.

We note that under SDCC Reg. Ref. SD18A/0227 [ABP Ref. ABP-304162-19] permission has recently been granted by An Bord Pleanála for 6 No. dwellings at a site to the northwest of the subject site (known as Mount Michael & Wits End, The Rookery, Scholarstown, Dublin 16). However, having regard to the separation distances provided and the existing buildings located between the subject site and the development at the Rookery when constructed, it is considered that no cumulative impacts will occur as a result of the proposed development.

### 3.6 Conclusion

As a result of a detailed design process involving 11 No. design iterations, a significant number of design team meetings and subsequent to feedback from South Dublin County Council and An Bord Pleanála, it is considered that the proposed layout is the optimum arrangement in terms of appropriately densifying the subject lands while also protecting the residential amenity of the neighbouring residential properties.

As noted previously, the proposed layout locates the highest forms at the least sensitive positions within the site (centre of the site and fronting Scholarstown Road) transitioning to 2 and 3 No. storeys around the perimeter of the site adjacent to existing dwellings. The scheme also provides a substantial quantum of open space principally in 3 No. main sections of the site (centre, west and north-east) providing a high quality living environment for residents in addition to the provision of small scale retail units and café/restaurant units which achieves a strong mix of uses ancillary to the predominant residential use. The facilitation of a pedestrian link from the north-east of the site to the public open space in Dargle Park will also encourage permeability through the site which is a significant planning gain for the wider area as it will open up access to public transport and cycle networks in the area.

In conclusion, the proposed layout is well considered and includes an appropriate mix of residential dwelling types, support facilities and commercial floorspace. The increased permeability through the site will benefit the wider community and will be a positive addition to the area.