



Childcare and School Demand Assessment

In respect of:

Strategic Housing Development at Lissywollen, Athlone, County Westmeath



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Part A - Background



1.0. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of Report

1.1.1. This Childcare and School Demand Assessment (hereafter 'assessment') has been prepared by Delphi Design, Architecture + Planning, on behalf of Alanna Roadbridge Developments Ltd. (the applicant) to accompany the application for Strategic Housing Development (SHD) submitted to An Bord Pleanála in respect of lands at Lissywollen, Athlone, County Westmeath.

1.1.2. This assessment aims to:

1. Review the existing planning policy context in relation to the provision of childcare services and schools;
2. Detail the existing range of childcare services and schools in the vicinity of the development site;
3. Assess the capacity of existing childcare services and schools to support for the proposed development;
4. Consider the childcare services proposed as part of the subject development;
5. Forecast the expected demand for childcare services and schools generated by the proposed development;
6. Evaluate the if expected demand will be appropriately met by existing and proposed services.

1.2. Request for Assessment

1.2.1. As part of the SHD process, tri-partite pre-application consultations were held between the applicant, the local planning authority (Westmeath County Council) and An Bord Pleanála. An Bord Pleanála's Case Reference for the consultations is ABP-305726-19.

1.2.2. 2 no. pre-application consultations were held. The first meeting took place on 11th December 2019 at the offices of Westmeath County Council in Mullingar with the second meeting taking place on 30th March 2020 via Microsoft Teams - for full details of same please refer to the Planning Report prepared by Delphi Design which accompanies the application.

1.2.3. Subsequently, An Bord Pleanála issued a Notice of Pre-Application Consultation Opinion which requested the applicant to submit a "*Childcare demand analysis and the likely demand for childcare places*" with the application. This assessment has been prepared in accordance with same.

1.3. Structure of Assessment

1.3.1. This assessment is structured in four parts: Parts A, B, C & D.

1.3.2. Part A consists of an introduction to the assessment, provides background information on the proposed development, and reviews the existing planning policy context in relation to childcare services and schools.

1.3.3. Part B consists of a childcare demand analysis which details the existing range of childcare services in the vicinity of the development site and establishes if these existing services, together with those proposed as part of the subject development, have capacity to support the expected demand generated by the proposed development.

1.3.4. Part C discusses demographic trends in relation to schools and assesses the capacity of existing primary and post-primary schools to support the expected demand generated by the proposed development.

1.3.5. Part D provides for overall conclusions of the assessment.



2.0. Development Overview

2.1. Site Location

- 2.1.1.** The application site is located c. 1 kilometre to the northeast of Athlone town centre, County Westmeath, in the townlands of Lissywollen, Kilnafaddoge & Retreat, and partially traversing the townlands of Curragh, Cloghanboy (Strain) & Cloghanboy (Homan).
- 2.1.2.** The site is located within lands designated for the Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-2024 (hereafter LSFP). The LSFP lands are bounded to the north by the N6, which connects Kinnegad to Galway, to the west by the R915 (Ballymahon Road) and to the east by the R916. The LSFP lands are partially bisected along the south by the Old Rail Trail Greenway which forms a section of the Dublin-Galway National Cycle Network.
- 2.1.3.** The application site (i.e. that within the red line boundaries detailed on the site location map / site layout drawings prepared by Delphi Design and enclosed with the application) is generally bounded to the north by the N6, and to the south by the Old Rail Trail Greenway. To the west, the site is bounded by Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí primary school and Athlone Regional Sports Centre. The eastern boundary of the site is defined by an old breen road further east of which lies undeveloped greenfield lands and ESB Regional Headquarters.
- 2.1.4.** The proposed development includes for the construction of a new east-west access route (Lissywollen Avenue) through the development site which is being delivered as per the objectives of the LSFP and as such, the full extent of the application boundaries span from the existing Ballymahon roundabout (on the R915 - to the west) to the existing Garrycastle roundabout (on the R916 - to the east).

2.2. Site Description

- 2.2.1.** The application site currently consists of undeveloped greenfield lands zoned for proposed residential development / open space and is bisected by the existing Brawny residential estate (c.160 no. dwellings). Access to the site is currently limited to a distributor road (Brawny Road) which serves the Brawny estate and enters from the west off the Ballymahon roundabout.
- 2.2.2.** The western boundary of the site is defined by an existing cycleway, running along the perimeter of the Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí, which connects to the Old Rail Trail Greenway to the south. The western section of the site (i.e. that to the west of the Brawny estate) has a largely non-descript landscape character and slopes in a south westerly direction at an approximate gradient of 1 in 230.
- 2.2.3.** The eastern section of the site (i.e. that to the east of the Brawny estate) has a landscape typical of the rural countryside, with small, irregular and enclosed field patterns defined by hedgerows and trees. The eastern boundary of the site is defined by an old breen which provides access to a former residence. The eastern section of the site slopes in a north easterly direction at an approximate gradient of 1 in 165.



Figure 1 - Subject site in the context of Athlone.



2.3. Development Proposal

2.3.1. The subject application for SHD is detailed in full below, as per the public notices:

Alanna Roadbridge Developments Ltd. intend to apply to An Bord Pleanála for permission for a strategic housing development, on a site of c. 17.64 hectares, located in the townlands of Lissywollen, Kilnafaddoge & Retreat, and partially traversing the townlands of Curragh, Cloghanboy (Strain) & Cloghanboy (Homan), Athlone, County Westmeath. The development site is bisected by the existing Brawny residential estate and is generally bounded to the north by the N6, to the south by the Old Rail Trial Greenway, to the west by Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí, and to the east by undeveloped lands, further east of which are ESB Regional Headquarters. Access to the development will be from the Ballymahon roundabout (on the R915 - to the west) and the Garrycastle roundabout (on the R916 - to the east).

The development will consist of the following:

- (1) Construction of 576 no. residential dwellings comprised of 285 no. houses and 291 no. apartments and duplex units consisting of:
 - 285 no. 2 storey semi-detached & terraced houses (50 no. four beds, 200 no. three beds & 35 no. two beds);
 - 8 no. apartments & duplexes (4 no. one beds & 4 no. three beds) in Block A (3 storeys);
 - 8 no. apartments & duplexes (4 no. one beds & 4 no. three beds) in Block B (3 storeys);
 - 15 no. apartments (15 no. two beds) in Block C (3 storeys);
 - 16 no. apartments & duplexes (7 no. one beds, 5 no. two beds & 4 no. three beds) in Block D (3 storeys);
 - 9 no. apartments & duplexes (5 no. one beds, 1 no. two bed & 3 no. three beds) in Block E (3 storeys);
 - 8 no. apartments & duplexes (4 no. two beds & 4 no. three beds) in Block F (3 storeys);
 - 4 no. apartments (4 no. one beds) in Block G (2 storeys);
 - 12 no. apartments & duplexes (12 no. three beds) in Block H (3 storeys);
 - 21 no. apartments (21 no. two beds) in Block K (3 storeys);
 - 36 no. apartments (36 no. two beds) in Block L (part 4 storey / part 5 storey);
 - 20 no. apartments (6 no. one beds, 6 no. two beds & 8 no. three beds) in Block M (part 3 storey / part 4 storey);
 - 27 no. apartments (27 no. two beds) in Block N (3 storeys);
 - 43 no. apartments & duplexes (14 no. one beds, 24 no. two beds & 5 no. three beds) in Block O (2 to 4 storeys);
 - 12 no. apartments (6 no. one beds & 6 no. two beds) in Block P (3 storeys);
 - 8 no. apartments & duplexes (4 no. two beds & 4 no. three beds) in Block Q (3 storeys);
 - 18 no. apartments (6 no. one beds & 12 no. two beds) in Block R (3 storeys);
 - 12 no. apartments & duplexes (6 no. two beds & 6 no. three beds) in Block S (3 storeys);
 - 14 no. apartments (4 no. one beds & 10 no. two beds) in Block T (3 storeys).
- (2) Construction of 2 no. *crèches* comprised of: a 2 storey crèche of c. 321m² located on the ground & first floors of Block C & a 1 storey crèche of c. 448m² located on the ground floor of Block T.
- (3) Construction of 1 no. community hub of c. 101m² located on the ground floor of Block D.



- (4) **Construction of basement level car parking of c. 1,089m² comprising 34 no. car parking spaces & 36 no. bicycle parking spaces, forming part of Block L.**
- (5) **Construction of an east-west access road through the development site, extending from the Ballymahon roundabout (on the R915 - to the west) to the Garrycastle roundabout (on the R916 - to the east) and all associated road development works.**
- (6) **Provision of public open spaces, hard and soft landscaping, public lighting, car & bicycle parking, pedestrian and cyclist connections to Old Rail Trail Greenway, bin storage, 6 no. ESB sub-stations, drainage and attenuation, utility services etc. and all associated site development works.**

The application contains a statement setting out how the proposal is consistent with the objectives of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020, the Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 and the Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-2024, and also contains a statement indicating why permission should be granted for the proposed development, having regard to a consideration specified in section 37(2)(b) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, notwithstanding that the proposed development materially contravenes a relevant development plan or local area plan other than in relation to the zoning of the land.

An Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) has been prepared in respect of the development proposal and accompanies the application. The application, together with the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, may be inspected, or purchased at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy, during public opening hours at the offices of An Bord Pleanála and Westmeath County Council. The application may also be inspected online at the following website set up by the applicant: www.lissywollenshd.ie.

2.3.2. With specific regard to this assessment, as detailed in the above development description, the development caters for 2 no. childcare facilities as follows:

- A 2 storey crèche measuring c. 321m² located on the ground & first floors of Block C. This crèche has an associated outdoor play area of c. 167m². The crèche has capacity for c. 62 no. childcare places based upon the internal spatial standards detailed in the Childcare Facilities-Guidelines for Planning Authority (2001).
- A 1 storey crèche measuring c. 448m² located on the ground floor of Block T. This crèche has an associated outdoor play area of c. 241m². The proposed crèche has capacity for c. 83 no. childcare places based upon the internal spatial standards detailed in the Childcare Facilities-Guidelines for Planning Authority (2001).

For full details on the proposed childcare facilities forming part of the application please refer to the associated block plans / site layout drawings prepared by Delphi Design which are enclosed with the application.

3.0. Planning Policy

3.0.1. For the purposes of this assessment Delphi Design have reviewed national, regional, and local planning policy relating to the provision of childcare services and schools. These policy documents are discussed in detail in this section of the assessment.

3.1. Project Ireland 2040 – The National Planning Framework

3.1.1. The National Planning Framework (hereafter NPF) is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of the country to cater for a projected population increase of c. one million people up to the year 2040. The NPF is accompanied by the National Development Plan, a 10 year capital investment strategy, and together they are known as Project Ireland 2040.

3.1.2. Section 6.5. of the NPF has regard to the provision of childcare and school services. The NPF states that access to affordable childcare services are of critical importance and notes that childcare provision in the country is currently under strain. The NPF considers that investment in childcare services is needed to ensure capacity is maintained for projected population growth. As such the NPF directs that the provision of childcare services should form an integral element of the planning process at a local level.

3.1.3. With regard to schools, the NPF acknowledges the existing school system is experiencing contrasting pressures. Certain parts of the country, where a high level of population growth has occurred, are unable to meet the demand for school places, while in other parts of the country the viability of some schools experiencing population decline is being called into question. These contradicting elements emphasise the need for the planning system to strategically assess and plan for the provision of schools to ensure sustainable development of new and existing communities.

3.1.4. Of particular relevance to this assessment is the following National Policy Objective:

- **National Policy Objective 31** - *"Prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with investment in:*
 - *A childcare/ECCE planning function, for monitoring, analysis and forecasting of investment needs, including identification of regional priorities;*
 - *The provision of childcare facilities and new and refurbished schools on well located sites within or close to existing built-up areas, that meet the diverse needs of local populations;*
 - *The expansion and consolidation of Higher Education facilities, particularly where this will contribute to wider regional development, and*
 - *Programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas of higher education and further education and training where skills gaps are identified."*

3.2. Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019-2031

3.2.1. The Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019 - 2031 (hereafter E&MRSES) is the relevant regional strategy. The E&MRSES is a strategic plan and investment framework which aims to shape the future development of the Eastern and Midland region up to the year 2031 and beyond. The Eastern and Midland region is identified as the primary economic engine of the State and therefore the E&MRSES notes that the provision of childcare services is of critical importance not just for child development but also for parents in the labour market.

3.2.2. Section 9.6. of the E&MRSES has regard to childcare and school provision. It is stated that a key aim of the E&MRSES is to:

“address mis-alignment in the Region across a range of factors including school provision, facilities and child-friendly amenities. School provision is a key part of social infrastructure to be provided in tandem with housing provision. The RSES will seek to prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with educational investment, including the provision of new schools on well-located sites within or close to existing built-up areas that meet the diverse needs of local populations”.

3.2.3. The E&MRSES projects that the number of children in the country will continue to increase until the mid-2020s and as such, the provision of childcare and schools is a priority for the foreseeable future. The E&MRSES states that County Development Plans and Local Area Plans should provide a planned approach to new educational facilities.

3.2.4. Of particular relevance to this assessment are the following Regional Policy Objectives:

- **Regional Policy Objective 9.20** - *“Support investment in the sustainable development of the Region’s childcare services as an integral part of regional infrastructure to include:*
 - *Support the Affordable Childcare Scheme.*
 - *Quality and supply of sufficient childcare places.*
 - *Support initiatives under across Government Early Years Strategy.*
 - *Youth services that support and target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability.”*
- **Regional Policy Objective 9.21** - *“In areas where significant new housing is proposed, an assessment of need regarding schools provision should be carried out in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills and statutory plans shall designate new school sites at accessible, pedestrian, cycle and public transport friendly locations.”*

3.3. Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009)

3.3.1. The Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009) set out core principles of urban design to be used by Planning Authorities in writing their County Development Plans and in assessing development proposals. Chapter 4 of the guidelines, *‘Planning for Sustainable Neighbourhoods’*, has regard to childcare and school provision.

3.3.2. Regarding childcare facilities, the guidelines refer to the Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001). The childcare guidelines, discussed further in Section 3.4. of this assessment, recommend the provision of one new childcare facility catering for 20 no. childcare places for every 75 no. dwellings constructed. However, the guidelines also state that the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas should form part of the analysis for the provision of new facilities.

3.3.3. Regarding schools, the Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009) note that new residential developments can generate a demand for a significant number of new school places. Therefore, the guidelines recommend that no *“substantial residential development should proceed without an assessment of existing schools capacity or the provision of new school facilities in tandem with the development”*. It is recommended that that planning applications for 200 or more dwellings should be accompanied by a report identifying the demand for school places likely to be generated by a development proposal and the capacity of existing schools in the vicinity.

3.3.4. This assessment addresses the above recommendations.

3.4. Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)

- 3.4.1. The Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001) direct Planning Authorities to facilitate the provision of childcare facilities as part of the development of sustainable communities. The guidelines define childcare as:

“full day-care and sessional facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours. It includes services involving care, education and socialisation opportunities for children. Thus, services such as pre-schools, naíonraí (Irish language playgroups), day-care services, crèches, playgroups, and after-school groups are encompassed by these Guidelines. Conversely childminding, schools, (primary, secondary and special) and residential centres for children are not covered by these Guidelines.”

- 3.4.2. The guidelines require Planning Authorities to include childcare facilities as part of their County Development Plan objectives as a specific use in ‘appropriate locations/zones’. These locations include for ‘new communities / larger new housing developments’. The guidelines advise that sites should be identified for such facilities as an integral part of the pre-planning discussions.

- 3.4.3. In relation to new housing developments, the guidelines state:

“Planning authorities should require the provision of at least one childcare facility for new housing areas unless there are significant reasons to the contrary for example, development consisting of single bed apartments or where there are adequate childcare facilities in adjoining developments. For new housing areas, an average of one childcare facility for each 75 dwellings would be appropriate. The threshold for provision should be established having regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas. Authorities could consider requiring the provision of larger units catering for up to 30/40 children in areas of major residential development on the basis that such a large facility might be able to offer a variety of services – sessional/drop in/after-school, etc.”

- 3.4.4. This assessment addresses the above recommendations.

3.5. Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2018)

- 3.5.1. The Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines (2018) update the previous 2015 version of same and were adopted in response to growing demand for apartment living in the State.

- 3.5.2. In relation to childcare facilities, the guidelines state:

“Notwithstanding the Planning Guidelines for Childcare Facilities (2001), in respect of which a review is to be progressed, and which recommend the provision of one child-care facility (equivalent to a minimum of 20 child places) for every 75 dwelling units, the threshold for provision of any such facilities in apartment schemes should be established having regard to the scale and unit mix of the proposed development and the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of the area. One bedroom or studio type units should not generally be considered to contribute to a requirement for any childcare provision and subject to location, this may also apply in part or whole, to units with two or more bedrooms”

- 3.5.3. The above recommendations have been considered as part of this assessment.



3.6. The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice (2008)

3.6.1. The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice (2008) stipulate the methodology for forecasting future education demand. The guidelines state that the identification of future primary school demands should be based upon:

- “- The anticipated increase in overall population for the city/county plan area over the next nine years (as set out in relevant development or local area plans);*
- The current school-going population based on school returns;*
- The increase in school going population, assuming that an average of 12% of the population are expected to present for primary education; and,*
- The number of classrooms required in total derived from the above.”*

3.6.2. Regarding post-primary schools, the guidelines note that the identification of future demand is:

“in some cases be more complex as it involves not just an assessment of likely population growth but also an appraisal of the capacity of existing post-primary schools, coupled with an assessment of the enrolment patterns in existing and anticipated ‘feeder’ national schools”

3.6.3. The above recommendations have been considered as part of this assessment.

3.7. Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020

3.7.1. The Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020 (hereafter CDP) is the current statutory development plan relevant to the proposed development. The CDP details the overall strategic policies and objectives for County Westmeath.

3.7.2. Section 7.6. of the CDP has regard to educational provision in the county. The CDP recognises that education has an important role to play in developing sustainable and balanced communities and that school provision should form an integral part of the evolution of compact sustainable urban development.

3.7.3. The CDP states that the demand for childcare and school places in the county is concentrated in the Gateway Towns of Athlone and Mullingar where the concentration of population is greatest. The CDP projects that the demand for new childcare and school places in the county will continue to concentrate on the Gateway Towns of Athlone and Mullingar, which has implications for the proposed development. The CDP re-iterates the recommendations of the Childcare Facility - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001) which generally seeks the provision of 20 no. childcare places for every 75 no. dwellings constructed.

3.7.4. Of particular relevance to this assessment are the following CDP Policies:

- **Policy P-CF2** - *“To ensure the needs of communities including education facilities are appropriately provided for in newly developed areas.”*
- **Policy P-CC1** - *“To encourage and support the provision of childcare facilities, subject to locations and design throughout the county, and in accordance with the needs identified by Westmeath County Childcare Committee (WCC). All planning applications for childcare facilities shall be assessed in consultation with Westmeath County Childcare Committee. The dual use of such facilities will be encouraged to provide for the wider community needs.”*
- **Policy P-SEC1** - *“To ensure that there are sufficient and appropriate educational and community facilities available to meet the needs of residents of the area.”*

3.8. Draft Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

3.8.1. The Draft Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (hereafter DCDP) is yet to be adopted with the initial public consultation period for same having ended on 30th June 2020. While the DCDP is subject to change, it is acknowledged that the proposed development, if granted, will be built during the life of the next development plan and it is therefore considered important to reflect on the draft provisions contained in same.

3.8.2. The DCDP seeks to ensure that that all significant developments can only take place where sufficient schools are either in place or proposed. Section 4.11. of the DCDP has regard to Social Infrastructure and states that:

“Proposals for large-scale residential and/or mixed-use schemes must demonstrate how the proposal will contribute to the range of supporting community infrastructure necessary for a sustainable community.”

3.8.3. Of particular relevance to this assessment are the following Community Policy Objectives:

- **Community Policy Objective 4.24** - *“Support the provision of childcare facilities and new and refurbished schools on well located sites within or close to existing built-up areas, that meet the diverse needs of local populations.”*
- **Community Policy Objective 4.27** - *“Ensure the needs of communities including education facilities are appropriately provided for in newly developed areas.”*
- **Community Policy Objective 16.42** - *“Childcare Facilities should:*
 - *Demonstrate compliance with the ‘Guidelines on Childcare Facilities, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001) and Circular Letter PL3 2016 or any superseding guidelines.*
 - *Provide justification for proposed site location.*
 - *Provide details on accessibility, including pedestrian, cycle and public transport provisions and linkages to the proposed development.*
 - *Identify adequate and safe set-down and collection areas to facilitate peak traffic movements*
 - *Identify adequate on-site car parking for staff*
 - *Identify adequate play area(s) for pupils.*
 - *New or expanded premises should have regard to traffic impact associated with the number of children and staff to be accommodated and should provide adequate set-down areas and car parking areas to prevent traffic congestion.*
 - *Large scale proposals may be required to present a Mobility Management Plan to mitigate against traffic volumes by proposing staggered opening hours and drop off times to avoid congestion at peak times.**The following locations are considered appropriate for the provision of childcare facilities:*
 - *In communities/larger new housing estates.*
 - *The vicinity of concentrations of work places, such as industrial estates, business parks and any other locations where there are significant numbers working.*
 - *Near schools.*
 - *Neighbourhood and town centres.*
 - *Adjacent to public transport corridors, park-and-ride facilities, pedestrian routes and dedicated cycle ways.”*

3.9. Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020

- 3.9.1.** The Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 (hereafter ATDP) is the relevant development plan for the town of Athlone. Chapter 3 of the ATDP has regard to new residential development and states that the capacity of existing infrastructure and the adequacy of community facilities need to be considered in the assessment of new housing developments.
- 3.9.2.** The ATDP notes that Local Area Plans, prepared for specific areas of Athlone and its environs, will provide the spatial framework for the development of sustainable residential communities in the town. It should be noted that proposed development is located on the lands designated for the Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-2024, which is discussed in Section 3.10. of this assessment.
- 3.9.3.** Section 10.8. of the ATDP has regard to the provision of new childcare facilities. It is stated that:

“Childcare facilities are required in residential areas but it is important that residential amenity is not adversely affected by the conversion of unsuitable dwellings or an over concentration of childcare facilities in one area. The Councils will require the provision of high quality, affordable childcare facilities at easily accessible locations, in association with housing and other developments. Such developments shall comply with the Westmeath County Childcare Strategy and the Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001 (DECLG) or any amendments thereto.”

- 3.9.4.** Of particular relevance to this assessment are the following ATDP Policies:

- **Policy P-CC1** - *“To encourage and support the provision of sufficient childcare facilities to support new and existing communities in Athlone, in accordance with the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Childcare Facilities (June 2001), or any revision thereof.”*
- **Policy P-CC2** - *“To encourage the establishment of high quality childcare facilities in suitable locations in Athlone, such as neighbourhood centres, areas of concentrated employment, in the vicinity of schools, adjacent to public transport corridors and /or pedestrian areas, and in larger new housing estates.”*
- **Policy P-ED4** - *“To integrate the provision of school facilities with new residential development in accordance with the DEHLG Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas 2009.”*
- **Policy P-ED6** - *“To ensure that provision for education facilities is made with regard to access arrangements, road safety, high quality design and efficiency in the use of resources.”*
- **Policy P-ED7** - *“To promote the co-location of Primary & Post-Primary school sites subject to site suitability and access proposals.”*

3.10. Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-2024

- 3.10.1.** The Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-2024 (hereafter LSFP) is the relevant local area plan for the proposed development. The LSFP contains a detailed Land Use & Function Strategy which is designed to ensure coherent development of the LSFP lands and divides the plan lands into 6 no. designated land uses. The proposed development is located in Area 4 - *‘Residential’* of the LSFP Land Use & Function Strategy. Area 4 of the LSFP provides for more than 20 hectares of land zoned for residential use and accordingly, the proposed development largely consists of residential development.



- 3.10.2.** With regard to childcare, the LSFP states that there is a need to facilitate the provision of new childcare facilities in appropriate locations in residential settings, taking into account the existing provision and emerging demographic trends in an area.
- 3.10.3.** With regard to schools, the LSFP details that 17.6 hectares of land is reserved for educational uses (adjacent to, but outside of, the subject application site). Athlone Community College, the Marist College (both post-primary) and Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí (primary) are located in the LSFP lands while Our Lady's Bower (post-primary) is located immediately south of the LSFP lands. The LSFP aims to consolidate and extend these existing educational facilities.
- 3.10.4.** Of particular relevance to this assessment are the following LSFP Objectives:
- **Objective O-LUF5** - *"To ensure the timely provision of community facilities and services in tandem with the development of lands."*
 - **Objective O-LUF7** - *"To support and encourage the provision of educational, community, recreational, healthcare and social infrastructure facilities, within the Lissywollen South Framework Plan, including promotion of optimum use of existing facilities and encouragement of shared/dual use of existing and future facilities."*
 - **Objective P1-KS06** - *"To provide for a childcare facility to serve the needs of new residential communities which should cluster with existing Primary School."*
 - **Objective P2-KS05** - *"To provide a childcare facility to serve new residential communities and the adjacent Business Park."*

3.11. Policy Conclusions

- 3.11.1.** Having regard to all the foregoing planning policy documents, it is evident that an analysis of the existing childcare services and schools is required as part of the proposed SHD application submitted to An Bord Pleanála. This assessment is put forward in accordance with same. Part B of this assessment has regard to childcare provision while Part C has regard to schools provision.



Part B – Childcare Demand Analysis

4.0. Childcare Assessment

4.1. Study Area & Data Collection

4.1.1. To assess the capacity of existing childcare services to support the expected demand generated by the development it was first necessary to establish an appropriate study area. While the various planning policy documents discussed in Section 3 make provisions for the quantum of childcare places required for new residential developments, there is no reference to the most appropriate distances families should travel.

4.1.2. For the purposes of this assessment a study area has been defined by a 2 kilometre radius created around the development site as per Figure 2. This distance is roughly equivalent to a 20 minute walk and is therefore considered within easy, walkable, reach of the development.



Figure 2 - Study area.

4.1.3. To establish a baseline of existing childcare capacity it was necessary to identify each existing childcare facility located in the study area. Identification of these existing childcare facilities was established through comprehensive desktop research which used publicly available information and sources. These sources include for information available from:

- Tusla (www.tusla.ie);
- Pobal (www.pobal.ie);
- Westmeath County Childcare Committee (www.westmeathchildcare.ie).

Delphi Design initially reviewed the local childcare services listed by Tusla, available from their website www.tusla.ie. It is considered that Tusla offer the most definitive and accurate source of information on childcare facilities as it acts as the dedicated State agency for child protection and family support services in Ireland. To ensure a detailed assessment, information was also sourced from www.pobal.ie. Pobal acts as an intermediary for programmes funded by the Irish Government and the European Union, and their website contains a number of resources with regard to existing childcare facilities. Existing facilities found through both of the aforementioned sources were then crosschecked with the information available on the Westmeath County

Childcare Committee website, www.westmeathchildcare.ie. Direct contact was also made with the Westmeath County Childcare Committee in order to ensure all information sourced was up to date.

- 4.1.4. Once a list of existing childcare services located in the study area was established, it was then necessary to gather information on the existing capacity and vacancy rates in each facility. While it was possible to access information regarding the capacity of childcare facilities registered with Tusla from their website, there is no publicly available data listing the quantum of spare capacity within existing facilities. As such it was necessary to directly contact each facility individually and request such information.
- 4.1.5. Each of the facilities contacted was asked to provide information on their current enrolment figures and asked if they had any further capacity to accommodate additional children. Due to the understandably cautious attitude of some childcare facility owners to release such information this proved to be a difficult task which was further exacerbated by the ongoing situation of the Covid-19 pandemic that has, in many cases, temporarily limited or reduced the capacity of existing facilities. Nevertheless, capacities and vacancy rates were established for all but one of the existing childcare facilities located in the study area.

4.2. Existing Childcare Services

- 4.2.1. Figure 3 details the locations of all existing childcare services located in the study area. In total, 23 no. existing childcare facilities were identified in the study area.

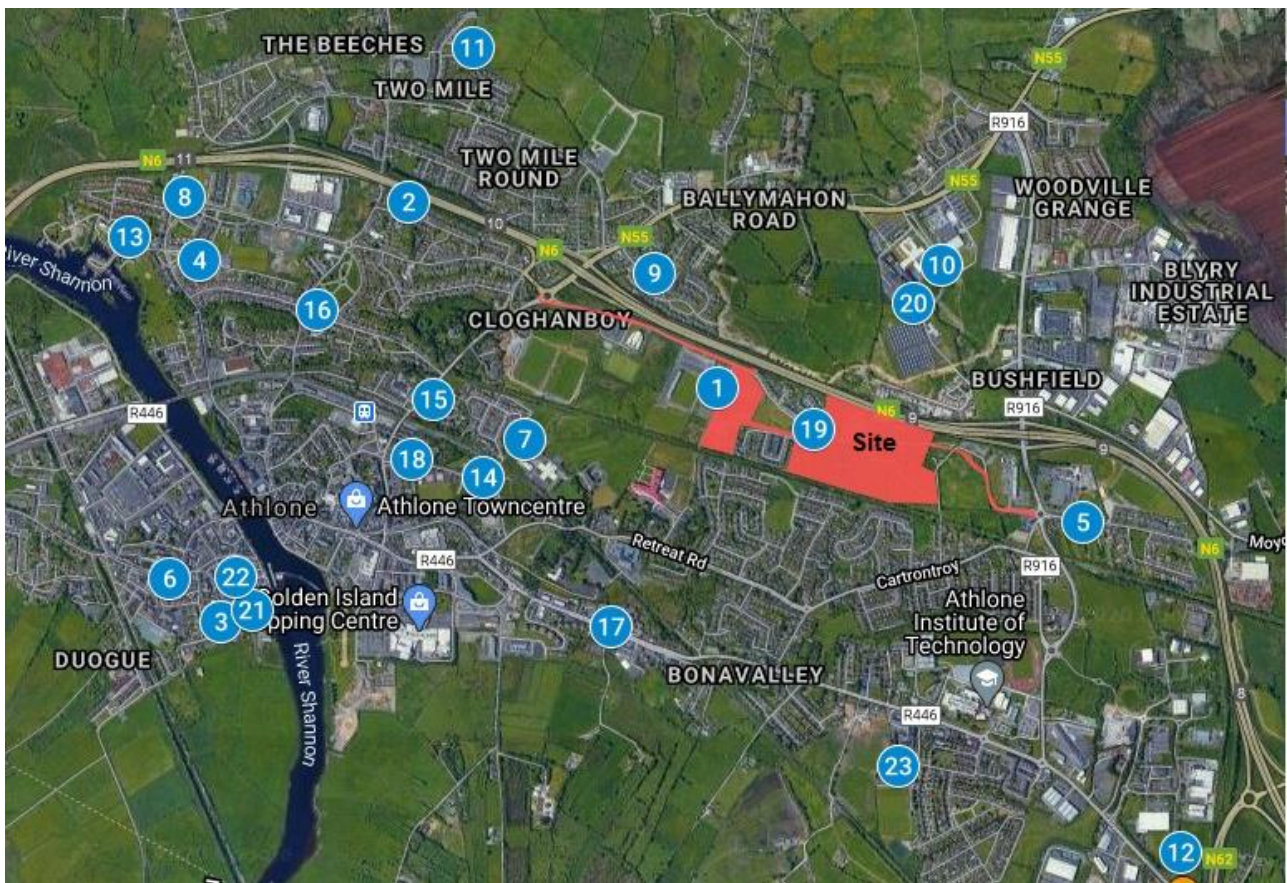


Figure 3 - Existing childcare services.

- 4.2.2. Table 1 details the existing childcare services located in the study area sourced from the Tusla. Table 2 details the existing childcare services located in the study area sourced from the Pobal website. Details on the capacity of each facility were sourced from Tusla. Where information on capacity was not available, individual facilities



were contacted directly. The response of each facility contacted is detailed under the 'Vacancies' column in Tables 1 & 2. The numbers in the left column correspond to the location of the facilities identified in Figure 3.

Number	Name	Capacity (No. of Children)	Vacancies	Facility Type
1	Naionra Lios na Nog	22	Not Disclosed	Part Time, Sessional
2	Treasures Island	22	Not Disclosed	Sessional
3	Little Acorns Montessori	22	Not Disclosed	Sessional
4	Saint Kieran's Childcare Centre	36	Not Disclosed	Part Time, Full Day, Sessional
5	Sallywags Childcare Centre	50	At Capacity	Part Time, Full Day, Sessional
6	Peek A Boo Pre-School	22	Not Disclosed	Part Time, Sessional
7	Sarsfield Pre-School	22	At Capacity	Part Time, Sessional
8	Clonbrusk Childcare Centre	95	c. 5 no. vacancies	Part Time, Full Day, Sessional
9	Busy Kids Creche	105	c. 35 no. vacancies	Part Time, Full Day, Sessional
10	Chatterboxes Childcare	39	At Capacity	Full Day
11	Realta Gael Montessori	55	At Capacity	Part Time
12	Grovelands Childcare IDA	147	c. 3 no. vacancies	Part Time, Full Day, Sessional
13	Jolly Mariner Childcare	52	Not Disclosed	Part Time, Full Day, Sessional
14	Clonros	12	Not Disclosed	Part Time
15	Grovelands Childcare Centre Ballymahon Road	35	At Capacity	Sessional
16	Na Fea Montessori	22	At Capacity	Part Time, Sessional
17	Cam Community Pre-School	22	At Capacity	Sessional

Table 1 - Existing childcare services sourced from Tulsa.

Number	Name	Capacity (No. of children)	Vacancies	Facility Type
18	Saint Mary's After School Service	30	At Capacity	Part Time, Sessional
19	Brawny After School Service	30	At Capacity	Sessional, After School
20	Páistí Beaga	Not Disclosed / Unable to Confirm	Not Disclosed	Part Time, Full Day, Sessional
21	Saint Paul's After School Service	30	At Capacity	Sessional, After School
22	Saint Peter's After School Service	50	c. 7 no. vacancies	Sessional, After-School
23	Willow Park After School Service	30	At Capacity	Sessional, After School

Table 2 - Existing childcare services sourced from Pobal.



- 4.2.3.** In total, details of capacity and vacancies were found for 15 no. of the 23 no. existing childcare services located in the study area. 11 no. of these 15 no. facilities claimed to be at full capacity, with 4 no. of the 15 no. facilities stating they had capacity to enrol additional children. In total, these 15 no. childcare facilities have a capacity for 762 no. childcare places and have current vacancies for c. 50 no. children, which equates to a vacancy rate of c. 6.6%.
- 4.2.4.** Taking into account the information available on capacity from the Tusla website and a reasonable estimate of the capacity for the 1 no. facility for which capacity information could not be obtained, and applying the above vacancy rate (6.6%) to the 8 no. childcare services for which existing vacancy rates could not be established, it is considered reasonable to suggest that there may be c. 14 no. further childcare places available in addition to the confirmed 50 no. available childcare places found above.
- 4.2.5.** In total, there are 23 no. existing childcare services located in the study area which have a total capacity for c. 972 no. children. This assessment has established a confirmed vacancy of c. 50 no. childcare places in these 23 no. childcare services. Based on a reasonable estimate it is considered likely that there may be c. 14 no. further childcare places available in addition to the confirmed 50 no. available childcare places.

4.3. Annual Early Years Sector Profile 2018/2019

- 4.3.1.** The 2018 / 2019 Annual Early Years Sector Profile is jointly prepared by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs & Pobal and presents a national overview of the Early Learning Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) sector. The report provides details of existing enrolment and vacancies on a county by county basis, which can be used to aid our own assessment.
- 4.3.2.** The report established that in 2018/2019 there were 3,505 children enrolled in the existing childcare services surveyed across County Westmeath with 330 no. vacant places. This equates to a vacancy rate of 9% in the county. Previous data available found the vacancy rate in the county to be 5% in 2015/2016; 7% in 2016/2017 & 10% in 2017/2018. Based on this information it is considered reasonable to assess that there may be a level of vacancy in existing childcare services of between 5% and 10%.
- 4.3.3.** Based on the total capacity of c. 972 no. children in the 23 no. existing childcare services located in the study area, this would suggest that the number of vacant childcare places could range from c. 49 no. childcare places (5%) to c. 97 no. childcare places (10%). The primary research conducted as part of this assessment found there to be c. 50 no. confirmed vacant childcare places available in the study area based on direct feedback from individual childcare services.

4.4. Planned Facilities

- 4.4.1.** In addition to the existing childcare services located in the study area, it is noted that an SHD application located to the north-west of the subject site, adjacent to Athlone Rugby Club, has recently been granted permission by An Bord Pleanála (An Bord Pleanála Ref. 307508). This permitted development, known as Dún an Rí, includes for a childcare facility of approximately 545m². This childcare facility will further add to the existing supply of childcare facilities in the area.



4.5. Proposed Childcare Facilities

- 4.5.1.** Thus far, this assessment has demonstrated that there are 23 no. existing childcare services located within walking distance of the development, and that there are currently vacant childcare places available. Notwithstanding same, the proposed SHD application subject to this assessment caters for 2 no. childcare facilities which are put forward in compliance with the relevant planning policy documents previously discussed in Section 3 of this assessment.
- 4.5.2.** The first of the proposed childcare facilities is comprised of a 2 storey crèche measuring c. 321m² located on the ground & first floors of Block C. This facility has an associated outdoor play area of c. 167m² located to its east. The proposed creche has a capacity for c. 62 no. childcare places based upon the internal spatial standards detailed in the Childcare Facilities-Guidelines for Planning Authority (2001).
- 4.5.3.** The second of the proposed childcare facilities is comprised of a 1 storey creche measuring c. 448m² located on the ground floor of Block T. This facility has an associated outdoor play area of c. 241m² located to its east. The proposed creche has a capacity for c. 83 no. childcare places based upon the internal spatial standards detailed in the 2001 Childcare Facilities-Guidelines for Planning Authority.
- 4.5.4.** The development therefore caters for 2 no. childcare facilities with a combined capacity for c. 145 no. childcare places.

4.6. Expected Demand

- 4.6.1.** The SHD application subject to this assessment caters for 576 no. residential dwellings comprised of the following mix of dwellings:

Unit Type	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	Total
Houses	-	35	200	50	285
Apartments	60	169	17	-	246
Duplex Units	-	8	37	-	45
Overall Mix	10%	37%	44%	9%	576 (100%)

Table 3 - Proposed dwelling mix.

- 4.6.2.** For clarity, the above mix caters for:

- 60 no. 1 bed dwellings
- 212 no. 2 bed dwellings
- 254 no. 3 bed dwellings
- 50 no. 4 bed dwellings

- 4.6.3.** The Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001) recommend the provision of one new childcare facility catering for 20 no. childcare places for every 75 no. dwellings however, it is noted the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas should form part of the analysis for the provision of new facilities.

- 4.6.4.** Furthermore, the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines (2018) state in regard to the provision of new childcare facilities that:



“One-bedroom or studio type units should not generally be considered to contribute to a requirement for any childcare provision and subject to location, this may also apply in part or whole, to units with two or more bedrooms”.

- 4.6.5.** The development caters for 576 no. dwellings however, when 1-bedroom dwellings (60 no. dwellings) are discounted as per the above guidance, the resultant figure is 516 no. dwellings. Based on the provision of 20 no. childcare places for every 75 no. new dwellings, the proposed development therefore has a requirement to provide for c. 138 no. childcare places.
- 4.6.6.** As detailed in Section 4.5 of this assessment, the development caters for 2 no. childcare facilities which have a combined capacity for c. 145 no. childcare places. The development therefore exceeds its requirement for the provision of childcare places and complies with the planning guidance contained Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authority (2001).

4.7. Conclusions on Childcare Demand Analysis

- 4.7.1.** Based on the recommendations of the Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001) and the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2018) the development is expected to generate a demand for c. 138 no. childcare places.
- 4.7.2.** The development caters for 2 no. childcare facilities which have a combined capacity for c.145 no. childcare places, which is in excess of the expected demand to be generated by the development.
- 4.7.3.** Furthermore, this assessment has demonstrated that there are several existing childcare services within walking distance of the development which currently have childcare places available.
- 4.7.4.** It is evident in all the foregoing that the development will be adequately served by existing and proposed childcare facilities.



Part C – Schools Assessment



5.0. Demographic Trends

- 5.0.1.** This section of the assessment reviews existing population data to establish local population trends. These population trends will be used to aid our assessment of school places (primary and post-primary) required to support the development. As used in the childcare demand analysis in Part B, a 2 kilometre study area was established around the development site (please refer back to Figure 3). This distance is roughly equivalent to a 20 minute walk and is therefore considered within easy, walkable, reach of the development.
- 5.0.2.** The vast majority of the study area is made up of 2 no. District Electoral Divisions (hereafter DED) being the Athlone East Urban DED and the Athlone East Rural DED. As such Census data available for these 2 no. DEDs are discussed in this section. It should be noted however that the development lies entirely within the Athlone East Rural DED. The analysis contained in this section is largely based on the Census 2011 and Census 2016 data available from the CSO website at www.cso.ie.

5.1. Population Change 2006 - 2016

- 5.1.1.** The 2016 Census Results revealed that the State’s population grew by 3.8% over the five year period from 2011 to 2016. Comparative data indicates that the populations of County Westmeath (3%), the Athlone East Urban DED (6%) and Athlone East Rural DED (3.5%) also grew during the five year period from 2011 to 2016.
- 5.1.2.** Prior to this, the 2011 Census Results revealed that the State’s population grew by 8.2% over the five year period from 2006 to 2011. Comparative data indicates that the populations of County Westmeath (8.6%), the Athlone East Urban DED (1.4%) and Athlone East Rural DED (8%) also grew during the five year period from 2006 to 2011.
- 5.1.3.** The above data demonstrates that while the population growth rate for both the State and County Westmeath has slowed significantly over last recorded five year period, the population growth rate for the Athlone East Urban DED has rapidly increased. This data may reflect upon the increasing trend for urbanisation and the importance of Athlone as regional growth centre in the Midlands which provides employment and services.
- 5.1.4.** Table 4 summarises the population changes discussed above.

Area	Population Change 2006-2011 (%)	Population Change 2011-2016 (%)
State	8.2%	3.8%
Westmeath	8.6%	3%
Athlone East Urban DED	1.4%	6%
Athlone East Rural DED	8%	3.5%

Table 4 - Population change 2006 - 2016.

- 5.1.5.** It is evident from the above that the population levels within the Athlone East Urban and Athlone East Rural DEDs have undergone significant change in terms of growth rates over the most recent two intercensal periods.



5.2. Children per Family

- 5.2.1. The 2016 Census Results revealed that the average number of children per family in the State was 1.38, which is the same the 2011 Census Results. Comparative results from 2016 details that the average number of children per family in County Westmeath was 1.41.
- 5.2.2. The Athlone East Urban DED had an average of 0.99 children per family (an increase from 0.96 in 2011 Census) while the Athlone East Rural DED had an average of 1.39 children per family (an increase from 1.32 in 2011 Census).

5.3. Population Age Distribution (0 - 4 Age Cohort)

- 5.3.1. Projections for future primary school demand need to consider the number of children expected to enter the primary school system in the coming years. It is therefore considered appropriate to examine in detail the 0-4 age cohort in the study area as these children will graduate from pre-school to primary school in the short term.
- 5.3.2. The 2016 Census Results detail that the population of pre-school children (0-4 years) in the State was 331,515 no. children, a decrease of 7% compared to the 2011 Census. During the same 5 year period comparative data reveals that County Westmeath experienced a similar decline in the 0-4 age cohort (6%).
- 5.3.3. The 2016 Census Results detail there were 251 no. children in the 0-4 age cohort in the Athlone East Urban DED, representing 5.7% of the population. There were 563 no. children in the 0-4 age cohort in the Athlone East Rural DED, representing 7.4 % of the population. In 2011 the 0-4 age cohort represented 5.1% of the Athlone East Urban population and 8.5% of the Athlone East Rural population.
- 5.3.4. Table 5 summarises the population changes for the 0-4 age cohort discussed above.

Athlone East Urban	2006	2011	2016
Total Population	3,323	4,131	4,382
0-4 Age Cohort	162	211	251
% of Total Population	4.9%	5.1%	5.7%
Athlone East Rural			
	2006	2011	2016
Total Population	4,965	7,307	7,560
0-4 Age Cohort	545	624	563
% of Total Population	11%	8.5%	7.4%

Table 5 - Population change 2006 - 2016 (0 - 4 age cohort).

- 5.3.5. It is evident from the above that the 0-4 age cohort within study area has had contrasting fluctuations during the most recent two intercensal periods. In percentage terms the 0-4 age cohort has increased in the Athlone East Urban DED between 2006 and 2016. During the same period the 0-4 age cohort has decreased in the Athlone East Rural DED, though the rate of decline slowed significantly in the second half of the 10 year period.



5.4. Primary School Age Cohort

- 5.4.1. The provision of primary school services applies to a specific population cohort, typically children aged 5-12 years, it is therefore considered appropriate to examine in the detail the 5-12 age cohort in the study area.
- 5.4.2. The 2016 primary school age population of County Westmeath represented 12.1% of the population, while the State as a whole had 548,693 children of primary school age representing 11.5% of the population.
- 5.4.3. The 2016 Census Results details that the population of primary school aged children in the Athlone East Urban DED was 314 no. children, representing 7.16% of the population. The population of primary school aged children in the Athlone East Rural DED was 914 no. children, representing 12.1 % of the population. The 2011 Census Results reveal that primary school aged children previously represented 5.3% of the Athlone East Urban DED population and 10.9% of the Athlone East Rural DED population.

5.5. Post-Primary School Age Cohort

- 5.5.1. The provision of post-primary school services applies to a specific population cohort, typically children aged 13-18 years, it is therefore considered appropriate to examine in the detail the 13-18 age cohort in the study area.
- 5.5.2. The 2016 post-primary school age population of County Westmeath represented 8.4% of the population while the State as a whole had 371,588 children of post-primary school age representing 7.8% of the population.
- 5.5.3. The 2016 Census Results detail that the post-primary school age population of the Athlone East Urban DED was 186 no. children, representing 4.2% of the population. The post-primary school age population of the Athlone East Rural DED was 572 no. children, representing 7.6% of the population. The 2011 Census Results reveal that post-primary school age population previously represented 6.3% of the Athlone East Urban DED population and 7.6% of the Athlone East Rural DED population.

5.6. Existing School Trends

- 5.6.1. The Preliminary Enrolment Results published by the Department of Education & Skills in December 2019 provides information on the current school enrolment figures throughout the country.
- 5.6.2. Total enrolments in mainstream primary schools stood at 559,378 in September 2019, a decrease of 170 pupils or 0.03% on September 2018 (559,548). While the number of girls attending primary school fell by 417 pupils, the number of boys attending rose by 247 pupils.
- 5.6.3. The report determines that small schools remain a distinctive feature of the primary education system in Ireland, with 716 schools having 60 or fewer pupils enrolled for the 2019 academic year, which accounts for 23.1 per cent of all schools, representing 4.4 per cent of total enrolments. A continuing trend is the growth of multi-denominational schools, both percentage and absolute terms, which increased by 4.8 per cent with an additional 1,746 pupils.
- 5.6.4. With regard to post-primary schools, total enrolments stood at 371,455 at September 2019, an increase of 8,566 pupils or 2.4% per cent on September 2018 (362,889). The number of post-primary schools has been gradually rising for the last number of years, going from a low of 700 in 2013 to 723 in 2019. As with primary schools, this growth has been led by the growing demand for multi-denominational schools.



5.7. Department of Education & Skills Projections

- 5.7.1. The Regional Projections of full-time enrolments Primary and Second Level, 2019–2036, provides several scenarios for the estimated future enrolment figures based on the study of present trends. The report builds on the State projections of enrolments published in 2018 and was modelled on the Central Statistics Office (CSO) Regional Projections published in June 2019. The report is therefore considered to contain the most accurate and up-to-date projections for future primary and post-primary school demand.
- 5.7.2. The chosen scenario for the forecast was M2F2 which encompasses the assumption of medium levels of migration and the fertility rate falling from 1.8 to 1.6 over the course of next 12 years. Within the report, details for the Midlands region are relevant to the proposed development.
- 5.7.3. Primary school enrolments in the Midlands are projected to fall by 4,790 no. children by 2036 (12.4% change) while primary enrolments in the State as a whole are projected to fall by 134,024 no. children by 2036 (23.6% change).
- 5.7.4. Post-primary enrolments in the Midlands are projected to rise by 2,249 no. children up to the year 2028 before decreasing until 2036 to roughly the existing levels of enrolment. Post-primary enrolments in the State as a whole are projected to increase by 38,259 no. children until 2025 before decreasing until 2036 to a level of circa 37,584 no. children below existing levels.
- 5.7.5. It is important to note that projection figures may differ from the actual outcome, as can be seen in the projections released by the Department of Education and Skills in previous years when compared to actual figures, however the data contained in the report assists in developing a holistic overview for the purposes of this assessment.

6.0. Assessment of Primary School Provision

6.0.1. This section of the assessment identifies and examines the existing primary schools located in the study area, considers the expected demand to be generated by the development, and assesses if existing primary schools have capacity to support the development.

6.1. Existing Primary Schools

6.1.1. The Department of Education & Skills provides details on enrolment figures for all primary schools on an annual basis which are available from their website, www.education.ie. Based upon the chosen study area, Department of Education & Skills records show that there are a total of 7 no. existing primary schools located in the study area as identified in Figure 4.

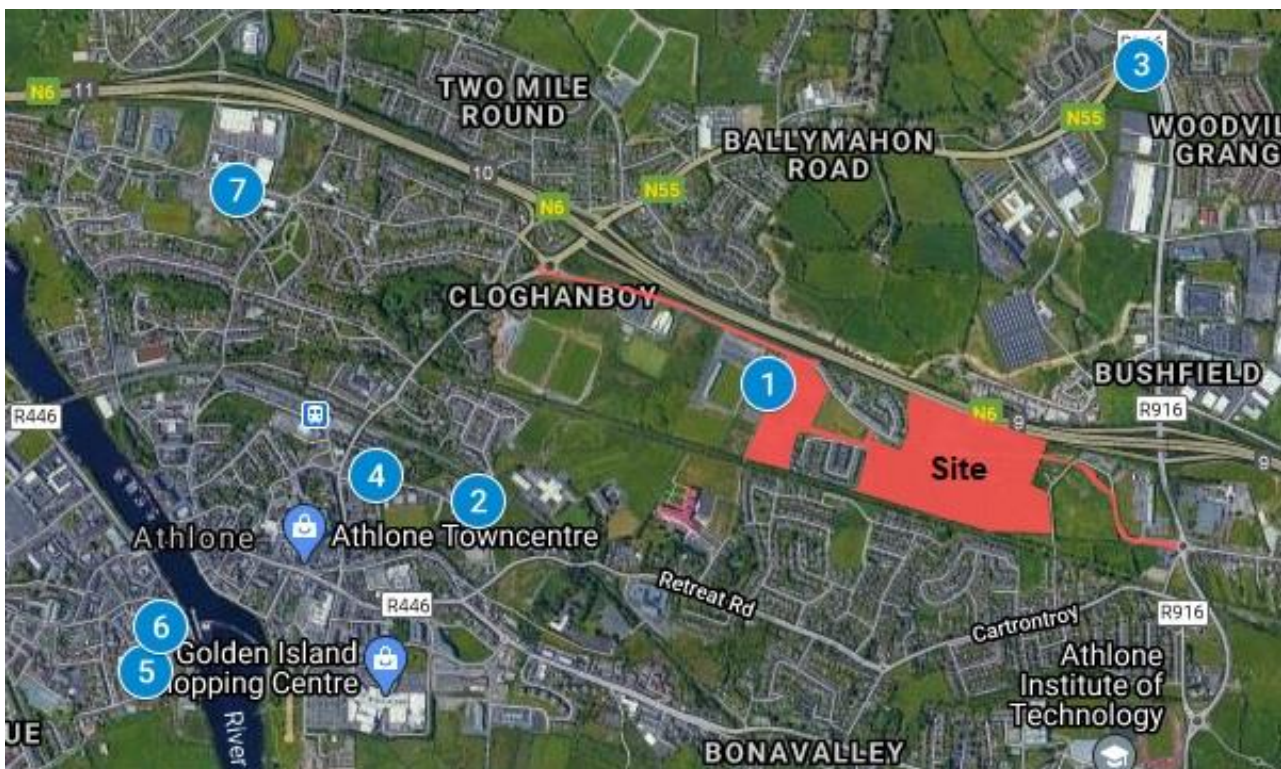


Figure 4 - Existing primary schools.

6.1.2. There is no publicly available information on the number of existing vacancies in individual schools therefore, while enrolment figures were obtained from the Department of Education & Skills, it was necessary to contact each school individually to request information on their existing vacancies.

6.1.3. All the schools contacted were amenable to providing information on their existing vacancies, however all of the schools contacted appear to have a somewhat fluctuating capacity and could generally only provide an estimate of vacancy. Details of existing primary schools located in the study area, their enrolment figure for the 2019/2020 academic year, and their capacity can be found in Table 6.



Number	Name	2019/2020 Enrolment	Capacity	Facility Type
1	Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí	293	c. 325	Mixed
2	Saint Hilda's Special School	43	At Capacity	Mixed
3	Cornamaddy National School	263	c. 275	Mixed
4	Saint Mary's Primary School	412	c. 440	Mixed
5	Saint Paul's National School	138	c. 185	Mixed
6	Saint Peter's National School	147	At Capacity	Mixed
7	Athlone National School	64	c. 75	Mixed
Total		1,360	c. 1,490	-

Table 6 - Existing primary schools.

6.1.4. It is evident from the above that there are 7 no. primary schools within walking distance of the development which have a total existing enrolment of 1,360 no. students and 130 no. additional places currently available based on direct feedback from the schools.

6.1.5. Table 7 provides information on the enrolment figures for each school for the four most recently completed academic years being 2016/2017; 2017/2018; 2018/2019 & 2019/2020.

Number	Name	2019/2020 Enrolment	2018/2019 Enrolment	2017/2018 Enrolment	2016/2017 Enrolment
1	Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí	293	313	313	333
2	Saint Hilda's Special School	43	43	43	40
3	Cornamaddy National School	263	253	254	262
4	Saint Mary's Primary School	412	406	441	432
5	Saint Paul's National School	138	150	162	169
6	Saint Peter's National School	147	151	133	123
7	Athlone National School	64	72	72	67
Total		1,360	1,388	1,418	1,426

Table 7 - Enrolment figures for the four year period covering 2016-2020.

6.1.6. The total enrolment for the 7 no. primary schools for the 2019/2020 academic year demonstrates a decrease on the total enrolment figure recorded in 2016/ 2017, decreasing by 66 no. students. On an individual basis, 4 no. of the 7 no. primary schools recorded decreases in the four year period. The above record of enrolment figures for recent academic years would indicate that there is existing capacity available to cater for the development.



6.2. Additional Considerations

- 6.2.1. While this assessment has established a defined study area, it is considered relevant to note that there are 2 no. additional primary schools located just outside the study area. These schools are Dean Kelly National School (located circa 2.3 km to the south-west of the subject site) and Coosan National School (located circa 2.5 km to the north-west of the subject site). These schools have an existing enrolment of 107 no. students and 422 no. students respectively.

6.3. Estimated Demand Generated

- 6.3.1. In respect of identifying requirements for primary schools in the future, The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice (2008) outlines that the Department of Education & Skills will assume that an average of 12% of the population is of primary school-going age.
- 6.3.2. The 2016 Census Results reveals that the average household size in the State was 2.75 persons while the average household size the Athlone East Rural DED, where the development is located, was 2.72 persons. For accuracy, this latter figure of 2.72 will be used to formulate expected demand.
- 6.3.3. The proposed SHD application consists of 576 no. dwellings. Based on 576 no. dwellings with an average household size of 2.72 persons, the development will likely generate a population of c. 1,567 persons. On the assumption that 12% of the population will be of primary school age this equates to c. 188 no. additional school places generated by the development.
- 6.3.4. It should be noted, however, that the development caters for a mix of residential dwellings which provides for 1, 2, 3 & 4 bedroom houses, apartments and duplex units. The proposed mix is put forward so that the development is capable of supporting persons at all stages of the lifecycle, particularly young couples and older persons who may be looking to downsize. It is therefore reasonable to assume that not all the proposed dwellings will accommodate families with children of primary school going age. Nevertheless, the figure of 188 no. primary school places will be considered for the remainder of this assessment.

6.4. Primary School Assessment

- 6.4.1. Table 5 of Section 5.3.4. of this assessment established that there was a total of 814 no. children of pre-school age in the study area in 2016. If it is assumed that these children are evenly distributed across year groups, there is an average of 163 no. children in each year group¹. It is therefore considered reasonable to assume that an average of 163 no. children in the study area will graduate from the pre-school system into the primary school system each year.
- 6.4.2. As stated in Section 6.3 of this assessment, primary school demand generated by the development is based upon the assumption that 12% of the population is of primary school-going age. The development has a projected population of c. 1,567 persons which equates to an additional demand of c. 188 no. primary school places.
- 6.4.3. The development will generate a demand for c. 188 no. primary school places thus increasing the total number of children in the study area who will require primary school education in the short term to 1,002 no. children² or an average of 200 no. children in each year group.

¹ 814 no. children evenly distributed across the 5 pre-school years (under 1 year old, 1 year old, 2 year old etc.).

² 814 no. children of pre-school age in the study area + 188 no. children generated by the development



- 6.4.4.** This assessment has identified that there are 7 no. existing primary schools located in the study area. These 7 no. schools have a current enrolment of 1,360 students or an average of 170 no. students in each school year³. It is therefore considered reasonable to estimate that an average of 170 no. students will graduate from the primary school system each year.
- 6.4.5.** The number of children expected to graduate from the primary school system each year in the study area (c. 170 no. students) in addition to the number of existing vacancies found in the 7 no. primary schools identified in this report (130 no. places) indicates that there is an adequate level of existing primary school provision to cater for expected primary school population generated by the development.
- 6.4.6.** This is supplemented further by the Department of Education & Skills projections for primary school enrolment which projects enrolments in the Midlands to fall by 4,790 by the year 2036 (12.4% change) and enrolments in the State as a whole to fall by 134,024 by the year 2036 (23.6% change).
- 6.4.7.** Furthermore, it is considered that the development, if granted, will be built over a number of years and that the projected primary school age population generated from the development will not be immediate.
- 6.4.8.** Based on the planning policy documents discussed in this assessment and the details of the SHD application subject to this assessment, it is estimated that there will be a maximum of 188 no. additional primary school places required as a result of the development. Given the average number of students per primary school year in the study area (c.170 no. students) it is reasonable to expect that 170 no. students will graduate to post-primary school every year. When taken in combination with the number of vacant places available in the 7 no. primary schools found in the study area (130 no. places), it is considered that there is more than adequate capacity in existing primary schools to cater for the development.

³ 1,360 no. students evenly distributed across 8 primary school years (Junior /Senior infants and 1st -6th Class)

7.0. Assessment of Post-Primary School Provision

7.0.1. This section of the assessment identifies and examines the existing post-primary schools located in the study area, considers the expected demand to be generated by the development, and assesses if existing schools have capacity to support the development.

7.1. Existing Post-Primary Schools

7.1.1. The Department of Education & Skills provides details on enrolment figures for all post-primary schools on an annual basis which are available from their website, www.education.ie. Based upon the chosen study area (as per the study for primary schools detailed in Section 6), the Department of Education & Skills records show that there are a total of 3 no. post-primary schools in the study area as identified in Figure 5.



Figure 5 - Existing post-primary schools.

7.1.2. As with primary schools, there is no publicly available information on the number of existing vacancies in individual schools therefore, while enrolment figures were obtained from the Department of Education & Skills, it was necessary to contact each school individually to request information on their existing vacancies.

7.1.3. All the schools contacted were amenable to providing information on their existing vacancies, however all of the schools contacted appear to have a somewhat fluctuating capacity and could generally only provide an estimate of vacancy. Details of existing post-primary schools located in the study area, their enrolment figure for the 2019/2020 academic year, and their capacity can be found in Table 8.



Number	Name	2019/2020 Enrolment	Capacity	Facility Type
1	Athlone Community College	1,180	At Capacity	Mixed
2	Marist Collage	517	c. 530	Boys
3	Our Lady's Bower	708	c. 715	Girls
Total		2,405	c. 2,425	-

Table 8 - Existing post-primary schools.

7.1.4. It is evident from the above that there are 3 no. post-primary schools within walking distance of the development which have a total existing enrolment of 2,405 no. students and 20 no. additional places currently available based on direct feedback from the schools.

7.1.5. Table 9 provides information on the enrolment figures for each school for the four most recent completed academic years being 2016/2017; 2017/2018; 2018/2019 & 2019/2020.

Number	Name	2019/2020 Enrolment	2018/2019 Enrolment	2017/2018 Enrolment	2016/2017 Enrolment
1	Athlone Community College	1,180	1,147	1,143	1,121
2	Marist Collage	517	499	516	536
3	Our Lady's Bower	708	711	686	692
Total		2,405	2,357	2,345	2,349

Table 9 - Enrolment figures for the four year period covering 2016-2020.

7.1.6. The total enrolment for the 3 no. post-primary schools for the 2019/2020 academic year shows an increase on the total enrolment figure recorded in 2016/ 2017, growing by 56 no. students. However, an increase in enrolment numbers was not recorded in every school with the number of students attending the Marist Collage decreasing by 19 no. students over the four year period.

7.2. Additional Considerations

7.2.1. While this assessment has established a defined study area, it is considered relevant to this assessment that there is 1 no. additional post-primary school located just outside the study area, being Colaiste Chiaráin (located circa 5km to the south-west of the subject site). Colaiste Chiaráin is a new school created in 2017 from the amalgamation of St. Joseph's College and St. Aloysius College. The school's enrolment for the 2019/2020 academic year is 515 no. students. Direct feedback from the school revealed Colaiste Chiaráin has a capacity for c. 1,000 no. pupils and therefore has c. 485 no. available places to cater for the post-primary school needs of the development. This is particularly relevant as the Department of Education & Skills notes that post-primary students are more likely to travel greater distances to access education.



7.3. Estimated Demand Generated

- 7.3.1.** As detailed in Section 6.3.3. of this assessment, the projected population for the proposed development is 1,567 persons. The Department of Education & Skills, and the relevant planning policy documents, acknowledge the prediction of expected post-primary school demand is, in many cases, more complex than predictions of expected primary school demand as it involves a number of additional considerations. Notwithstanding same, the Department of Education & Skills assumes that 8.5% of the population will be available for post-primary education.
- 7.3.2.** Based on the projected population of 1,567 persons arising from the development, this equates to a potential requirement of c. 133 no. post-primary school places.
- 7.3.3.** Section 5.4.2. of this assessment detailed that there was a total of 1,228 no. children of primary school age in the study area in 2016. If it is assumed that these children are evenly distributed across year groups, there is an average of 154 no. children in each year group⁴. It is therefore considered reasonable to assume that an average of 154 no. children in the study area will graduate from the primary school system into the post-primary school system each year.
- 7.3.4.** As established in Section 7.3.2. above the development will generate a demand for an additional c. 133 no. post-primary school places thus increasing the total number of children in the study area who will require post-primary school education in the short term to 1,361 no. children⁵ or an average of 170 no. children in each year group.
- 7.3.5.** This assessment identified that there are 3 no. existing post-primary schools located in the study area. These 3 no. schools have a current enrolment of 2,405 students or an average of 401 no. students in each school year⁶. It is therefore considered reasonable to estimate that 401 no. students will leave the post-primary school system each year.
- 7.3.6.** The number of students expected graduate from the post-primary school system each year (c. 401 no. students), in addition to the number of existing vacancies in the 3 no. post-primary schools identified in this assessment (20 no. places) indicates that there is a more than adequate level of existing post-primary school provision to cater for expected post-primary school population generated from the proposed development.
- 7.3.7.** This is supplement by the Department of Education & Skills projections for post-primary school enrolment which projects a long term trend for declining enrolments (post-2028). It is also worth noting that the Colaiste Chiaráin post-primary school is located circa 5km to the south-west of the subject site and has c. 485 no. available places based upon direct feedback from the school. This is particularly relevant as the Department of Education & Skills notes that post-primary students are more likely to travel greater distances to attend secondary school compared to primary school.
- 7.3.8.** It is also noted that post-primary school places are not normally required immediately for new development as the population life cycle takes longer for the post-primary school age population to materialise.
- 7.3.9.** Based on the planning policy documents discussed in this assessment and the details of the SHD application subject to this assessment, it is estimated that there will be a maximum of 133 no. additional post-primary school places required as a result of the development. Given the average number of students per post-primary school year (401 no. students) it is reasonable to expect that 401 no., students will graduate to third level education or into the labour market every year. When taken in combination with the number of vacant places available in the 3 no. post-primary schools located in the study area (20 no. places) and the proximity of the Colaiste Chiaráin

⁴ 1,228 no. children evenly distributed across 8 primary school years (Junior /Senior infants and 1st – 6th Class)

⁵ 1,228 no. children of primary school age in the study + 133 no. children generated by the development

⁶ 2,405 no. students evenly distributed across 6 post-primary school years (1st – 6th Year)



post-primary school, which has an existing vacancy rate of c. 485 no. places based upon direct feedback from the school, it is considered that there is more than adequate capacity in existing post- primary schools to cater for the development.



Part D – Overall Conclusions



8.0. Conclusions

- 8.1. This Childcare and School Demand Assessment is put forward in support of the proposed SHD application submitted to An Bord Pleanála on behalf of Alanna Roadbridge Developments Ltd. The assessment aimed to:
1. Review the existing planning policy context in relation to the provision of childcare services and schools;
 2. Detail the existing range of childcare services and schools in the vicinity of the development site;
 3. Assess the capacity of existing childcare services and schools to support for the proposed development;
 4. Consider the childcare services proposed as part of the subject development;
 5. Forecast the expected demand for childcare services and schools generated by the proposed development;
 6. Evaluate the if expected demand will be appropriately met by existing and proposed services.
- 8.2. With regard to Aim 1 of the assessment, Section 3 of the assessment reviewed the existing planning policy context in relation to the provision of childcare services and schools and concluded that an analysis of the existing childcare services and schools is required as part of the proposed SHD application submitted to An Bord Pleanála.
- 8.3. With regard to Aims 2 & 3 of the assessment, Part B of this assessment found there to be 23 no. existing childcare services within walking distance of the development. Based upon the primary research of this assessment, these facilities have existing vacancy for 50 childcare places. Based upon reasonable assumptions it is considered likely that there maybe be a further 14 no. vacant childcare places available in the study area.
- 8.4. With regard to Aims 2 & 3 of the assessment, Part C of this assessment found there to be 7 no. existing primary schools and 3 no. existing post-primary schools within walking distance of the development. Based upon the primary research of this assessment, the existing primary schools have vacancies for 130 no. students with the existing post-primary schools having vacancies for c. 20 no. students.
- 8.5. With regard to Aim 5 of the assessment, the development consists of 576 no. dwellings, comprised of:
- 285 no. houses (35 no. 2 bed; 200 no. 3 bed & 50 no. 4 bed);
 - 246 no. apartments (60 no. 1 bed; 169 no. 2 bed & 17 no. 3 bed);
 - 45 no. duplex units (9 no. 2 bed & 36 no. 3 bed).

Based on existing planning policy detailed in this assessment it is expected that the development may require an additional 188 no. primary school places and 133 no. post-primary school places.

- 8.6. Regarding Aims 4 & 6 of the assessment, in consideration of childcare services, national and local planning policy recommends that one new childcare facility catering for 20 no. childcare places is built for every new 75 dwellings. Excluding the proposed 1-bedroom dwellings, the development has a required childcare provision of c. 138 no. childcare places. The development caters for 2 no. childcare facilities measuring 321m² and 448m² respectively, which have a combined capacity for 145 no. childcare places. Therefore, the proposed development exceeds the requirement for 138 no. childcare places and complies with the Childcare Facilities-Guidelines for Planning Authority (2001). This is in addition to the 23 no. existing childcare facilities located in the defined study area of this assessment. Given all the above it is considered that the development will be adequately served by existing and proposed childcare services.
- 8.7. Regarding Aim 6 of the assessment, in consideration of primary schools, 7 no. existing primary schools were found to be located within walking distance of the development. The development is projected to generate a maximum of 188 no. additional children of primary school age. Based on the demographic information gathered as part of this assessment, c. 170 no. students are expected to graduate from the existing 7 no. primary schools into the post-primary system each year. Together with existing vacancy rates established in this assessment, it



is considered that there is an adequate capacity in existing primary schools to cater for the demand generated by proposed development.

- 8.8.** Regarding Aim 6 of the assessment, in consideration of post-primary schools, 3 no. existing post-primary schools were found to be located within walking distance of the development. The development is projected to generate a maximum of 133 no. additional children of post-primary school age. Based on the demographic information gathered as part of this assessment, c. 401 no. students are expected to graduate from the existing 3 no. post-primary schools into further education each year. Together with existing vacancy rates established in this assessment, it is considered that there is an adequate capacity in existing post-primary schools to cater for the demand generated by development.
- 8.9.** Based on all the foregoing it is considered that existing and proposed childcare services, along with the existing schools, in the vicinity of the development have adequate capacity to support the proposed development put forward for permission.



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