

Proposed Large Scale Residential  
Development at Rathgowan, Mullingar,  
Co. Westmeath  
**Applicant: Marina Quarter Ltd.**

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# Volume II

## Main Statement

### CHAPTER 3

#### Alternatives Considered



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## 3 Alternatives Considered

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### 3.1 Introduction

Consideration of reasonable alternatives is an important aspect of the EIA process and is necessary to evaluate the likely environmental consequences of a range of development strategies for the site of the proposed development within the constraints imposed by environmental and planning conditions. This section provides a description of the reasonable alternatives that have to be considered.

The EIA Directive 2014/52/EU notes that the following is required in relation to the consideration of alternatives in the preparation of the EIAR:

*‘A description of the reasonable alternatives (for example in terms of project design, technology, location, size and scale) studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects’.*

The objective is for the developer to present a representative range of the practicable alternatives considered. The alternatives should be described with ‘an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option’. It is generally sufficient to provide a broad description of each main alternative and the key issues associated with each, showing how environmental considerations were taken into account in deciding on the selected option.

This section of the EIAR provides an explanation of the reasonable alternatives examined throughout the design and consultation process. This serves to indicate the main reasons for choosing the proposed development, taking into account and providing a comparison of the environmental effects. The alternatives may be described under the following headings.

- Alternative locations
- Alternative designs
- Alternative layouts
- Alternative processes

Alternatives may also be described at six levels: do-nothing alternative, alternative locations, alternative layouts, alternative design, alternative processes, and alternative mitigation measures.

### 3.2 Expertise & Qualifications

This chapter of the EIAR has been prepared by Saoirse Kavanagh, Executive Planning Consultant of McCutcheon Halley Planning Consultancy. Saoirse holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Arts (International), majoring in Geography, and a Master’s in Planning and Sustainable Development. She has over 4 years’ experience working with multi-disciplinary teams and has provided input into a variety of projects. In particular, she has co-ordinated the preparation of the following three Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EIARs) including the completion of the Introduction, Alternatives, and Population and Human Health chapters.

- Cooldown Commons Strategic Housing Development, Citywest, Dublin
- Parkside 5B Strategic Housing Development, Belmayne, Dublin.
- Clonattin Strategic Housing Development, Gorey, Co. Wexford.

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### 3.3 Proposed Development

The full description of the proposed development is outlined in Chapter 2 'Development Description' of this EIAR.

### 3.4 Methodology

The following factors have influenced the development of the proposed design:

- Guidance documents referred to in Item 3.1.2 above, and their relevance to the proposed development.
- Analysis of the physical site context, including detailed topographical and site survey information.
- Planning history of the subject site and surrounding area.
- Collaboration with design team members and relevant departments of the Local Authority, with an iterative approach to design that addresses the requirements of all disciplines in a balanced manner.

#### 3.4.1 Relevant Legislation & Guidance

The relevant guidelines to the development of the built environment in Ireland are referenced by the architect. The following documents are among them:

- National Planning Framework 2040
- Urban Development and Sustainable Residential Development in urban areas.
- Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities
- Westmeath County Council Development Plan
- Mullingar Local Area Plan
- Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS)

### 3.5 'Do Nothing' Scenario and Alternative Locations

The Do-Nothing Alternative would see this residential zoned site remain in agricultural use and an undeveloped greenfield site along the R394. The sustainable connectivity and modes of transportation would be less utilised if the Do- Nothing Alternative occurred. The Do- Nothing Alternative would not help Mullingar achieve its population and housing targets identified in the 2021 Westmeath County Development Plan as well as the 2014 Mullingar Local Area Plan.

The subject site belongs to Glenveagh Homes Ltd. and is zoned for residential development. It is a greenfield parcel of land situated in an area which has already been developed for residential use. The site has access to infrastructure (drainage and transport), services and Mullingar town centre via the existing footpath network along the Ashe Road to the south. When considering that the site is owned

by the applicant, the purchasing of an alternative site with residential zoning/planning permission was discounted due to the unlikely availability of such a site on the market and the levels of capital that would be required to purchase such a site. In addition, another site would not have the proximity to the R394 as well as other services and institutions in the area that would provide sustainable connectivity and community.

The development of this infill site will complete the improvement of the surrounding residential area. If the site was to remain undeveloped, it would place additional pressure on development of other zoned lands in order for Mullingar to meet its housing and population targets.

The development of the site will create new landscaped spaces and amenities overlooked by houses which will promote active use and passive surveillance in this area. It will create new landscaped spaces, play areas, and a creche which will enhance the area.

Having regard to the above alternatives, the selected location is considered the most suitable location for the proposed development.

### 3.6 Alternative Uses

The proposed development is located in the townland of Rathgowan within the town of Mullingar, which is identified as a Key Town in the Westmeath County Council Development Plan 2021 – 2027. The site is currently zoned within the town development boundary as ‘Proposed Residential’. Westmeath County Council has highlighted the importance of providing sustainable communities through environmentally friendly transportation routes and amenity walks/cycle routes. This is displayed in the Development Plan 2021 – 2027 under objective CPO 7.6 that states:

*“To promote the development of healthy and attractive places by ensuring:*

- *Good urban design principles are integrated into the layout and design of new development.*
- *Future development prioritises the need for people to be physically active in their daily lives and promote walking and cycling in the design of streets and public spaces.*
- *New schools and workplaces are linked to walking and cycling networks.*
- *The provision of open space considers different types of recreation and amenity uses with connectivity by way of safe, secure walking and cycling routes.*
- *Developments are planned for on a multi-functional basis incorporating ecosystem services, climate change measures, Green Infrastructure and Key Landscape features in their design. “*

When the land use zoning, do-nothing scenario, and planning policies in the development plan are analysed, the proposed development would be the best option for the site. An alternative use for the

subject site would not meet the housing targets by Westmeath County Council (Please see Chapter 4 Population and Human Health Chapter) as well as the land use zoning.

Considering these objectives and targets, the proposed development has emerged as the best use option for the site.

### 3.7 Alternative Process

Due to the nature of the current proposal (i.e. a residential development greater than 100 dwellings), where the only option is to submit a Large-Scale Residential Development (LRD) planning application to the Planning Authority, it was not considered necessary to consider alternative processes for the proposed development.

### 3.8 Alternative Design/Layout

The subsections below outline the various layouts that were considered.

#### 3.8.1 Alternative A: Previously Permitted Phase 1 and 2 Layout

Two applications were previously permitted on the subject site by Westmeath County Council – references 21/97 and 21/139. These two applications have been appealed by a third party to An Bord Pleanála and are currently awaiting a decision. The current proposed application, if permitted, will replace these schemes.

The 21/97 Phase 1 application included:

- 98 no. dwellings (24 no. apartments and 74 no. houses) comprising 8 no. 1 beds, 28 no. 2 beds, 58 no. 3 beds, and 4 no. 4 beds.
- 135 no. car parking spaces and 12 no. cycle parking spaces.
- 6,278sqm public open space
- 1 no. childcare facility.
- 1 no. pumping station.

The 21/139 Phase 2 application included:

- 83 no. dwellings (36 no. apartments and 47 no. houses) comprising 12 no. 1 beds, 20 no. 2 beds, 48 no. 3 beds, and 3 no. 4 beds.
- 112 no. car parking spaces and 66 no. cycle parking spaces
- 6,945sqm public open space.
- 1 no. pumping station.

The pumping station was included within both applications, but it was intended to provide just one pumping station on the overall site.

The layout shown in Figure 3.1 provides a combined layout of both the previously permitted Phase 1 and Phase 2 layouts. This layout combined provided 181 no. dwellings (60 no. apartments and 121 no. houses) comprising 20 no. 1 beds, 48 no. 2 beds, 106 no. 3 beds, and 7 no. 4 beds.

The open space provided in this combined layout was dispersed with limited large areas of useable open space. The main open space area coincided with overhead electricity lines, which was not ideal from a recreation and amenity perspective. The open spaces provided within the eastern portion of the site were provided as narrow strips and would not have encouraged their use for recreation or leisure. The internal street layout includes a high quantum of streets and junctions. While this would have created a permeable layout it also resulted in a car oriented scheme which would have encouraged the use of cars as a mode of transport and worked against the national objective for a modal shift to more sustainable forms of transport.

This layout included houses along the Ashe Road to the south which were provided with vehicular access and car parking off the Ashe Road. This is a less favourable arrangement.



Figure 3.1 Alternative A: Combined Layout showing Phase 1 and Phase 2 layout permitted by Westmeath County Council.

### 3.8.2 Alternative B: Layout Submitted with Section 247 Meeting Request

The previously permitted layout described above which were appealed to An Bord Pleanála, have provided an opportunity to create a new layout for the subject site. John Fleming Architects assessed the site constraints and opportunities and provided a Design Strategy for the scheme. This strategy included a large central open space within a cycle path through the scheme and internal streets branching off from the open space. The image shown in Figure 3.2 summarises the design strategy.



**Figure 3.2 Site Assessment and Design Strategy by John Fleming Architects**

Following the development of this design strategy, John Fleming Architects created a detailed site layout to submit for a Section 247 pre-planning meeting with Westmeath County Council. This layout included the following key elements:

- A large central open space with a play area and kickabout area.
- Seven cells of residential units arranged around the central open space.
- An internal street along the western boundary, parallel to the C Link Road.
- A mix of unit types including terraced houses, semi-detached houses, and maisonettes.
- A cycle path through the centre of the scheme which provides access from the roundabout to the north, through the site, to the Ashe Road to the south.
- A pumping station in the north-eastern corner of the site.

The Council provided a range of comments on this layout and requested the following changes:

- Provision of a focal building in the south-west corner of the site, at the junction of the C Link Road and the Ashe Road.
- Provision of a landscaped buffer strip along the western boundary of the site to reduce potential impact of noise from the C Link Road on the future residents of the residential units.
- Amended junctions to remove staggered junctions.
- Amended cycle path and street to demonstrate if vehicular access provided from Ashe Road.

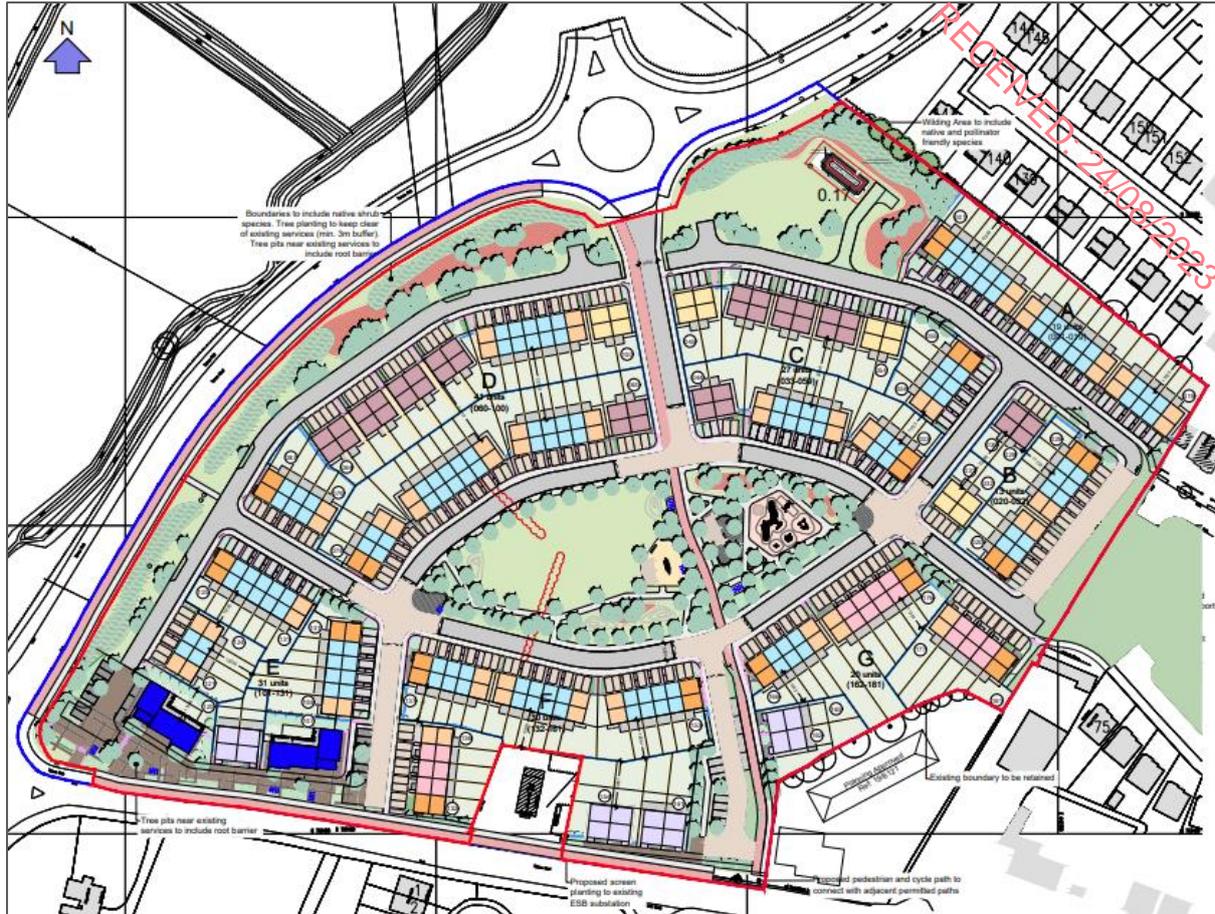


**Figure 3.3 Alternative B: Layout submitted with LRD Section 247 Meeting Request to Westmeath County Council**

### 3.8.3 Alternative C: Layout submitted with Section 32B Meeting Request

This layout progressed from the layout submitted with the Section 247 Meeting Request and took on board the comments and feedback from the Council. The following key changes were made:

- The residential units in Cells D and E and internal street along the western boundary were set back further from the road to provide a landscaped buffer strip between the new homes and the road.
- Cell B was amended to provide a homezone along the eastern boundary and improve permeability in this section of the layout.
- The pedestrian and cycle access between Cells G and F was amended to clearly indicate that there will be no vehicular access from this point.
- The units in the south-west corner of the site have been amended to provide a strong frontage to the corner.
- The internal street layout has been amended to provide clearer and safer internal junctions. This resulted in a slight amendment to each of the cells.

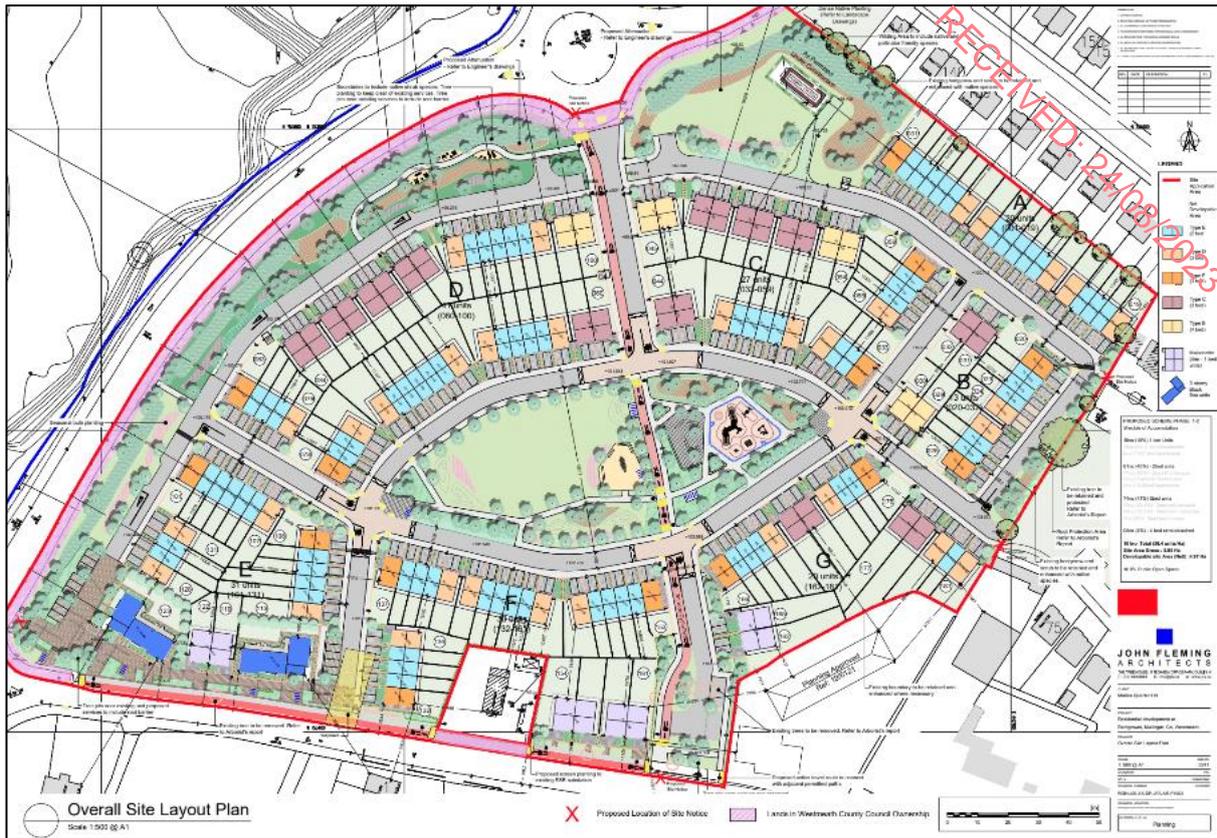


**Figure 3.4 Alternative C: Layout submitted with LRD Section 32B Meeting Request**

### 3.8.4 Alternative D: Final Layout

This layout progressed from the layout submitted with the Section 32B Meeting Request and took on board the comments and feedback from the Council. The following key changes were made:

- The cycle path through the scheme and the street between Cells G and F has been amended to provide clear and safe route for pedestrians and cyclists, and to limit the potential for accidents between cars and pedestrians or cyclists.
- The street and space in the south-western corner have been amended to provide a plaza area and to provide a more pleasant area in front of the proposed apartment blocks.
- The gardens in Cell G were amended to provide a more uniform garden sizes for all units.



**Figure 3.5 Final Layout Submitted with LRD Application**

### 3.9 The Existence of the Project

The Construction Phase will last approximately 2 years. During the construction phase of the proposed development there will be approximately a maximum of 100 construction workers at the peak of the construction works. Hence, for the duration of the Construction Phase of the proposed development there will be a short-term increase in construction employment in the area, which will have a positive impact, both directly and indirectly, on the local economy.

The Operational Phase of the proposed development will result in an increase in the population of the area, and it will have a positive impact on the long-term supply of housing in Mullingar. In addition to housing construction, the proposed development will have the potential to create employment in the local area through the proposed childcare facilities. The provision of passive and active public open space with a mixture of recreational and amenity facilities will have a long-term, positive impact on the local human health and the socio-economic environment.

The primarily likely significant environmental impacts of the proposed development are fully addressed in the relevant specialist Chapters of this EIAR. These impacts relate to Population & Human Health, Land & Soil, Hydrology and Hydrogeology, Landscape & Visual, Noise & Vibration, as well as Air Quality & Climate associated with the proposed development.

The proposed development has the potential for cumulative, secondary, and indirect impacts, these can be difficult to quantify due to complex inter-relationships. All interactions and cumulative impacts

have been addressed in Chapter 16 Significant Interactions with cumulative impacts and interactions fully addressed in the relevant specialist Chapters of this EIAR.

### **3.10 Climate Change Preparation**

The proposed scheme has been developed in consideration of future climate change impacts. All houses will feature high levels of insulation to maximise energy efficiency. The proposed layout has been developed to encourage pedestrian and cycle connectivity between neighbourhoods. The creche facilities have been located in accessible locations to reduce reliance on car trips.

Existing mature trees have been retained as far as practicable and will enhance the new neighbourhoods and landscaped open spaces. The play areas are located around existing trees to facilitate shading and create a high-quality natural environment for younger children. The proposed surface water drainage strategy has been designed to reflect future expectations relating to climate.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

Throughout the design evolution of the subject site, the advantages and disadvantages of each early and alternative option were examined, with solutions considered in detail and the more favourable elements threaded through to the final and preferred strategy. As a result, it is our opinion that the proposed final layout and design strategy outlined in Figure 3.5 (i.e. Alternative D: Final Layout), is the most appropriate scheme with the highest quality of residential amenity and least environmental effects. The final scheme is consistent with both local and national planning policy and will create a new residential community with a strong identity, within a built-up urban environment.