



August 22'

Title

Childcare Demand Analysis

Development Description

*"Strategic Housing Development –
Proposed Residential Development of 165 units"*

Location

Dunlo & Pollboy, Ballinasloe

Applicant

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Requirement for Childcare Capacity Review

We have been instructed by Limehill Esker Ltd. to prepare a “Childcare Demand Analysis” with respect to a proposed Strategic Housing Development at Dunlo & Pollboy, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.

The development consists of a proposal to construct 59 no. houses and 106 no. duplex & apartments. i.e. a total of 165 no. residential units.

On 13th May 2021, as part of the SHD process, An Bord Pleanála issued a “Notice of Pre-Application Consultation opinion” to the applicant. Item No. 8 of this opinion requires the preparation of “A childcare demand analysis, including but not restricted to the justification for omission of a crèche, the likely demand for childcare places resulting from the proposed development and how it will be accommodated.”

In response, this report will respond to the Boards request, whilst having regard to the provisions of the Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines entitled “Childcare Facilities; Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)”, which provides a framework for the consideration of Childcare Facilities within the Planning System.

1.2 Provisions of 2001 Childcare Guidelines

The guidelines instruct Local Authorities to set out objectives in Development Plans that relate to the provision of childcare facilities. In general, it advises that there should be a focus placed on promoting childcare facilities, as part of the development of sustainable communities, in locations such as: residential areas; places of employment; educational establishments; city, town, neighbourhood and district centres; and locations convenient to public transport nodes.

Section 2.4 of the Guidelines states, inter alia that “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.” It is noted that the requirement for a childcare facility is a guide rather than an absolute planning requirement. Furthermore, the guidelines clarify that the geographical/spatial distribution of childcare facilities in the area, together with the emerging demographic profile of the area, are the key informants as to whether a new Childcare Facility should be provided as part of the proposed development at this location.

1.3 Provisions of 2018 Design Standards for New Apartments – Guidelines for Planning Authorities

Section 4.7 of the Guidelines (herein referred to as the Apartment Guidelines) references the provision of childcare facilities in new apartment developments. It states the following: “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.”

The latter provision of the Apartment Guidelines allows for further flexibility in the provision of childcare facilities as it specifically excludes one-bedroom apartments from the requirement for any childcare provision. This will be discussed further below.

2.0 Site Location & Context

The subject site is located within the urban envelope of Ballinasloe town, in a suburban location to the south of the town centre.



Figure 1: Map extract showing indicative location of subject site within the southern suburbs of Ballinasloe town.

The subject site is generally bounded by: the Dun Esker and Beechlawn Heights Estates to the east, the Esker Fields Estate to the west, greenfield residential zoned lands to the south, and a commercial park and a residential site under construction immediately to the north.

3.0 Existing Supply & Capacity

3.1 Study Area

Firstly, a study area consisting of a 1km radius of the site was identified. This proximity was considered reasonable for the purposes of identifying a local geographic distribution of Childcare facilities in the area. Furthermore, it generally equates to a 20 minute walking distance from the subject site. The location of the subject site together with the extent of the 1km radius is indicated in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Location of subject site and extent of the 1km radius study area shaded in blue.

3.2 Geographical Distribution

In turn, this office consulted the most up to date formal list of the “*Early Years Services*” in the area (January 2021) published by Tusla (Child & Family Agency). This was cross referenced with the “*Tusla-National Data Viewer*” in order to identify the geographical distribution of these Childcare Facilities in Ballinasloe.

The location of these established Childcare Facilities is outlined in Figure 4 below.

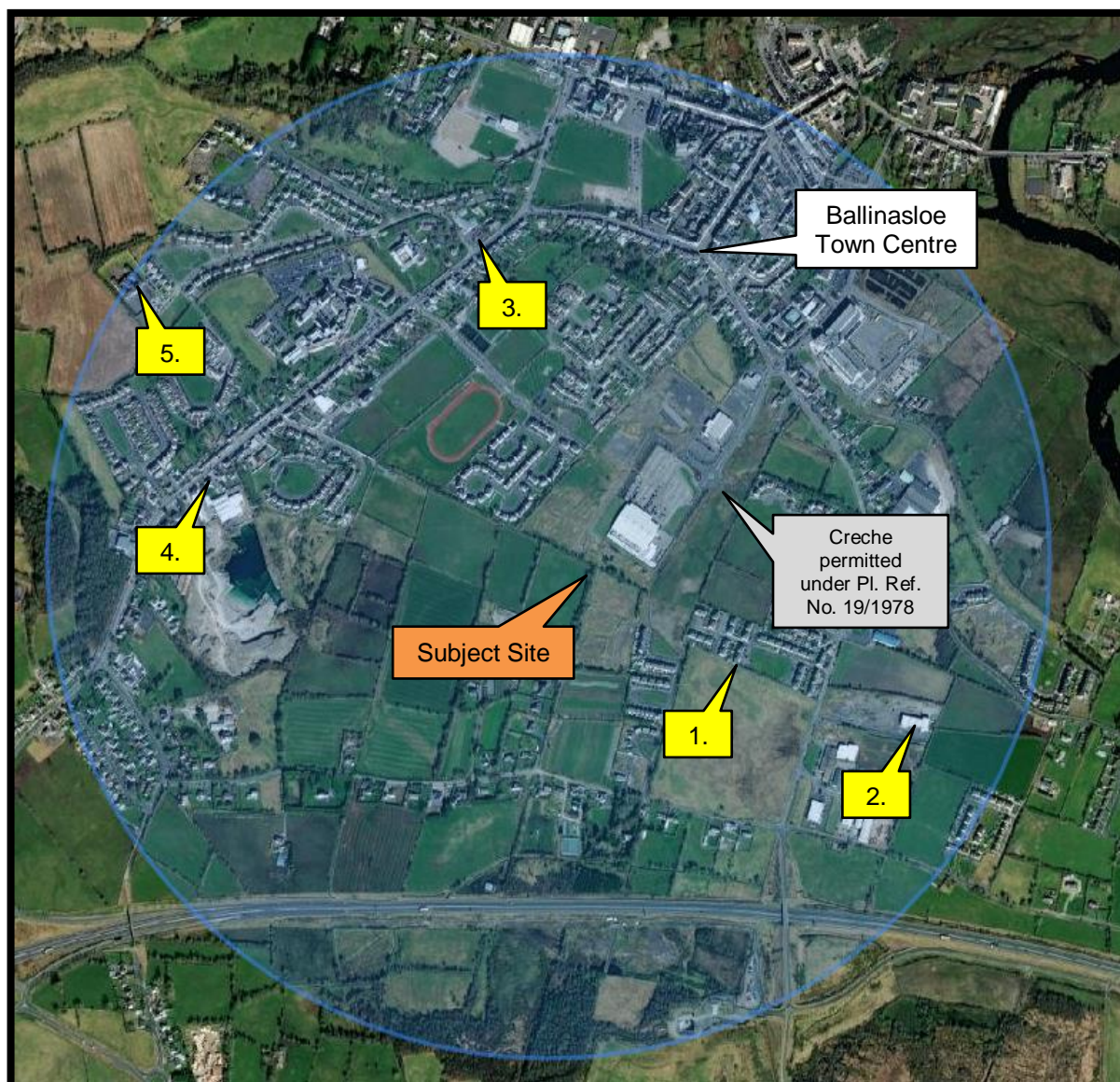


Figure 3: Geographical Distribution of Established Childcare Facilities within a 1km radius of the site.

Note: The location of the neighbouring creche (under construction) permitted under Pl. Ref. No. 19/1978 on the site alongside is also indicated.

As can be seen from Figure 3 above, a total of 5 no. Childcare Facilities are located within a 1km radius of the subject site (Numbered 1-5). This map should be read in conjunction with Table 1 below.

Table 1: List of Childcare Facilities within 1km radius of the subject site.

No.	Childcare Facility	Eircode	Tusla No.	Type	No. of Children Service can accommodate
1.	Headstart Montessori School	H53 PC92	TU2015GY 103	Part Time, Sessional	22
2.	Ballinasloe Community Creche	H53 X9XO	TU2015GY 017	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional	55
3.	Brackernagh Pre-School Playgroup/Happy Days Pre-School	H53 DH33	TU2015GY 037	Sessional	22

4.	Ballinasloe Therapeutic Project/ Ballinasloe Social Services Pre-School	H53 VW40	TU2015GY 018	Sessional	24
5.	Naionra Uí Cheithearnaigh	H53 W183	TU2015GY 192	Sessional	33

Note: The above list is provided in order of proximity from the subject site.

Figure 3 & Table 1 above demonstrate a high concentration of existing Childcare Facilities, within close proximity to the subject site.

In particular, Figure 3 above demonstrates a strong geographical distribution of childcare facilities both to the northwest and to the southeast of the site. Therefore, the proposed residential development on the subject site is centrally and conveniently located vis-à-vis these established Childcare Facilities.

From a spatial distribution perspective, there would appear to be an adequate quantum of existing Childcare Facilities in the area.

3.3 Existing Capacity

With regard to official figures with respect to existing childcare capacity, we refer to the 2020/2021 “*Annual Early Years Sector Profile report*” prepared by Pobal and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This publication includes an analysis of the number of vacant Childcare places on a County by County level. The vacancy rate is calculated as the number of vacant places within childcare facilities as a percentage of children enrolled. This identified the overall national vacancy rate at 21%. At County level it identified a higher vacancy rate of 27% in County Galway. The latter figures would suggest that there are no Childcare Capacity issues within the County as a whole. However, it is acknowledged that the latter study was commissioned at a time when many of the Childcare Facilities were closed and/or operating under capacity owing to the constraints of the Covid 19 Government restrictions.

More up to date, official figures of local vacancy can be gleaned from recent Tusla inspection reports. This is demonstrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Estimate Spare Capacity within existing Childcare Facilities within 1km of the subject site

No.	Childcare Facility	Tusla No.	No. of Children Service can accommodate	Max. No. of Pre-School Children present during most recent Tusla Inspection	Estimated Spare Capacity
1.	Headstart Montessori School	TU2015GY103	22	18 (October 2020)	4
2.	Ballinasloe Community Creche	TU2015GY017	55	35 (April 2022)	20
3.	Brackernagh Pre-School Playgroup/Happy Days Pre-School	TU2015GY037	22	18 (April 2022)	4
4.	Ballinasloe Therapeutic Project/ Ballinasloe Social Services Pre-School	TU2015GY018	24	19 (May 2021)	5
5.	Naionra Uí Cheithearnaigh	TU2015GY192	33	25 (April 2021)	10

The above table reveals a total estimated space capacity of 43 no. childcare spaces, amongst the existing 5 no. registered childcare facilities located within 1km of the subject site.

The latter analysis suggests that there is sufficient capacity within the existing Childcare providers to cater for future growth. Furthermore, given the “connectivity” benefits of the proposed housing layout, which will provide for pedestrian connectivity to the north, south, east and west of the site, each of the existing Childcare Facilities will be readily accessible to future residents of the proposed development.

4.0 Recently Permitted Creche Alongside

It is important to note that in addition to the 5 no. established childcare facilities in the area, another Creche has been permitted on the applicants neighbouring site to the north, as part of a residential development of 78 no. houses (Pl. Ref. No. 19/1978 refers). The latter permission provides for a generously proportioned Creche (332sqm), and the latter development is currently under construction. In addition, the proposed development provides for vehicular and pedestrian connectivity to the latter development, which will provide for convenient accessibility to the latter creche for future residents of the proposed development.

The permitted plans for Creche indicated 3 no. Classrooms, with proposals for 42 no. childcare spaces.

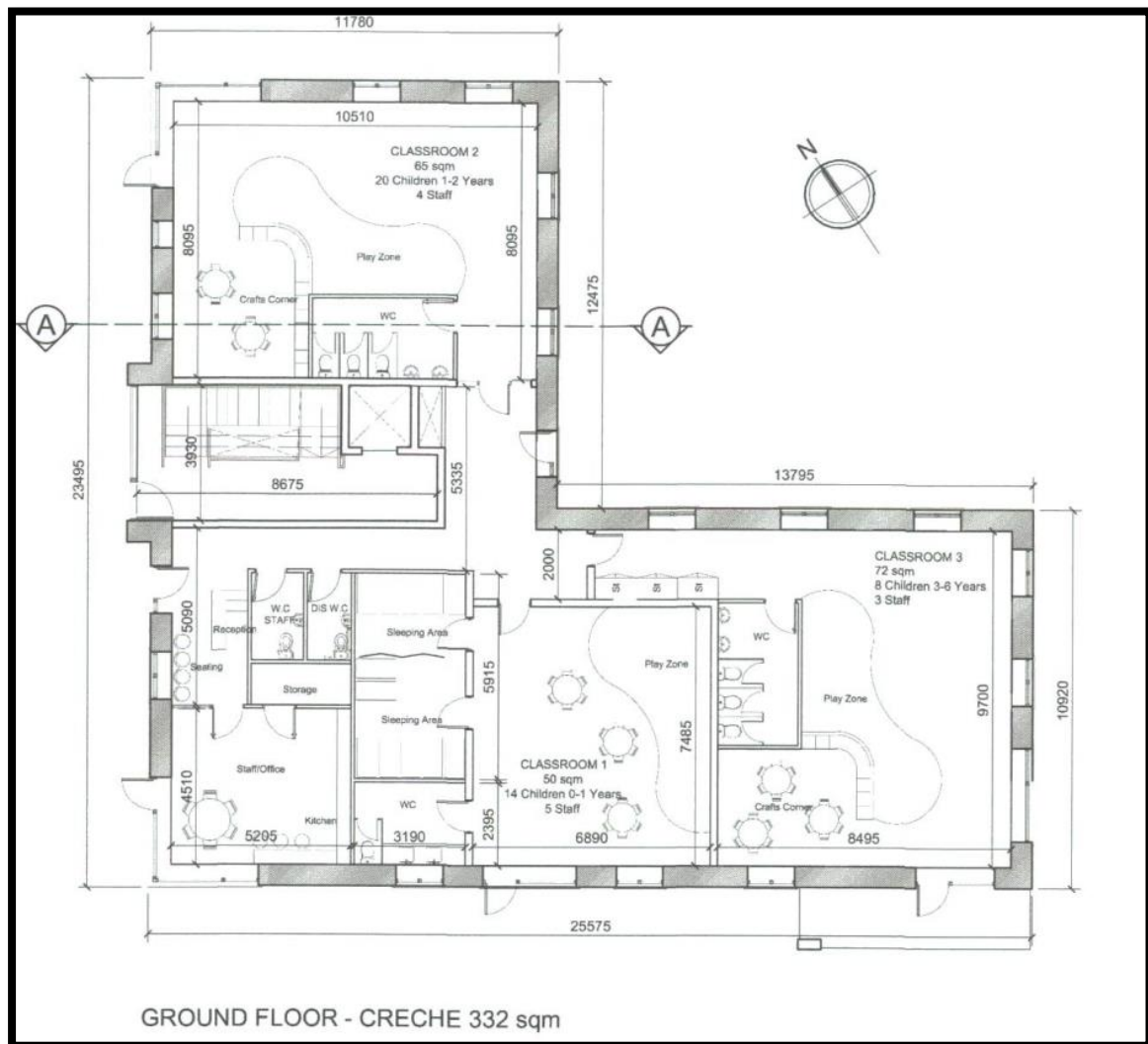


Figure 4: Extract from Floor Plan of Creche permitted under Pl. Ref. No. 19/1978.

Under the provisions of the Childcare Guidelines, it requires a minimum of one Childcare Facility with 20 places for each 75 dwellings. Therefore, under the provisions of the Guidelines, the permitted development of 78 no. units would require c. 21 no. spaces. However, given that the permitted creche was designed to cater for 42 no. spaces, it would appear that there would be c. 21 no. spaces within the permitted Creche under construction, which would be available to the proposed development.

Therefore, the estimated spare capacity of the existing Childcare Facilities in the area (43 no. spaces) together with the anticipated spare capacity of the neighbouring Creche under construction (21 no. spaces), it would appear that c. 64 no. childcare spaces would be available to cater for the needs of the proposed development.

Conversely, given the distribution of existing and permitted (under construction) Childcare facilities within a 1km radius of the subject site, it is difficult to envisage how another Creche facility on the subject site would be viable at this suburban location.

5.0 Projected Demand

The proposed development of 165 no. residential units, provides for a mix of 59 no. houses and 106 no. duplex and apartment units. As discussed above, Section 4.7 of the Apartments Guidelines specifically excludes one-bedroom apartments from the requirement for any childcare provision.

Therefore, given that the proposed development includes for 15 no. 1 bed apartments, these can be excluded from the Childcare Facility requirement in this case. When the latter units are excluded scheme, the amount of “applicable units” is reduced to 150.

Data from CSO Electoral Division (ED) of Ballinasloe (Urban) was used to understand the population trends at this location.

In turn, in order to estimate the quantum of childcare places generated as a result of the “applicable” 150 no. units, the following indicators from the Census 2016 have been utilised:

- Persons per unit proposed (i.e. amount of persons within the applicable units of the scheme)
- Average Household size at 2.75 persons per unit within Ballinasloe (Urban) ED (Census 2016)
- Percentage of households that contain children (determined at 45.75% within Ballinasloe -Urban ED using the Census 2016 SAPS data)
- Percentage of Children (0-4 years) cohort (determined at 8% within the Ballinasloe (Urban) ED, using the Census 2016 SAPS data).

Analysis of these factors allows for a determination of the total number of childcare places generated by the development, as set out below.

Table 3: Pre-School Childcare Demand based on Census 2016 indicators for Ballinasloe (Urban ED)¹

Total Units (Excluding 1-Bed apartments)	Units/Households with Children (45.75%)	Average Household Size	Residents	0-4 Years (%)	0-4 years (Number)
152	68.62	2.75	188.7	8%	15.1

¹ As per SAPS 2016 Census Data for Ballinasloe Urban, the total population was 6,662 persons. The total no. of households within the ED was 2,415 and the total no. of units /households with children was 1,105.

As outlined in Table 3 above, the impact of the proposed development will result in a projected demand for c. 15 no. childcare spaces based on Census 2016 indicators. In addition, according to the most up to date CSO Quarterly National Household Survey (QHHS Q3 2016) the childcare facility take-up for pre-school children within the West region equated to 6.4%². On this basis that, only 6.4% of the 15 no. pre-school children within of the proposed scheme would be likely to attend a childcare facility, this would mean that only 1 no. childcare space is likely to be generated by the proposed development.

6.0 Likely Future Trends

As stated above, during the pandemic, the demand for childcare facilities has decreased significantly at a national level with many parents working from home. The trend of parents working from home is likely to continue in the future (Post-Covid Restrictions). This trend is supported by Government Policy. In this regard we refer to the Governments *“National Remote Work Strategy”* (NRWS), published by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, January 2021. This aims to introduce legislation to give employees the right to work from home, and mandating that *“home and remote work should be the norm for 20 percent of public sector employment.”* The NRWS also finds that *“Research carried out in October 2020 found that 94 percent of participants would like to work remotely after the crisis.”* The latter trend is therefore likely to reduce the demand for new Childcare Facilities in the future.

7.0 Planning for Schools

It is noted that An Bord Pleanála did not request a School Capacity Assessment as part of its written request. In this regard, we would concur that that such an assessment would not be required in this instance. Moreover, it is noted as part of the recent preparation of the 2022-2028 Ballinasloe Local Area Plan, the Planning Authority would have carried out a high-level assessment (including liaison with the Department of Education) to ensure that sufficient lands are zoned to meet the educational needs of the town within the lifetime of the Plan. In this regard, it should be noted that extensive swathes of land are zoned “CF-Community Facilities” to cater for any anticipated growth. Furthermore, an adequate amount of land is zoned “CF” in and around many of the existing schools within the town, to cater for any potential on site expansion. This is demonstrated in Figure 5 below.

² Source: Table 3 of QNHS Childcare Module Quarter 3 2016.

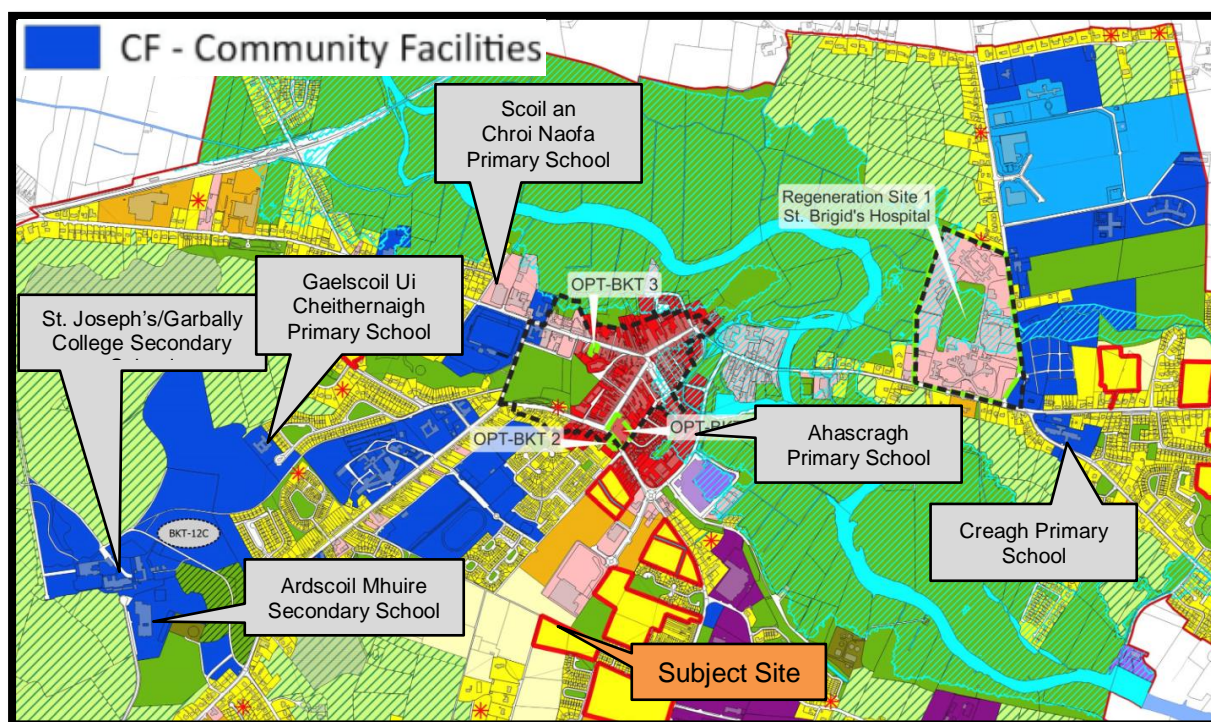


Figure 5: Extract from Ballinasloe LAP 2022-2028 Land Use Zoning Map, showing geographic distribution of existing schools and existing “CF” zones within the town.

In addition, the recently adopted LAP does not identify any capacity issues relating to existing schools and does not contain any specific objectives to cater for expansion and/or new development of schools within the town. Similarly, as per the Core Strategy for the town of Ballinasloe, it sets a population growth target of 1,999 persons within the Plan period (2022-2028), without mentioning that this is contingent on significant school expansion.

Notwithstanding these points, we would submit that the proposed development and its associated student growth cohort, would not generate undue pressure on existing schools in the area. This is examined in Table 4 below.

Table 4: School Cohort Demand based on Census 2016 indicators for Ballinasloe (Urban ED)³

Total Units (Excluding 1-Bed apartments)	Units/Households with Children (45.75%)	Average Household Size	Residents	5-19 Years (%)	5-19 years (Number)
150	68.62	2.75	188.7	20.1%	37.93

On the basis that the proposed development would generate a School Cohort demand of 38 places, it is considered that this could be readily accommodated by the 2 no. large secondary schools and 4 no. national schools within the town.

³ As per SAPS 2016 Census Data for Ballinasloe Urban, the total population was 6,662 persons. The total no. of households within the ED was 2,415 and the total no. of units /households with children was 1,105.

8.0 Summary of Findings:

Therefore, given the;

- high concentration/ geographical distribution of established Childcare Facilities in close proximity / walking distance of the proposed development,
- the location of a large and recently permitted creche on the housing development under construction alongside to the north,
- the estimated spare capacity on Childcare places in the area,
- the low level of predicted demand and future trends,

it is considered that the proposed development would not generate a demand for a childcare facility at this location.

Moreover, owing to the latter geographical distribution of Childcare Facilities, together with the proposed “connectivity” enhancements to the surrounding area (which form part of the proposed development), it can be concluded that the demand for childcare places generated by the proposed development would be readily accommodated by the combination of existing distribution of childcare providers and creche development under construction alongside.

Similarly, in the light of the above, it is considered that the provision of yet another creche as part of the proposed development, would not be viable at this location.

Yours faithfully,

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