



THORNTON O'CONNOR
TOWN PLANNING

Childcare Demand Assessment

Childcare Demand Assessment

Prepared in Respect of a Large-Scale Residential Development Application at a Site fronting Swords to Malahide Road (R106), Mountgorry, Swords, Co. Dublin

Prepared on Behalf of Bartra Propco No. 23 Limited

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION	3	
1.1	Approach		3
1.2	Study Area and Accessibility		4
1.3	Proposed Development		8
1.4	Layout of this Report		9
2.0	RELEVANT POLICY GUIDANCE	11	
2.1	National Planning Policy		11
2.1.1	National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040		11
2.1.2	Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework (July 2024)		11
2.1.3	Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (January 2024)		12
2.1.4	Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments (July 2023)		13
2.1.5	Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)		14
2.2	Regional Planning Policy		14
2.2.1	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region		14
2.3	Local Planning Policy		15
2.3.1	Fingal County Development Plan 2023-2029		15
3.0	DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT	17	
3.1	Population Trends		18
3.2	Age Profile		18
3.3	County Level Demand for Childcare Facilities		20
3.4	Composition of the Proposed Development		20
3.3.1	Estimated Population Generated		20
3.3.2	Estimated Childcare Demand Generated		21
3.5	Demographic Summary		22
4.0	CHILDCARE FACILITIES AUDIT	23	
4.1	Existing Childcare Facilities		23
4.2	Planned Facilities Network		27
4.3	Facilities Summary		27
5.0	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	29	

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Childcare Demand Assessment has been prepared by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning (TOC) on behalf of Bartra Propco No. 23 Limited in support of a proposed Large-Scale Residential Development at a c. 0.8731 Ha site fronting Swords Road, Mountgorry, Swords, Co. Dublin. The purpose of this report is to examine the existing childcare facilities located in the vicinity of the development site, their capacity, and the resulting need to incorporate on-site childcare facilities as part of the development proposal. This report supports the proposed development by:

- Providing a detailed review of the statutory, strategic and policy context that relates to the provision of childcare facilities in the area;
- Outlining the existing (and proposed) range of childcare facilities in the defined Study Area;
- Describing the demand for childcare places generated by the proposed development; and
- Offering insights into the capacity of existing childcare facilities.

The Government's Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001) instructs Local Authorities to set out objectives in their respective Development Plans relating to the provision of childcare facilities. The Guidelines recommend the provision of at least 1 no. childcare facility for new residential developments of 75 no. units or more. The focus of the Guidelines is to promote sustainable communities having regard to the scale and unit mix of the proposed development, the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of an area. The Guidelines acknowledge that case-specific circumstances based on the aforementioned factors may lead to an increase or decrease in this requirement. This report, therefore, identifies existing facilities in the local area and includes analysis and identification of potential shortfalls in infrastructure.

The Childcare Demand Assessment provided herein accompanies a planning application for a residential development comprising 123 No. units.

1.1 Approach

As part of this development proposal, we have carried out an assessment of the existing and proposed childcare facilities in the area in order to assess the need for additional infrastructure. A desktop study was used to collect the baseline information. The facilities in each category were recorded in an Excel table then mapped using the ArcGIS ecosystem. A large number of public and private geospatial datasets were used in the course of the survey, including but not limited to:

- 2024 Google Places Dataset;
- 2024 ESRI and Mapbox Ireland Basemaps;
- 2011, 2016 and 2022 Census Boundaries and Small Area Population Statistics;
- 2024 Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Reports – Registered Childcare Facilities; and
- 2024 Fingal County Council Planning Register

Having regard to the Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001), it is evident that an assessment of the existing childcare facilities in the local area is required. It is therefore necessary to carry out a demographic assessment of the local populations, and identify existing (and proposed) childcare facilities within the area to allow for demand estimations to be made with respect to the impact of the proposed development. A methodology for the assessment of

childcare facilities has been developed in accordance with the provisions of the relevant planning policy guidance (described in Section 3.0 to follow), which involves the following steps:

1. Defining a Study Area, centred on the subject site;
2. Determining the extent and provision of childcare facilities within the Study Area (both existing and proposed);
3. Undertaking a study of the demographic composition of the population of the Study Area; and
4. Estimating the level of demand for childcare facilities that may arise from the development proposal.

TUSLA Early Years Inspectorate Reports and School Age register were utilised for all identified pre-school facilities and after-school services. The relevant data extracted from the reports and register have been used. In addition to the review of the reports aforementioned, a supplementary phone survey was conducted on each of the childcare facilities within the Study Area to ascertain existing capacity. The survey achieved a healthy response rate although it was not possible to gain a complete analysis on the total available capacity for the catchment area.

1.2 Study Area and Accessibility

Swords town has grown considerably in recent years, it is identified as a 'Key Town' within the Dublin Metropolitan Area and the town has a broad range of uses, with residential, retail, offices, and logistics. Swords has a population estimated at 40,776 in the latest Census 2022, and the document 'Your Swords: An Emerging City, Strategic Vision 2035' envisages Swords growing into a city of 100,000 people by 2035.

Geographically, Swords is located c. 12km north of Dublin City Centre, and is within close proximity to the M1, which links to the M50, Dublin Airport and Dublin Port Tunnel while providing the main transport link to Louth and Northern Ireland. In addition to the broad range of uses located within Swords town centre, a number of large-scale shopping centres and retail parks operate within the Swords area, including the adjacent Airside Retail Park, Pavilions Shopping Centre, Swords Business Campus, and Swords Business Park and the Airside Business Park, in addition to the myriads of employment generating uses at and around Dublin Airport.

The subject site, covering approximately c. 0.8731 hectares, is situated toward the eastern periphery of Swords, less than 1 km from Swords Town centre, and is c. 2km from the employment hub of Dublin Airport to the south. The site is currently undeveloped, with the northern boundary of the site adjoined by Swords Business Park, a residential housing estate (Seamount View) to the west, an existing access road which serves the Applegreen service station and local business park to the east, and an apartment complex to the south (St Werburghs). Access to the site is provided via a gated entrance to the east of the site from the local access road. A public footpath is provided along the southern and eastern site boundary.



Figure 1.1: Site Location

(Source: Bing Maps, annotated by Thornton O’Connor Town Planning, 2024)

The Study Area for this assessment is defined by a c. 1 km radius of the subject site, equivalent to a c. 12- to 14-minute walking distance considered accessible to future residents of the proposed development. A distance of c. 1 km has also been defined by Fingal County Council within the *Fingal County Development Plan 2023–2029* (Section 14.14) as the development standard for future community and social audits. Given that the subject site is located at the edge of a rapidly growing settlement, an additional indicative catchment of c. 2km has been included (in some exceptions) to capture, survey and include relevant infrastructure that lies tangent to, or immediately outside of this study area but is directly relevant to assessing future needs of the settlement of Swords.



Figure 1.2: Study Area

(Source: Bing Maps, annotated by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

The site is well serviced by public transport with high capacity, frequent bus services. A number of bus stops are located within 500m walking distance to the site, providing for a high capacity and frequent service to the city centre, along with direct links with Dublin Airport, and Dublin City Centre. This includes the Swords Express bus services (including routes 503, 506 and 507), and a range of Dublin Bus and GoAhead services (including routes the 41, 42d, 43, 102, 142 & 197).

Future proposals for public transport in the area include Bus Connects and a section of the Core Bus Corridor 2 (Swords to Dublin City Centre) preferred route passes near the site to the west, along the R132/Dublin Road. Bus Connects aims to introduce 'next generation' bus services and corridors in Dublin. With the aim of significantly cutting existing journey times and ensuring that services are predictable and reliable. A section of the Core Bus Corridor 2 preferred route passes along the R132/Dublin Road to the west of the site. These corridors will have continuous bus priority, along with segregated cycle lanes where possible. The route will run service to the City Centre running every 10-15 minutes. This will provide significantly improved bus transport access to the subject site in the coming years.

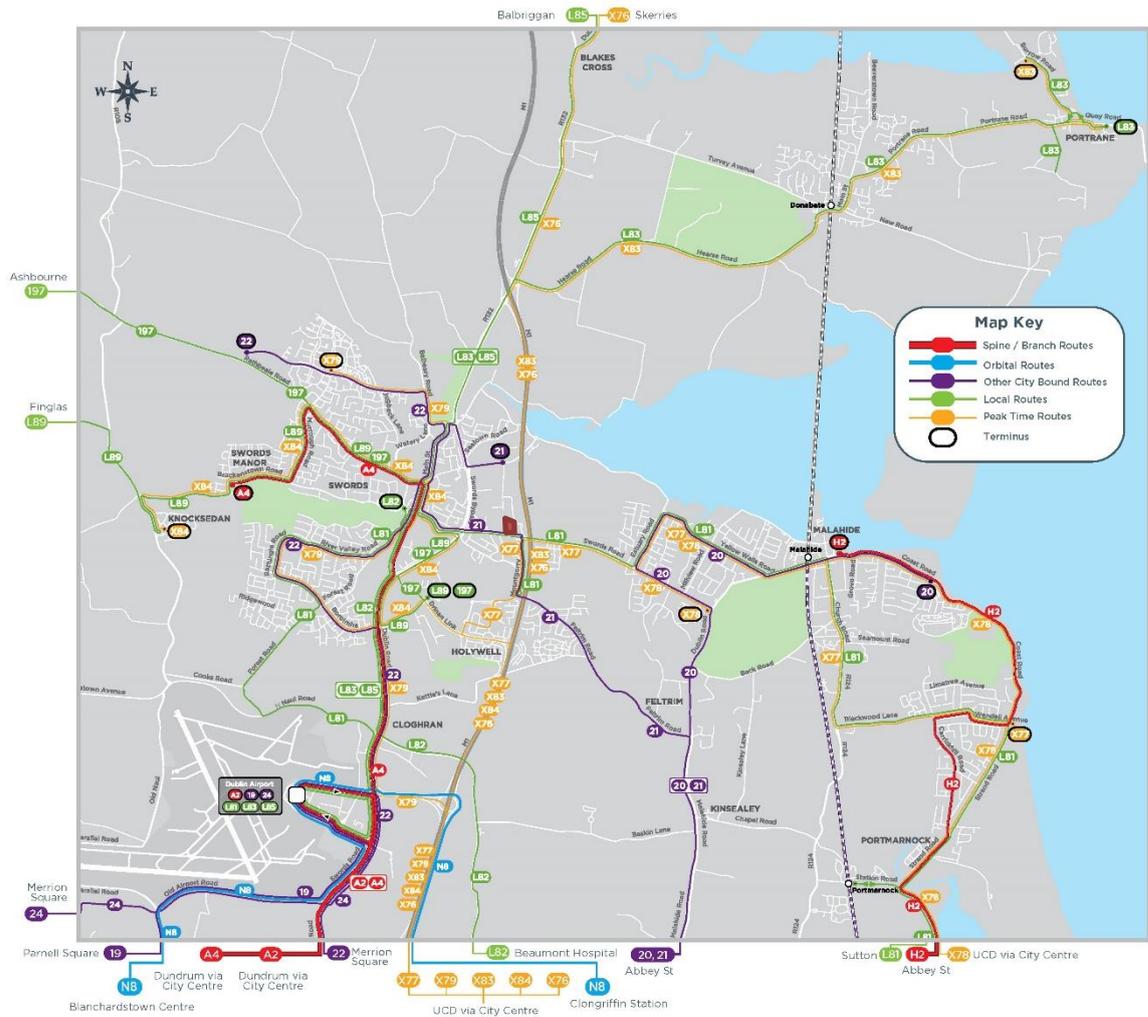


Figure 1.3: Bus Connects Network (Site Identified in Red Outline)

(Source: **BusConnects.ie, September 2020, annotated by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)**

The site will also benefit from the future Metro Link line, which will run along a corridor linking Swords, Dublin Airport and the City Centre, and will terminate at Charlemont. The proposed Metro Link will provide a station in Swords, 'Swords Central Station', which will be approximately 800 metres (c. 10 minutes' walk) to the south-west of the site along the R132 (see Figure 1.4).

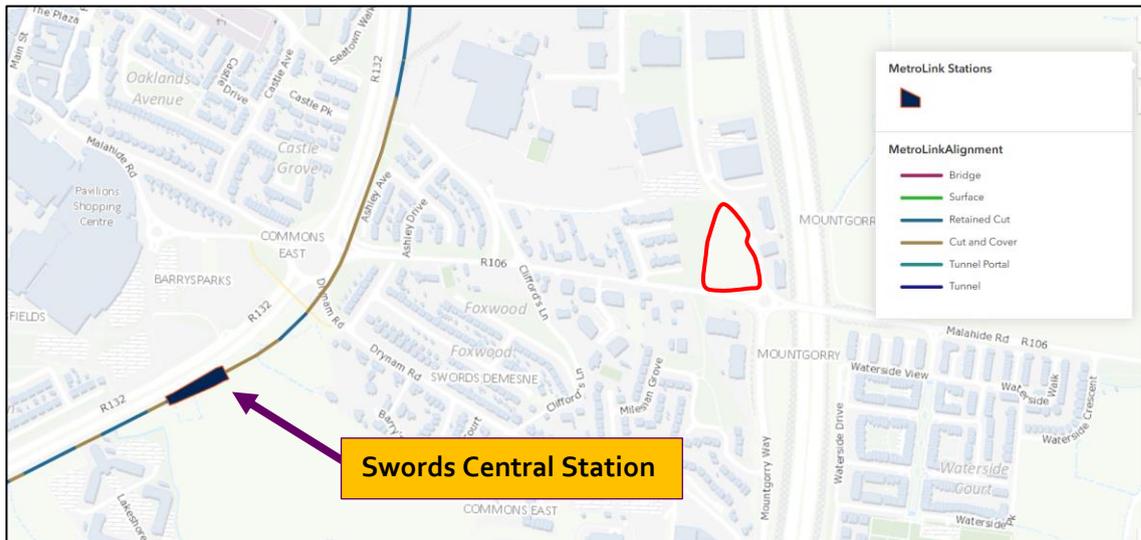


Figure 1.4: Site Proximity to MetroLink Line (Swords Central Station)

Source: metrolink.ie, Annotated by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

1.3 Proposed Development

Bartra Propco No. 23 Limited intend to deliver a residential development on the c. 0.8731 Ha development site. The development will consist of 123 No. apartments, with supporting resident amenity facilities. The development is arranged in a courtyard style with communal open space proposed in the centre.

Per the statutory public notices, the proposed development is as follows:

“Bartra Propco No. 23 Limited intend to apply for permission for development for a Large-scale Residential Development (LRD) at this c. 0.8731 Ha site fronting the Swords to Malahide Road (R106), Mountgorry, Swords, Co. Dublin. The site is bounded to the west by open space, with Seamount View Housing Estate further beyond, to the south by the R106, to the east by an access road to the Applegreen Service Station and to the north by Swords Business Park.

The development’s surface water drainage network shall discharge from the site into the existing manhole located along the access road to the east of the site. The development site area and drainage work area will provide a total application site area of c. 0.8792 Ha.

The proposed development will principally consist of: the construction of 123 No. residential units (55 No. one bed apartments and 68 No. two bed apartments). The development will be provided in a courtyard block arrangement ranging in height from part 4 No. to part 5 No. storeys. The proposed development has a gross floor area of c. 10,291 sq m.

The proposed development will also provide: vehicular access from the access road to the east; 24 No. car parking spaces; bicycle parking spaces; motorcycle parking spaces; pedestrian/cycle entrances at the south-west and north of the site, and along the western boundary connecting into the adjoining open space; a footpath and bicycle path around the south, east and north of the site perimeter and a shared cycle/pedestrian path along the western boundary; balconies and terraces facing all directions; hard and soft landscaping; boundary treatments; green roofs; lift overrun; PV panels; lighting; ESB substation; switchroom; plant; and all associated works above and below ground.”

Unit Type	Units	% of Total
1-Bedroom Units	55	45%
2- Bedroom Units	68	55%
Total units	123	100%

Table 1.1: Schedule of Accommodation

(Source: Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)



Figure 1.5: Site Layout Plan

(Source: Coady Architects, 2024)

1.4 Layout of this Report

The remaining Sections of the report will follow the approach outlined in Section 1.1 as a structural framework with the identification and categorisation of all current and future proposed childcare infrastructure in the area, followed by a demographic analysis that provides valuable insight into the characteristics of the population of the Study Area, prior to determining the potential demand impacts of the proposed development. The report will comprise a further four sections:

- **Section 2.0** provides the policy context and considers standards against which provision can be assessed;
- **Section 3.0** provides an overview of the population and demographic profile of the Study Area and assesses the likely future demographic trends as a result of the implementation

- of the proposed development;
- **Section 4.0** reviews existing local childcare infrastructure, as well as proposed future infrastructure; and
- **Section 5.0** identifies gaps in the existing provision of infrastructure and makes recommendations to address deficiencies.

2.0 RELEVANT POLICY GUIDANCE

For the purposes of this Childcare Demand Assessment, a range of national, regional and local planning policies relating to childcare infrastructure provision have been reviewed, including the *Fingal County Development Plan 2023–2029*. These documents provide guidance with respect to the provision of new facilities in residential development areas. The key points relating to this study, as derived from each policy document, will be highlighted in this Section.

2.1 National Planning Policy

2.1.1 *National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040*

The *National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040* ('NPF') sets a vision for the planning and development of Ireland to 2040 which is to be implemented through Regional, County and Local Plans. The NPF sets out 50% of future population are to be accommodated within the existing footprint of Dublin and the four other cities. The proposed development will contribute to this target.

A key focus of the NPF is on sustainable and compact development within pre-existing urban areas and the provision of accessible services and facilities for all communities. Chapter 6 of the NPF states that the "*ability to access services and amenities, such as education and healthcare, shops and parks, the leisure and social interactions available to us and the prospect of securing employment*" is intrinsic to providing a good quality of life for new and existing communities.

The NPF includes National Strategic Outcome 10 which seeks to provide access to quality childcare, education and health services. This requires an evidence-led planning approach. While there is no guidance on what infrastructure is required to service developments of different sizes, the NPF does provide a hierarchy of settlements and related infrastructure.

With the lack of alternative guidance and in order to provide a policy and evidence-based approach to the Assessment, within this Report we use the NPF hierarchy to assess the infrastructure but defer to catchment specification prescribed in Local Development Plan Policy.

2.1.2 *Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework (July 2024)*

On 10th July 2024, in accordance Section 20C(5)(a) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the Government published a draft of the first 6-year revision of the NPF. The Draft Revision focuses on updates to the NPF to reflect significant and sustained population growth observed since the publication of the NPF in 2018 and updates to Government policy, amongst other factors. This section focuses on the main changes reflected in the Draft Revision which can be summarised as follows:

- National Population Growth Target increased from 5.8 million to 6.1 million by 2040. This represents an additional 300,000 people compared with the original NPF and would result in a total increase of 950,000 people over 2022 Census population figures. This projected increase in population is in line with the Economic and Social Research Institute's (ESRI) baseline population projections contained in their July 2024 outlook.
- Extension of policy directing 50% of national growth amongst Ireland's five cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. Establishes new minimum growth

targets for Ireland's five cities.

- Amends regional population growth targets with the Eastern and Midland Region (EMRA) increasing by approximately 470,000 additional people between 2022 and 2040 (c. 690,000 additional people over 2016-2040) i.e. a population of almost 3 million. Dublin City and Suburbs is expected to absorb a majority of this increase and is projected to grow by 295,000 people over the period.
- Reinforces compact urban form objectives of the 2018 *NPF* requiring 40% of all new housing to be built within existing urban footprints (50% in cities/30% elsewhere).
- Outlines a national requirement for 50,000 homes to be completed per year to satisfy demand. This is also in line with the ESRI projections; however, it is noted that this does not take account of existing structural pent-up demand nor a significant fall in household size (as outlined by the Housing Commission).
- Places greater emphasis on the accelerated delivery of transport orientated development (TOD) opportunities at greenfield and brownfield sites adjacent to major public transport hubs in the five cities, suburbs and metropolitan towns.

Taken together, the revised framework presents the same National Strategic Objectives with regards to social infrastructure and childcare, but places revised figures in relation to expected demographic demands and the requirements for significantly more residential units to be completed to meet demand.

2.1.3 Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (January 2024)

The *Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities* provide national planning policy and guidance on sustainable residential development and the creation of compact settlements in both urban and rural areas in Ireland. The aim is to promote environmentally friendly practices, efficient land use, and community-focused development. The guidelines recognise the importance of compact growth in urban areas and the importance of walkable well-designed neighbourhoods that can meet day-to-day needs of residents within a short 10-to-15-minute walk of homes. These day-to-day needs refer to social infrastructure, including access to educational facilities and childcare, as essential to good quality of life, and state that new development should take into consideration the SI needs of the community and the existing provision of same. Under the chapter titled 'Sustainable and Compact Settlements', the process for the delivery of successful quality placemaking is reviewed and the provision of key community facilities such as amenities, schools, crèches and other community services are referenced as forming essential elements. In applying this methodology, the guidelines note it will be necessary to make an "*informed estimate of net developable area taking account of factors such as the need for roads and parks, schools*" and planning for same.

The Guidelines promote a move away from segregated land use areas (residential, commercial and employment) that have reinforced unsustainable travel in favour of mixed-use neighbourhoods. Ensuring that there is a good mix and distribution of activities around a hierarchy of centres has many benefits in terms of reducing the need to travel and creating active and vibrant places. It states that specific key principles (noted below) should be applied in the preparation of local plans and in the consideration of individual planning applications:

- a) "*In city and town centres and at high capacity public transport nodes and interchanges (defined in Table 3.8), development should consist of high intensity mix-use development (residential, commercial, retail, cultural and community uses) that responds in scale and intensity to the level of accessibility. At major transport interchanges, uses should be planned*

- in accordance with the principles of Transport Orientated Development.*
- b) In city and town centres, planning authorities should plan for a diverse range of uses including retail, cultural and residential uses and for the adaption and re-use of the existing building stock (e.g. over the shop living). It is also important to plan for the activation of outdoor spaces and the public realm to promote more liveable city and town centres. Much of this can be achieved through the implementation of urban enhancement and traffic demand management measures that work together to free up space for active travel and create spaces that invite people to meet, mingle and dwell within centres.*
 - c) In areas that are less central, the mix of uses should cater for local services and amenities focused around a hierarchy of local centres that support residential communities and with opportunities for suitable non-residential development throughout.*
 - d) In all urban areas, planning authorities should actively promote and support opportunities for intensification. This could include initiatives that support the more intensive use of existing buildings (including adaption and extension) and under-used lands (including for example the repurposing of car parks at highly accessible urban locations that no longer require a high level of private car access).*
 - e) It will be important to align the integration of land uses and centres with public transport in order to maximise the benefits of public transport.*
 - f) The creation of sustainable communities also requires a diverse mix of housing and variety in residential densities across settlements. This will require a focus on the delivery of innovative housing types that can facilitate compact growth and provide greater housing choice that responds to the needs of single people, families, older people and people with disabilities, informed by a Housing Needs Demand Assessment (HNDA) where possible. Development plans may specify a mix for apartment and other housing developments, but this should be further to an evidence-based Housing Needs and Demand Assessment.”*

This Childcare Demand Assessment has regard to these Guidelines which prescribe more compact city spaces and a wider diversity of social and community uses within walkable distances. These criteria were considered with respect of the future needs of proposed development and applied during the course of the study area audit.

2.1.4 Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments (July 2023)

The Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities (July 2023) also includes specific guidance with respect to childcare provision in the design and development of apartment schemes, as follows:

“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 document specifies the provision of 1 No. childcare facility (equivalent to a minimum of 20 No. child places) for every 75 No. proposed residential units. The application of this standard is however informed by the demographic profile of the area and the existing capacity of childcare

facilities.

In line with the above National Guidelines, all the one-bedroom units within the proposed scheme (55 No. units) have been discounted in estimating the total number of minors (children aged 0-4 years) and school going children (5-18) expected to reside within the development. As such, only the 68 No. 2-bed units have been included from the assessment. The estimation of children population and the likely demand for childcare services arising from them has been further detailed in the audit in Section 4.

2.1.5 Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)

Appendix 2 of *The Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2001) produced by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government state the following with respect to the provision of new communities / larger new housing developments (Paragraphs 2.4 and 3.3.1 also refer to this standard):

"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."

This document establishes an indicative standard of 1 No. childcare facility per 75 dwellings in new housing areas, where the facility provides a minimum of 20 No. childcare places. However, the guidance acknowledges that other case-specific insights may lead to an increase or decrease in this requirement. Appendix 2 of the Guidelines states that the threshold and level of potential provision should be established having regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of an area.

The results of any childcare needs analysis carried out as part of a County Childcare Strategy should also be considered.

2.2 Regional Planning Policy

2.2.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region

The *Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy* (Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly) ('RSES') states that social infrastructure (including childcare) plays an important role in developing strong and inclusive communities. Section 9.1 of the RSES details that the availability of, and access to, services and facilities, inclusive of healthcare services, childcare and education facilities and community/recreational facilities is key to creating healthier places. The RSES includes the following Regional Policy Objectives which relate to access to social infrastructure and its overall improvement:

RPO 9.14 – *"Local authorities shall seek to support the planned provision of easily accessible social, community, cultural and recreational facilities and ensure that all communities have access to a range of facilities that meet the needs of the communities they serve."*

RPO 9.19 – *“EMRA shall work collaboratively with stakeholders including the wide range of service providers through the LECs to effectively plan for social infrastructure needs.”*

Regarding childcare facilities and schools, the RSES states that Local Authorities should consider demographic trends and patterns when carrying out an assessment of the need for social infrastructure.

RPO 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 a cross Government Early Years Strategy.*
- *Youth services that support and target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability.”.*

Section 9.7 highlights that Childcare should be easily accessible by walking, cycling and public transport. Shared use and co-location of facilities should be encouraged, in order to align service provision, use land more efficiently and facilitate opportunities for further inclusion and community participation.

The RSES has been consulted in this *Childcare Demand Assessment* to ensure the range of services, facilities, and standards deemed to improve quality of life are considered.

2.3 Local Planning Policy

2.3.1 Fingal County Development Plan 2023-2029

The *Fingal County Development Plan 2023 -2029* (*Development Plan*) was completed on 22nd February 2023 and came into effect on 5th April 2023. The *Development Plan* provides the statutory planning policy framework for the growth and development of the County during its lifetime, with an underlying and cross-cutting theme promoting the creation of sustainable, healthy communities where people can access jobs, housing, and services, and enjoy a high-quality of life. A key priority of the *Development Plan* is to create sustainable neighbourhoods, with a range of household types and tenures located in close proximity to community facilities and services. The following policies and objectives are set out below in relation to a proposed development and childcare facility provision:

“Policy CIOSP10 – Childcare Facilities: *Support the provision of appropriate childcare facilities.”*

“Objective CIOSO28 – Childcare Facilities and New Development: *Require the provision of appropriate childcare facilities as an essential part of new residential and mixed-use developments in accordance with the provisions of the Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001 or any superseding Guidelines, or as required by the Planning Authority. Such facilities should be provided in a timely manner and be an integral part of the development proposal.”*

“Objective CIOSO27 – Optimum Childcare Locations - *Encourage the provision of childcare facilities in appropriate locations, including residential areas, town and local*

centres, areas of employment and areas close to public transport nodes. Encourage the co-location of childcare facilities and community facilities where appropriate, such as community centres and schools, with an emphasis on community and not for profit childcare facilities where appropriate.”

“Objective CIOSOS - Residential Developments and Community Facilities: *Ensure proposals for large scale residential developments include a community facility, unless it can be established that the needs of the new residents can be adequately served within existing or committed community facilities in the area.”*

“Policy SPQHP₁ – Healthy Placemaking: *The Council will support the development and creation throughout Fingal of successful and sustainable settlements which endorse the principles of healthy placemaking and which through a multi-faceted approach to planning, design and management continue to ensure the development of attractive high quality places to live, work, recreate, visit and invest in, served by a range of local services, provision of quality public realms, diverse and accessible community facilities for all genders, non-binary or none and open spaces for the benefit of the community.”*

With respect to new significant development and childcare infrastructure provision, the *Development Plan* states that it should only take place where sufficient childcare, and other social infrastructure are already in place or are proposed for development. The proposed development is consistent with the abovementioned Policy Objectives. It provides for high-quality housing, in accordance with the Core Strategy of the *Development Plan*, and in close proximity to the full range of social and community infrastructure. The proposed development will provide needed housing development to support the existing and future population of Swords.

Each of the relevant national, regional and local Guidelines and policy documents outlined above have been consulted in the development of this *Childcare Demand Assessment* to review the existing capacity of community facilities within the Study Area.

3.0 DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT

The assessment of the subject lands was examined using the Census 2016 and 2022 results, as the latest Census available on the CSO website. The scope of the assessment is determined by overlaying the 1-2km radius buffer zone over the application lands and assessing the relevant spatial unit in demographic analysis. For the subject site, the CSO Small Area Statistics (as outlined in purple in Figure 3.1) were selected as the optimal statistical unit to measure local levels of demand. Moreover, it better represented local demand outside of Swords in areas closer to the subject site (i.e. Drinan, or Malahide west). The Study Area selected refers to the aggregated data of 94 No. Small Area statistical units.

This Study Area provides insight into the composition of the local population and relevant demographic trends. Specifically, the study reviews the historic and current population’s age profile, in addition to an assessment of the potential number of 0- to 6-year-old residents in the proposed development.



Figure 3.1 Extent of Demographic Study Area comprising the 94 CSO Small Areas

(Source: CSO, 2022, and Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

3.1 Population Trends

According to the 2022 Census, Ireland’s population reached 5,149,139 in April 2022 – representing growth of 8.1% from the previous Census in 2016. Fingal’s population stood at 330,506 at the time, an increase from 2016 of 11.6%, or just over 34,000 people. The county hence accounts for 6.4% of Ireland’s population, with only Dublin City and Cork City and County accounting for higher proportions. Fingal’s population is expected to continue to grow with the *Development Plan* forecasting that the county’s population will increase by approximately 73,000 people by 2031 (+22.1% versus 2022). Between 2016 and 2022, Fingal was the third fastest growing county in Ireland, with only Longford (+14.4%) and Meath (+13.2%) growing at faster paces.

Further breakdowns show that 26.7% of the Fingal population was under 18 years old in 2022, while 134,264 people (40.6%) were under 30. This compares to 28.3% of the population under 18 years old and 42.2% under 30 years old in 2016. The proportion of under 30s in Fingal was higher than at the national level, where 38% of the population was under 30. Fingal had the youngest average age in 2022 at 36.2 years, with some 63% of its population below the age of 44, compared to 58.3% nationally.

Over the same period, the population within the Study Area grew at a significantly slower rate than the county increasing by 4.4% (1,252 No. additional persons) from 28,684 to 29,936 persons. Table 3.1 outlines the population of the Study Area and Fingal County as recorded during the Census in 2016 and 2022, as well as the percentage change in population during this period to highlight overall residential patterns.

Area	Population, 2016	Population, 2022	2016-2022 Change (Number)	2016-2022 Change (%)
Fingal County	296,020	330,506	34,486	11.6%
Study Area	28,684	29,936	1,252	4.4%

Table 3.1: Population Change 2016-2022.

(Source: CSO, 2022, and Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

3.2 Age Profile

The analysis of CSO data for the Study Area illustrates a strong representation of working age population within the 20-65 age groupings, with 61.5% of total resident population classified within these age cohorts. The 20-49 age cohort further highlights this concentration of young professionals, with 43.0% of total population classified in this group. The area has a low average age at 37.2 with a lower proportion of population older age cohorts. Some 20.7% of the population is aged under 14 years old, while 12.1% of the population are aged over 65 years old.

Table 3.2 provides a breakdown of the recorded population, categorised by age. It offers a breakdown of the area’s age profile that allows a more detailed overview of the specific cohorts that have experienced the greatest change. Different age cohorts of a population have different requirements, with young families in need of childcare and educational facilities, a strong working age population requiring employment opportunities, and those of retirement age in need of care and health services.

Age Cohort	2016 (Number)	2016 (% Total)	2022 (Number)	2022 (% Total)
0-4	2,266	7.90%	1,810	6.05%
5-9	2,173	7.58%	2,141	7.15%
10-14	1,727	6.02%	2,248	7.51%
15-19	1,682	5.86%	1,726	5.77%
20-24	1,750	6.10%	1,681	5.62%
25-29	1,990	6.94%	1,917	6.40%
30-34	2,498	8.71%	2,034	6.79%
35-39	2,765	9.64%	2,378	7.94%
40-44	2,262	7.89%	2,612	8.73%
45-49	1,953	6.81%	2,243	7.49%
50-54	1,983	6.91%	1,901	6.35%
55-59	1,799	6.27%	1,898	6.34%
60-64	1,217	4.24%	1,732	5.79%
65-69	1,016	3.54%	1,205	4.03%
70-74	717	2.50%	982	3.28%
75-79	429	1.50%	723	2.42%
80-84	244	0.85%	393	1.31%
85+	213	0.74%	312	1.04%
Total	28,684	100.00%	29,936	100.00%

Table 3.2: Population by Age 2016-2022

(Source: CSO, 2022, and Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

The focus of this age profile is on pre-school children, comprising persons within the age cohort of 0–6 years which is the standard age range for childcare facilities. Notably, over the six-year period between 2016 and 2022, the number of people in the age cohort of 0-6 years has decreased significantly in the catchment, from 3,191 children in 2016 to 2,645 people in 2022 (Figure 3.3). This represents a drop of 546 persons and moves the proportion of total population aged 0-6 from 11.1% to 8.8%.

Age	Population, 2016	2016 (% Total)	Population, 2022	2022 (% Total)
Age 0	434	1.51%	325	1.09%
Age 1	448	1.56%	328	1.10%
Age 2	453	1.58%	388	1.30%
Age 3	456	1.59%	385	1.29%
Age 4	475	1.66%	384	1.28%
Age 5	443	1.54%	408	1.36%
Age 6	482	1.68%	427	1.43%
Total	3,191	11.12%	2,645	8.84%

Table 3.3: Number and Percentage of the Total Population Aged 0-6 by Year 2016-2022

(Source: CSO, 2022, and Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

3.3 County Level Demand for Childcare Facilities

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth was contacted during this analysis who directed us to the recently produced 'Early Years Sector Profile Report 2020/2021' (May 2022)¹ which provides detail in relation to childcare capacity in the County. Surveys carried out as part of this report illustrated that there are 181,565 children enrolled across early years services in the country, a 12% decrease on the previous release (from 2018/2019), with a total national capacity for 220,500 children. At the time of the survey, services reported that the number of vacant places tripled since 2018/19 to 38,935 in 2021². By comparison, the number of children enrolled decreased by 24,736 in the same period. The average number of children per service stood at 41 No.

There were 5,793 children enrolled across early years services in Fingal in 2021, a 37.4% decrease on the previous release (from 2018/2019), with a total capacity for 6,969 children at the end of 2021. Table 3.4 below highlights the current capacity and vacancy within the childcare infrastructure in Fingal. At the end of 2021, there was a c. 20.3% rate of vacancy, with 1,176 places available for incoming students.

Area	Capacity	Enrolled	Vacant places	Vacancy rate
Fingal	6,969	5,793	1,176	20.3%

Table 3.4 County breakdown of Fingal Childcare Enrolments 2021

(Source: Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration)

Having ascertained the overall demographic trends as relevant to the age cohort pertaining to childcare provision, the impact of the proposed development in this context will now be examined.

3.4 Composition of the Proposed Development

3.3.1 Estimated Population Generated

As stated previously in Section 2.0, the *Childcare Facility Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2001) recommend that a crèche or childcare facility with capacity for 20 No. children should generally be provided for every 75 No. dwellings within new residential developments. However, both the Guidelines and Fingal County Council further advise that this provision should have regard to the guidelines, but the Council will take account of existing childcare provision when considering the delivery of new facilities as part of residential development in order to avoid over provision.

This assessment aims to determine what the nature of local supply and demand is within the catchment, in parallel with the estimation of planned 0–6-year-old residents that may reside in the proposed development. In line with National Guidelines, all the one-bedroom units within the

¹ Early Years Sector Profile Report 2020/2021: https://www.roscommonchildcare.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Pobal_22_EY_20-21-Report_final_21.pdf

² While the document makes reference to the potential impact that Covid-19 may have had on vacancy, it similarly notes that the majority of the falloff in demand is within older cohorts (aged 4-6+) more likely indicating the impact of households being able to leverage the flexibility of work from home arrangements into workable childcare systems.

proposed scheme have been discounted in estimating the total number of minors. The subject development comprises 123 No. units, of which 68 No. units can reasonably accommodate families. Therefore, the total number of units in the scheme which are included in this estimation amounts to 68 No. In order to calculate the number of 0–6-year-old residents in the proposed development, the study utilises 3 No. key number of indicators:

1. The proposed unit mix of the development;
2. Persons per unit proposed (this is calculated by using the average household size within the Study Area, established as 2.90 persons per unit³ using the Census 2022); and
3. Proportion of the Study Area’s population within the 0–6 years age cohort (determined as 8.84% using Census 2022 data).

Analysis of these factors allows for a determination of the total number of 0–6-year-old residents in the proposed development. As highlighted in Table 3.5, it is estimated that 18 No. children aged 0–6 years may reside in the proposed development (rounded from 17.4).

Description	No.	Value	Method
Units in Proposed Development*	a	68	a
Average Household Size	b	2.90	b
Potential Residents (Number)	c	198	a * b = c
0-6 Years (% of Total Population)	d	8.84%	d
Potential 0-6 Years (Number)	e	17.4	d * c = e

* Excluding All One-Bed Units.

Table 3.5: Estimation of Children Aged 0-6 Years in the Proposed Development.

(Source: Thornton O’Connor Town Planning, 2024)

3.3.2 Estimated Childcare Demand Generated

In 2022, the Central Statistics Office, as part of the latest Census release, provided a detailed statistical module⁴ on the rates of take-up for childcare in Ireland and at county level for 2022. This analysis highlighted that almost one-third (331,783) of children under the age of 15 in the State were in some form of childcare. This release is relevant for this assessment as it indicates the extent to which childcare facilities are utilised by the general population. An adaption of a table found within this module (Table 3.6), shows the range of methods parents used for the purposes of childcare for their pre-school or early primary school attending children in the State and at County level.

Type of Childcare	Parent/ Partner	Unpaid Relative/ Friend	Paid Relative/ Friend	Childminder/ Au-Pair/ Nanny	Childcare Facility	Other
Fingal	59%	9%	2%	7%	22%	1%
State	55%	10%	2%	10%	22%	1%

Table 3.6: Type of Childcare Utilised by Parents of Pre-School Children.

(Source: CSO, 2022)

³ CSO statistics record a total of 29,444 no. residents in 10,147 no. households within the catchment in 2022.

⁴ Census of Population - CSO, 2022. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp3/censusofpopulation2022profile3-householdsfamiliesandchildcare/childcare/>

The study indicates that the vast majority of pre-school children across Ireland are cared for by their parents or partners of their parents, while 22% of pre-school children attend a childcare facility nationally, and also 22% in County Fingal. This module from the CSO is not an approximation or a random sample survey, but a direct representation of the population in 2022. Since the previous analysis carried out in 2016, the level of pre-school children attending a childcare facility has not materially increased (increased in raw numbers, decreased in proportion). Table 3.7 applies the CSO’s 22% figure to the estimated number of residents aged 0–6-years old⁵, as determined under the quantitative demographic analysis above. The results indicate a potential need for c. 4 childcare places to be available to support the additional local need (value rounded from 3.8).

Description	Ref.	Value	Method
Units in Proposed Development*	a	68	a
0-6 Years (Number)	b	17.4	b
0-6 Years Total at 22%	c	3.8	b * 22% = c

Table 3.7: Number of Pre-School Children Requiring Access to Childcare Facilities.

(Source: Thornton O’Connor Town Planning, 2024)

3.5 Demographic Summary

This section provides an estimation of the potential number of 0–6-year-old children that may reside in the proposed development and may require a space in a childcare facility. Over the past 6 years (between 2016–2022), the population of the Study Area increased by 4.4% to 1,252. In 2022, the proportion of this total population aged between 0- to 6-years old was estimated to be 8.84%. The study uses this proportion to estimate the number of 0–6-year-olds that could potentially reside in the proposed development. Using the average household size (2.90 persons per household) and the percentage of 0–6-year-olds (8.84%) in the Study Area, a calculation was made to estimate that the proposed development could generate 18 No. 0–6-year-old children. Notably, while the population of the catchment area increased by 1,252 persons between 2016 and 2022, the number of children aged between 0 and 6 only decreased significantly by 546. This indicates a material decrease in demand for childcare facilities over the period.

Further analysis released by the CSO, based on Census 2022, indicated that 22% of children in Fingal attend a childcare facility. This would mean that from the potential 18 No. 0–6-year-olds resident at the proposal, **only 4.No. children would attend a childcare facility.**

From a demand perspective, research from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth indicates that capacity has been increasing since 2019 nationally, enrolments have been decreasing, and the rate of vacancy was significant in the latest study carried out (38,935 places). Fingal has a vacancy rate in excess of 20% indicating a strong capacity to support more children within the existing childcare infrastructure.

⁵ This analysis adopts the rate of childcare utilisation for children aged 0-8 years old for County Fingal. While a like-for-like analysis of those aged 0-6 would be ideal, the CSO only provide outputs for specific cohorts (specifically, 0-2, 3-4, and 5-8, 9-14, and under age 15 cohorts). In order to capture the key demographic of childcare take-up for those children aged 5-6, the percentage rate of take-up for all children aged 0-8 was selected and applied to the study.

4.0 CHILDCARE FACILITIES AUDIT

In order to establish a baseline of existing capacity within and bordering the Study Area it is necessary to first identify each of the existing childcare facilities. This assessment identifies 30 No. TUSLA registered childcare facilities within 1-2km radius of the subject site, it illustrates their maximum potential capacities based on the latest TUSLA inspection data, and their levels of accessibility with respect to walkable distances from the subject lands. These facilities were reported as having a combined total capacity of 963 No. childcare places at the time of the survey (January 2024). The demographic profile of this area provided in Section 3.0 also provides a baseline for understanding pre-school age population and the emerging demand for childcare facilities in the area.

As part of the data discovery process, each of the relevant TUSLA childcare facilities were contacted to gather information on enrolment and vacancy in January 2024. We also note that the Fingal Childcare Committee was consulted in the course of this assessment but was not able to provide any recent childcare capacity analysis for the Study Area at the time of the consultation. As a result, an independent audit of services has been conducted.

4.1 Existing Childcare Facilities

While the various policies referenced do make certain provisions for determining the requirements for childcare facilities in neighbourhoods, there is no reference to the most appropriate distances families should travel, or indeed the quantum of facilities that are appropriate in a given area. Therefore, for the purpose of this study it was deemed appropriate to audit all facilities within a c.2 km radius of the subject site. In identifying an appropriate study area, it is imperative to have regard to specific site conditions including locational context. The lands to the east of the application site, beyond the M50, are characterised by open space with little or no development and the remaining lands is largely residential and commercial use. Adopting a narrower search radius would distort the results and present a situation that is not reflected in reality. Furthermore, the Study Area as adopted in the assessment now captures several large employment areas, with parents likely to drop their children on their way to work.

Table 4.1 below provides facility-level detail for each of childcare providers considered in the study alongside indicative capacity, including full day, part-time and sessional services. Table 4.2 identifies each of these facilities on a map as they relate spatially to the subject site.

TUSLA ID	Childcare Facility	Distance from Site (km)	Service Type	Indicative Max Capacity	Estimated Available Capacity
TU2015FL001	A to Z Playschool	1.63	Sessional	16	0
TU2015FL030	Bo Peep's Montessori	0.93	Sessional	18	0
TU2015FL031	Bo-Peep Creche & Montessori	0.93	Full Time / Part Time	14	1
TU2015FL092	First Steps	0.94	Sessional	8	1
TU2015FL095	Funky Kids Pre school	1.63	Part Time / Sessional	21	0
TU2015FL107	Grow Montessori	1.56	Sessional	10	No Answer
TU2016FL014	Helping Hands Pre-School	2.05	Sessional	14	0
TU2015FL116	Holywellies (Holywell Childcare Ltd)	1.09	Full Time / Part Time / Sessional	28	0

TU2015FL125	Jonix Educational Serivces	1.09	Part Time	4	No Answer
TU2015FL132	Kid-e-Winks Montessori	2.01	Sessional	13	No Answer
TU2020FL001	Kids Den 2	1.02	Full Time	62	3
TU2015FL135	Kids Inc.	0.75	Full Time	71	0
TU2015FL137	Kids of Life	1.63	Sessional	39	0
			Full Time / Part Time / Sessional		6
TU2015FL147	Links Childcare	1.76	Sessional	88	
TU2015FL160	Little Caterpillars	1.47	Sessional	16	1
			Full Time / Part Time / Sessional		No Answer
TU2021FL001	Little Harvard Childcare Ltd	1.40	Sessional	60	
			Full Time / Part Time / Sessional		0
TU2017FL500	Little Harvard Creche and Montessori	1.08	Sessional	83	
TU2016FL025	Little Ruggers	1.25	Sessional	17	No Answer
			Sessional		0
TU2015FL193	Little Treasures	1.25		11	
TU2017FL507	Mighty Oaks Pre-School	1.91	Sessional	22	No Answer
			Full Time / Part Time / Sessional		No Answer
TU2015FL214	Mini Trinity Montessori	1.38	Sessional	14	
TU2015FL227	Naionra Cholmcille	0.87	Sessional	37	1
TU2015FL236	Oaklands Creche & Montessori	0.33	Full Time	51	0
			Full Time / Part Time / Sessional		0
TU2015FL255	Rivervalley Creche & Montessori	2.06	Sessional	14	
TU2020FL004	St Brigids Montessori School	1.02	Sessional	9	0
TU2015FL301	The Cottage Montessori School	1.48	Sessional	17	1
			Full Time / Part Time / Sessional		0
TU2016FL031	The Nest Kinsealy	1.29	Sessional	29	
TU2015FL323	Tiggers Playhouse	1.99	Sessional	17	0
			Full Time / Part Time / Sessional		0
TU2015FL324	Tigin Montessori	1.90	Sessional	86	
TU2015FL328	TLC Childcare	0.36	Full Time / Sessional	74	0
			Total	963	14

* Source: Combination of: Tusla Inspections (based on AM) and Tusla listing (January 2024) provided by FCC.

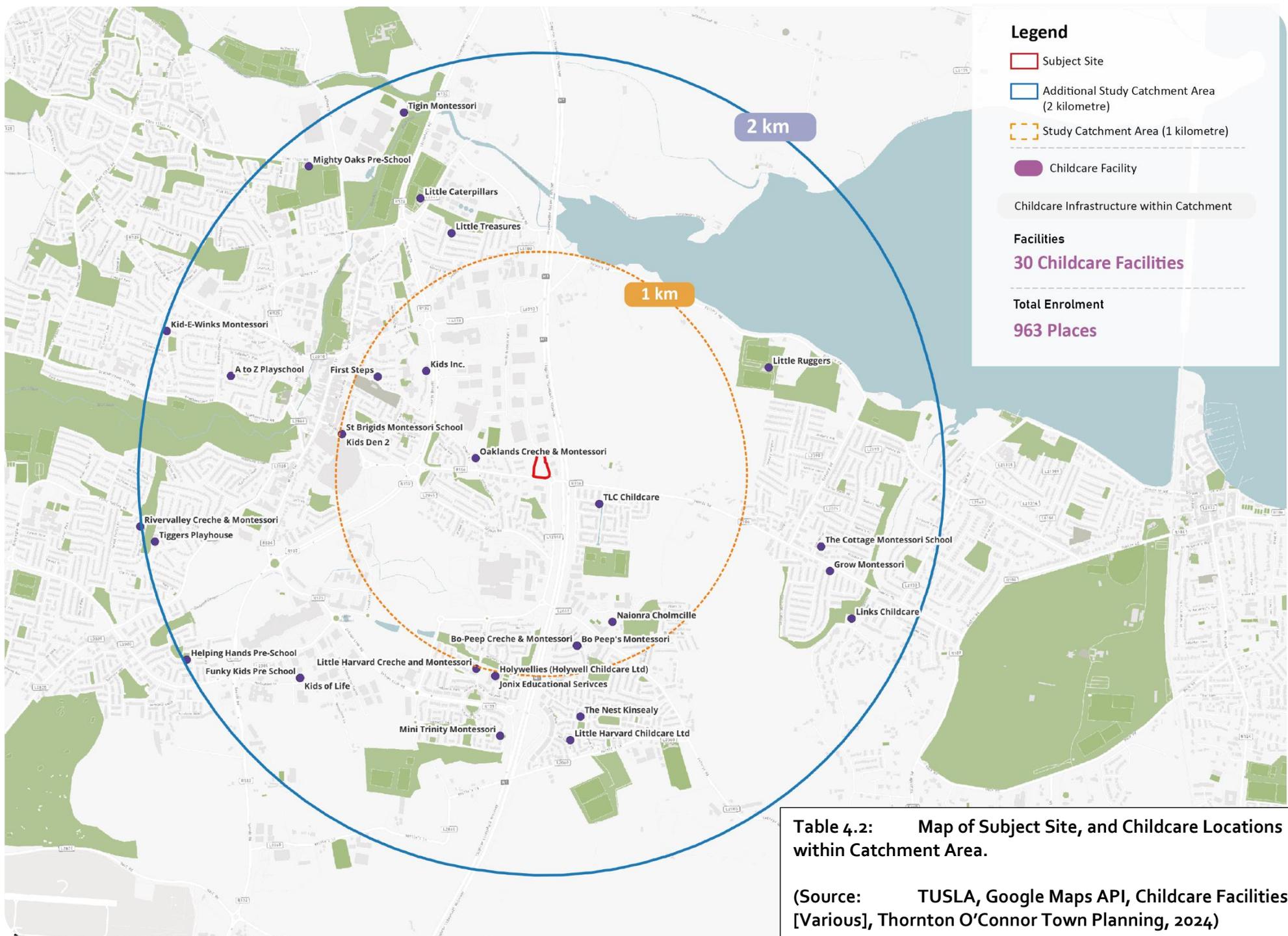
Table 4.1: Current Capacity of Existing Childcare Facilities in a 1–2km Study Area

(Source: TUSLA Inspections (based on AM) and TUSLA listing (January 2024) provided by FCC, Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

Due to the understandably cautious attitudes of childcare facility owners and managers to release such information, a 100% response rate was not secured during the consultation period. A conservative approach was undertaken in estimating available childcare spaces in this study, and for the facilities that did not provide enrolment figures, the available capacity was assumed

to be zero. Of the facilities that responded to the consultation, 7 no. indicated that they had capacity; amounting to 14 no. available spaces.

Consultation with each of the relevant childcare providers in the catchment area indicate no notable spare capacity for new enrolments as of January 2024. While there are constraints in relation to staffing of facilities, most of the facilities that were contacted have also reached floorspace limits and would need additional floorspace to expand services. Moreover, certain childcare providers have waitlists indicating a pent-up demand for childcare that is not currently being met by existing services in the town. Consultation with the Fingal Childcare Committee carried out in January 2024 further reinforced this position of capacity constraint and the demand for increased provision within Swords. Taken together, the analysis of existing capacity indicates a robust demand for additional childcare places will be essential to meet the need of local populations.



4.2 Planned Facilities Network

An examination of FCC's Online Planning Register showed the planning and development pipeline consisted of 5 no. planning applications in the Study Area (Table 4.3) as of January 2024. We note that 3 no. of the childcare developments are currently pending a Decision. If all of the developments currently within the planning pipeline are delivered, they will create a considerable additional childcare capacity of 407 no. childcare spaces to the Study Area, and the wider settlement of Swords.

As illustrated in Table 4.3 below, the proposed childcare facilities largely relate to new facilities in large residential developments. Whilst it is acknowledged that many of these spaces will be occupied by residents of planned and existing developments, it is not unreasonable to assume that there will be sufficient capacity in both the existing and planned network to accommodate the minor uplift in demand generated by the proposed development.

Plan Ref.	Status	Location	Description	Residential Units	Operator Estimated Capacity
F24A/0133	Applied	Miller's Glen, Oldtown, Swords, Co. Dublin	1 no. childcare facility (547 sq.m)	0	95
ABP-313337-22	ABP - Pending decision	Holybanks, Swords, Co. Dublin.	1 no. childcare facility (506 sq.m)	621	100
ABP-313331-22	ABP - Pending decision	Fosterstown North, Swords, Co. Dublin	1 no. childcare facility (609 sq.m)	645	120
F21A/0550	Granted	Kinsealy, Swords, Co Dublin	1 no. childcare facility (190 sq.m)	0	40
F23A/0676	Granted	Oldtown, Swords, Co. Dublin	1 no. childcare facility (200 sq.m)	224	52

Table 4.3: Childcare Planning and Development Pipeline – January 2024 in the Study Area

Source: Fingal County Council (January 2024)

4.3 Facilities Summary

In order to determine the current levels of childcare provision in the Study Area, an independent childcare capacity audit of existing facilities was conducted by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning in January 2024 for a Study Area comprising an approx. c. 2 km radius from the subject site. A total of 30 no. childcare facilities were identified in the Study Area using the latest Tusla Early Years Inspectorate data⁶ which could be accessed within an approx. 2 km radius.

Furthermore, a telephone survey was undertaken by contacting each childcare facility to determine current enrolment figures. As discussed previously, a 100% response rate was not

⁶ The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013). Inspection Reports for active facilities are available online for public inspection and are updated at regular intervals by the service. Visit the Tusla website for more detail: <https://www.tusla.ie/services/preschool-services/creche-inspection-reports/>

secured due to the understandably cautious attitudes of childcare facility owners and managers to release such information. Facilities indicated that there is capacity for 963 no. children with some facilities identifying small numbers of potential vacancies based on age group demand. The survey conducted in this study for the catchment area did identify a wider shortfall in available childcare places to meet the existing demands of the town in January 2024, with a number of facilities indicating that they had waitlists. Despite this strong demand, 14 No. places were identified within 7 No. existing facilities.

In addition, planning applications for 4 No. additional childcare facilities (and 1 No. extension to existing facility) in Swords were identified following a review of Fingal County Online Planning Register, indicating significant forthcoming childcare spaces (407 no. spaces).

The subject development comprises 123 No. units, of which 68 No. units can reasonably accommodate families. The potential childcare uptake of the proposal is likely to be 4 No. places, and the local childcare network has an indicative maximum capacity of 963 No. spaces. The Fingal Planning Register indicates significant future pipeline of an additional 407 childcare places within Swords in the coming years. While the survey did identify a limited vacancy in available childcare places in January 2024, given the minimal childcare demand generated by the proposed development, alongside the shifting age profile and demographic needs of the population, as well as planned new facilities in Swords, it is considered that additional childcare facilities at this location would not be necessary, and can be effectively absorbed by the existing and planned facilities network.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Childcare Demand Assessment has been completed with regard to national, regional and local policy relating to the provision of suitable facilities. Consideration has also been made to the policies on childcare infrastructure in the Fingal County *Development Plan 2023-2029*.

In our opinion, there is sufficient existing provision of childcare infrastructure in the vicinity of the subject site (i.e., within c. 2 km radius) to support the proposed development. As the above survey demonstrates, there is an adequate supply of facilities within walking available to local residents offering a higher-than-average per capita ratio of childcare places. While there was no material level of vacancy identified within existing childcare facilities **the size of the proposed development is unlikely to impact on the quality of services and facilities currently available in the locality.**