

4 Consideration of Alternatives

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4.1 Introduction

This chapter has been prepared by Brock McClure Consultants and Henry J Lyons Architects.

The requirement to consider alternatives within an EIAR is set out in Annex IV (2) of the EIA Directive (2014/52/EU) and in Schedule 6 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended (“the Regulation”), which state;

*“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.”*

The Schedule 6, para. 2 (b) of the Regulations implement this requirement by requiring the following information –

(b) a description of the reasonable alternatives (for example in terms of project design, technology, location, size and scale) 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 selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects;

Reasonable alternatives may include project design proposals, location, size and scale, which are relevant to the proposed development and its specific characteristics. The Regulations require that an indication of the main reasons for selecting the preferred option, including a comparison of the environmental effects to be presented in the EIAR.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2018) *Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála* - states;

The Directive requires that information provided by the developer in an EIAR shall include a description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the developer. These are reasonable alternatives which are relevant to the project and its specific characteristics. The developer must also indicate the main reasons for the option chosen taking into account the effects of the project on the environment.

Reasonable alternatives may relate to matters such as project design, technology, location, size and scale. The type of alternatives will depend on the nature of the project proposed and the characteristics of the receiving environment. For example, some projects may be site specific so the consideration of alternative sites may not be relevant. It is generally sufficient for the developer to provide a broad description of each main alternative studied and the key environmental issues associated with each. A ‘mini- EIA’ is not required for each alternative studied.

As such, the consideration and presentation of the reasonable alternatives studied by the project design team is an important requirement of the EIA process.

This chapter provides an outline of the main alternatives examined during the design phase. It sets out the main reasons for choosing the development as proposed, taking into account and providing a comparison on the environmental effects.

4.2 Rationale for Proposed Development

The key concepts which have informed the development of the Cornelscourt Residential Development include the following:

- The arrangement of the buildings to give structure and form to the principal spaces and vistas;
- The modulation of the building forms to take maximum advantage of the views and orientation;

- The use of variety and distinctiveness in the architecture to create a sense of place by means of a range of building sizes, shapes, heights, materials and character;
- The provision of appropriately scaled, well orientated and ‘people-friendly’ external spaces including landscaped streets, courtyards, gardens and pedestrian streets;
- The creation of a clearly defined hierarchy of public, semi-public and private spaces which provide legibility, permeability and connectivity and make it easy for residents and visitors to find their way around. Giving priority to walking, cycling and public transport, minimising the need for cars by providing attractive paths and cycle routes which facilitate safe access by users of all ages and degrees of personal mobility;
- The promotion of energy efficiency by use of good quality external materials and insulation, efficient heating systems, use of green roofs, and sustainable water use and drainage design.

4.3 Consideration of Alternatives

The alternative locations, layout and designs for this project and proposal are set out below.

Alternative Locations

The site was acquired by the applicant in November 2018. The site represented a suitable site for development, being primarily zoned for residential development under the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council Development Plan 2016-2022, with ‘residential’ being permitted in principle under Objective A, which governs the subject site. A portion of the site was also zoned for neighbourhood centre uses.

The applicant considered the following elements in selection of the site for development:

- The site offered significant opportunity to deliver significant residential development on an underutilised greenfield site in close proximity to existing services at Cornelscourt village.
- The subject site has excellent connectivity to public transport and major areas of employment as follows:
 - Bus - The overall site is located adjacent to the N11 Bus Priority Route / Quality Bus Corridor. Distances to the nearest bus stops are less than 5mins walk. Travel time to St. Stephen’s Green by bus is 40-50 mins.
 - Luas - The Carrickmines LUAS stop is a 25min walk from the proposed development, located 1.8km from the subject site. This stop is on the Green Luas line and journey time to St. Stephen’s Green is 34 minutes. The Carrickmines Luas Stop has the benefit of a Park and Ride facility.
 - Employment Areas - The site is proximate to a number of employment areas (within 1.5km), which include Cornelscourt Village, Cornelscourt Shopping Centre, National Rehabilitation Hospital, Deansgrange Business Park and Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology. Furthermore, University College Dublin and City Centre are short trips along the N11 by bus.
- The site is not subject to any statutory nature conservation designation.
- The site is opportunely located in the heart of Cornelscourt Village and adjacent to the N11 public transport corridor.
- The site has capacity to absorb development without significantly effecting the existing landscape and visual characteristics of the surrounding area.
- The site is not susceptible to flooding.

- The size of the site at 2.14 ha offers a significant opportunity to deliver infill residential development along a key public transport corridor which supports the provisions of the National Planning Framework.
- The site is located along a key public transport corridor (the N11); is proximate to the Green Luas line and a number of employment areas and is therefore opportunistically located to deliver on the build to rent accommodation model.

Having considered the above, the application site was considered the preferred site for the current build to rent accommodation proposal.

Alternative Layout & Designs

Option A

The Option A proposal (Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below) initially considered comprised of a series of 6 buildings arranged off a pedestrian avenue and surrounded by landscaped gardens containing surface car parking. The landscaped zones acted as a transitional zone between the proposed blocks and the existing dwellings on Old Bray Road and Willow Grove. The arrangement of blocks ascended in scale (Figure 4.2); the southernmost blocks were 4 - 6 storeys in height while the 3 northern blocks ascended in height to a range between 4 and 9 storeys. Each block was arranged on a north to south axis to provide generous daylight into the individual courtyards and establish generous views and quality aspect for each apartment.

With this option there was no clearly defined hierarchy of public, semi-public and private spaces. The central pedestrian avenue did not cultivate a sense of arrival for residents and the use of surface car parking was not a suitable integration within the surrounding context of Cornelscourt.

For these reasons, Option A was not considered an appropriate layout for the site.

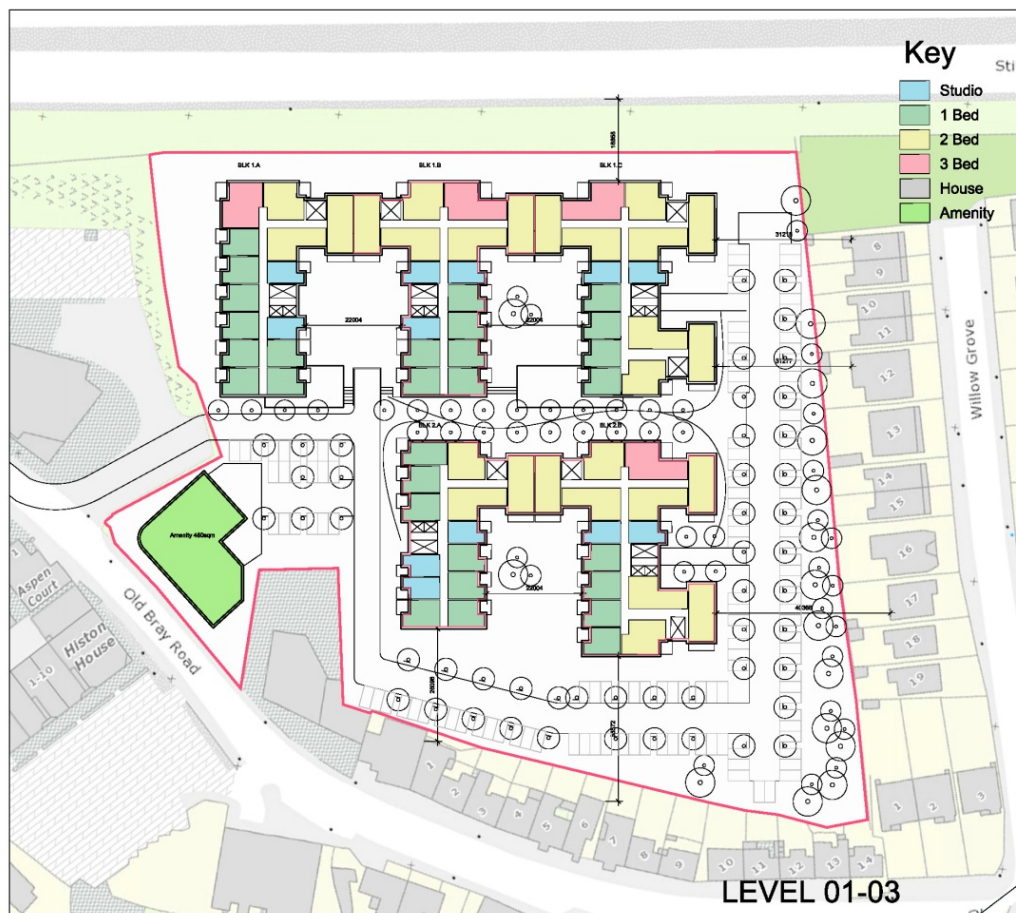


Figure 4.1 - Option A



Figure 4.2 - Option A

Option B

The Option B proposal (Figures 4.3 and 4.4. below), the second proposal considered, comprised of a series of eight buildings sitting upon a central landscaped space upon a podium. The ensemble of buildings was surrounded by landscaped gardens and surface car parking. The design established a greater sense of arrival and hierarchy of spaces for the residents by introducing a crescent shaped building form and 2 storey houses along the eastern boundary adjacent to Willow Grove.

Within the ensemble of 8 blocks; Blocks A, B and C ranged from 6 storeys to 12 storeys. The heights ascended in multiples of 3 to establish a distinctive identity along the N11 Corridor. The southern remaining blocks; Blocks D, E and F descended in scale from 5 to 2 storeys in height (Figure 4.4). Their height was carefully considered to present an appropriate scale towards the neighbouring dwellings along Old Bray Road and Willow Grove. Setbacks were introduced to Blocks D and Blocks E to further reduce the visual mass of the buildings. The design sought to complement the existing heights of Cornelscourt and to create a scheme that offered greater daylight and space to the proposal.

Despite the scheme's merits it had failed to properly integrate with the surrounding context, which resulted in unsuccessful and vacant public spaces along the boundaries. Furthermore, the central podium did not establish useable space for the residents.

For these reasons, Option B was not considered the optimum layout for the site.



Figure 4.3 - Option B

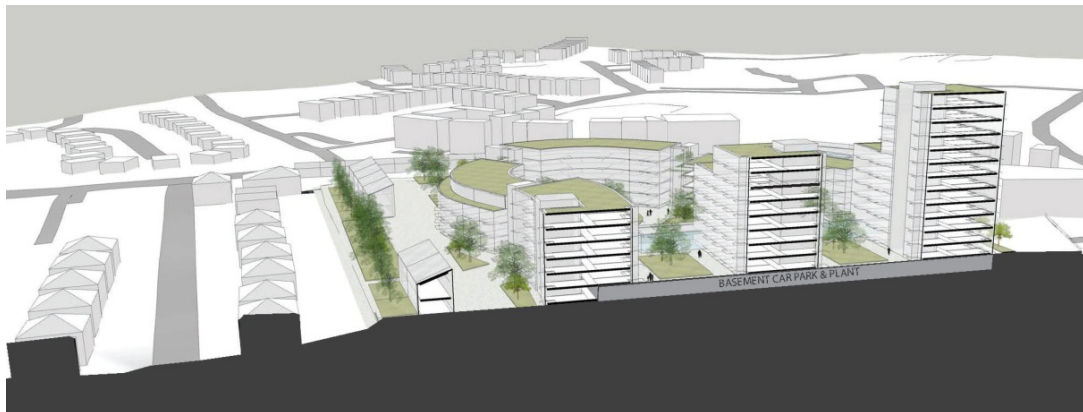


Figure 4.4 - Option B

Option C

The Option C proposal (Figures 4.6 and 4.7), the third design proposal considered, was a progression of the previous design option with further consideration of the scheme’s integration within the surrounding context. The scale and massing of Block E was carefully adjusted to provide an appropriate and sympathetic interface between the proposed site and existing dwellings of Old Bray Road. The introduction of single storey apartments along the boundary coupled with a generous external pedestrian link enhanced the open space and interaction between the proposed and existing dwellings.

The scheme was presented at the pre-application consultation with Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, who had concerns that the landscaping strategy had created inconsequential spaces, which were not suitable to the quantity of residents within the proposed development. The provision of surface car parking spaces was also identified as an issue.

Section 247 Consultation Stage 1



Figure 4.4 - Option C

The Option C proposal was a progression of the previous Option B with further consideration given to the proposal's integration with surrounding development. This was the scheme originally presented to the Planning Authority for Section 247 Consultation in January 2019.

Section 247 Stage 2



Figure 4.5 - Option at Section 247 Stage

Following feedback received at the Section 247 Consultation meeting, the design team prepared a scheme in response to the particular concerns raised which in design terms, centered on Blocks E/F and the relationship with the village. In response, the height of Block E was reduced from 5 to a set back 4 storey building. The separation between Block E and the properties along the Old Bray Road was increased to 29 metres and own door access apartments were introduced in Block E to promote activity along that edge.

At this stage, the introduction of a pedestrian linkage to Willow Grove was included, through the omission of 1 house along the boundary (to the north east).

The Planning Authority declined to meet to discuss this enhanced scheme and the applicant therefore elected to proceed with a scheme for discussion with An Bord Pleanala.

An Bord Pleanála Consultation



Figure 4.6 - Option at Pre-App Stage with ABP

The scale and massing of Block E was carefully adjusted to provide an appropriate and sympathetic interface between the proposed site and existing dwellings of Old Bray Road. The introduction of single storey apartments along the boundary coupled with a generous external pedestrian link enhanced the open space and interaction between the proposed and existing dwellings.

The scheme was presented at the pre-application consultation with An Bord Pleanála and the Planning Authority. It was noted that a key issue for the local authority throughout the discussion related to concerns that the landscaping strategy had created inconsequential spaces, which were not suitable to the quantity of residents within the proposed development. The provision of surface car parking spaces was also identified as an issue.

For these reasons, Option C was not considered the optimum layout for the site. Further refinement and amendment of the scheme was required. The applicant undertook to positively consider the issues raised and further refinement of the scheme was required.



Figure 4.7 - Option C

Current Scheme

The current scheme (as identified in Figure 4.8 below) builds upon all successful design objectives of the previous schemes and resolves their shortcomings. The current design was selected as it successfully embodied and improved key concepts which had been developed during the entirety of the design process. These qualities include the following:

- Greater integration into the context of Cornelscourt. The introduction of two storey houses along the perimeter to Willow Grove and single storey units adjacent to Old Bray Road removed vacant open space along the perimeter and established an appropriate and considered transitional scale to the development;
- The arrangement and adjustment of the buildings' scale to give greater structure and form to the principal spaces and vistas. The adjustment of Building D and Building E allowed the Central Garden to take maximum advantage of the views and orientation while also providing greater presentation of scale to the varied heights of Cornelscourt;
- The current scheme adjusted the forms of the buildings to create visual permeability to the residents and wider context. Between each building there is provision of pedestrian routes which allow residents to easily walk or cycle throughout the development.
- Compared to the earlier schemes, the current scheme improves the variety and distinctiveness in the architecture to create a sense of place by means of a range of building sizes, shapes, heights, materials and character. The façades of Building A,B and C were revised to improve the visual identity of the development. The facades of Buildings D and E were changed to brick to present a more quality expression along the boundary of the development site;
- The improved landscaping design removed all surface car parking spaces to provide appropriately scaled, well orientated and 'people-friendly' external spaces including landscaped streets, courtyards, gardens and pedestrian streets;

- This adjustment has improved the defined hierarchy of public, semi-public and private spaces which provide legibility, permeability and connectivity and make it easy for residents and visitors to find their way around. Giving priority to walking, cycling and public transport, minimising the need for cars by providing attractive paths and cycle routes which facilitate safe access by users of all ages and degrees of personal mobility.



Figure 1.8 - Current Option

These key concepts have formulated a development that is conceived as a continuous ribbon of residential development that touches the townscape of Cornelscourt at a two-storey height (Figure 4.7) and steps gradually being cognisant of the low scale of the existing context until it reaches the wide expanse of the N11 Corridor where it steps from six to nine and twelve stories.

The response to context and orientation is fundamental to the scheme design and the enclosure created by the curvilinear form of the development, facilitates both daylight and sunlight penetration to allow the garden amenities to be of the highest quality. The perimeter of the site is further protected to ensure both visual integration and security. The use of both one and two storey housing serves to graduate from Old Bray Road and Willow Grove to integrate the entire scheme with Cornelscourt and its environment.



Figure 2.9 - Current Option

At the junction with the N11 corridor, these taller finger buildings are separated by lower buildings, which articulate the stepped form of the scheme and facilitate daylight, air movement, and visual connection to create a landmark ensemble of buildings. The material palette for Cornelscourt is kept simple and clear to create order between the elements and to have a connection to its context.

For the larger buildings, a more formal and urban material palette has been chosen, this palette maintains the warmth of the lower buildings but adds a striking architectural edge in the form of large bronze frames and expansive glass curtain walling.

The remaining blocks; Block D, E and F (Figure 4.10) descend in scale from 5 to 2 storeys in height. Their height has been carefully considered to present an appropriate scale towards the neighbouring dwellings along Old Bray Road and Willow Grove. Setbacks have been introduced to Blocks D and Blocks E to further reduce the visual mass of the buildings.



Figure 3.10 - Current Option

4.4 “Do Nothing” Alternative

The ‘Do Nothing’ Alternative associated with this particular site involves the site remaining in the current condition, that being a zoned, underutilised greenfield infill site along the N11 public transport corridor. This is a completely inefficient use of lands proximate to key public transport nodes and significant employment areas. The site is currently active on the Vacant Site Register and it is therefore critical that the site is brought forward for development.

4.5 Conclusion

It is the opinion of the Design Team and applicant that they have presented a scheme that illustrates a scheme which enhances and improves upon its neighbouring context, provides a new addition of outstanding architectural quality and visual interest along the wider N11 corridor community and would serve as an exemplary design as part of the Build To Rent market due to its quality of tenant accommodation and generosity of residential amenity.

The project is designed to create a landscaped podium where cars are excluded except to facilitate drop off delivery or emergency access. The buildings are accessed through individually landscaped gardens, which have their own distinct architectural character and quality.

This curvilinear building’s response to the existing context is a vital component of the scheme’s design. The progressive stepping and setbacks along its length provide excellent daylight to the central gardens while also mitigating any potential overlooking of the neighbouring properties.

The single and two-storey housing along the perimeter provide an excellent buffer between the larger elements of the scheme and the existing properties. These houses are also specifically designed to prevent overlooking and act as an integrating factor for the project with Cornelscourt Village and Willow Grove.

The buildings that face the N11 are conceived as urban buildings and contain diamond-shaped balconies with a substantially glazed facade. The framework in brickwork or bronze coloured cladding holds these elevations and creates a distinct urban architecture style. Glazed low-level links provide variation in this facade and a visual connection between the road and the internal gardens. These high-quality buildings step gradually to meet the more modest height of the adjoining residential roads.