



## **Statement of Rationale on Childcare Provision**

Proposed Strategic Housing Development at  
Cartrontrou, Kilnafaddoge, Lissywollen and Ardnaglug  
(townlands), Athlone, Co. Westmeath

**Avenir Homes Limited**

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**Connecting people.**  
**Connecting places.**



# Contents

<b>01.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Context	1
<b>02.</b>	<b>Planning Policy Review</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1	Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001	2
2.2	Circular PL3/2016	2
2.3	Universal Design Guidelines 2019	2
2.4	Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027	3
2.5	Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-2024	3
2.6	Sustainable Urban Housing Design Standards for New Apartments – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2020)	3
<b>03.</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1	Housing Mix	4
3.2	Demographics	5
3.3	Existing and Planned Childcare Provision	5
3.4	Commentary	6
<b>04.</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1	Summary Findings	8

# 01. Introduction

## 1.1 Context

This Childcare Needs Assessment has been prepared to accompany a planning application for the development of 122 residential units and 46 no. student apartments at Carrontrony, Kilnafaddoge, Lissywollen and Ardnaglug (townlands), Athlone, Co. Westmeath. Specifically, it examines the demand for childcare places to be generated by the residential proposal and the extent to which this can or will be catered for on or off-site.

The subject site is located approximately 3 km east of Athlone Town Centre, south of the N6 and accessed via Junction 9 from the R916 at Garrycastle. The site comprises four separate fields with the collective lands bounded to the south by the Old Rail Trail Greenway, the east by a local Spar and an ESB Depot. Blackberry Lane abuts the site to the west and north, with the latter part to be replaced by a new east-west distributor road (Lissywollen Avenue) permitted under ABP-309513-21, which has secured funding under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF). The wider lands to the north and east are zoned for development and form part of the Lissywollen South Framework Development Area. The site is located a short distance from a significant amount of social and community infrastructure including schools, childcare facilities, sports clubs and facilities, as well as Athlone Institute of Technology, and some large employment areas to the west and north of the N6.



Figure 1.1 Site Context

# 02. Planning Policy Review

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## 2.1 Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001

The national Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities provide a framework to guide both local authorities in preparing development plans and assessing applications for planning permission, and developers and childcare providers in formulating development proposals.

Appendix 2 of the guidelines establishes an indicative standard of one childcare facility per 75 dwellings in new housing areas. One facility providing a minimum of 20 childcare places is considered to be a reasonable starting point in this regard. The guidance acknowledges that other case-specific assumptions may lead to an increase or decrease in this requirement.

The guidelines emphasize that the results of any childcare needs analysis carried out as part of a county childcare strategy should also be considered.

Appendix 2 also states that the threshold for provision should be established having regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas.

## 2.2 Circular PL3/2016

In March 2016, the Government issued a circular in relation to childcare facilities under the early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme. In accordance with the stated aspiration to increase access to childcare nationally, the circular requests that local planning authorities:

- *“Expedite all pre-planning application consultation requests from childcare facility providers in relation to proposals to extend opening hours, to increase capacity or to provide new facilities.*
- *Expedite, insofar as is possible, consideration of all planning applications or Section 5 declaration submissions in respect of childcare facilities in order to facilitate the expansion of required capacity as appropriate”.*

## 2.3 Universal Design Guidelines 2019

On 10th June 2019, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone, launched the Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings. These guidelines are an important step in making all Early Learning and Care services accessible to all children. This publication offers guidance on the refurbishment, renovation and building of centres for Early Learning and Care in Ireland. The guidelines apply to both new-build and retrofit projects and provide a flexible Universal Design framework to ensure that settings are accessible, understandable and easy to use for all children, staff, families and visitors.

- The Universal Design ELC setting comprises four quality features.

- Site Location, Approach, Entry and Site Layout
- Entering and Moving about the ELC setting
- Key Internal and External Spaces
- Elements and Systems

## 2.4 Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

Policy CPO 4.24 of the County Development Plan states the following:

*‘Encourage and support the provision of childcare facilities, with consideration given to proper siting and design, in appropriate locations including residential areas, town and local centres, areas of employment and close to public transport throughout the County and in accordance with the needs identified by Westmeath County Childcare Committee (WCC). All planning applications for childcare facilities shall be assessed in consultation with Westmeath County Childcare Committee.’*

## 2.5 Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-2024

The Framework Plan identifies the specific need for two creche facilities in the plan study area, namely in Parcel 2 and Parcel 4:

Parcel 1

P1-KS06: *‘To provide for a childcare facility to serve the needs of new residential communities which should cluster with existing Primary School’.*

Parcel 2

P2-KS05: *‘To provide a childcare facility to serve new residential communities and the adjacent Business Park’.*

## 2.6 Sustainable Urban Housing Design Standards for New Apartments – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2020)

We note section 4.7 of the 2020 Apartment Guidelines which states that:

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

# 03. Assessment

## 3.1 Housing Mix

The proposed development will consist of approximately 122 conventional housing units comprising 60 dwelling houses and 62 apartments.

Total Residential Units	122
Dwelling Houses	60 Units
3-bed	38
4-bed	22
Apartments	62 Units
1-bed	16
2-bed	36
3-bed	10

Figure 3.1 Proposed Housing Mix

We note section 4.7 of the 2020 Apartment Guidelines which states that:

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

We envisage that the primary market for the proposed dwelling houses will be families, with the apartments identified specifically to cater for young professionals working in Athlone and nearby employment centres. Given the strong connectivity of the site which includes direct access to pedestrian and cycle routes, we envisage the proposed development will provide sustainably located residential accommodation that will allow workers to live close to their employment source and the wide array of associated services and amenities that the locale provides.

In view of the accessible location and proposed housing mix of the development, it is envisaged that the apartments will house relatively few families when compared to a typical residential scheme. As a result, and independent of the dwelling houses, we



consider that the resulting demand for childcare will not be comparable to an average suburban residential development.

### 3.2 Demographics

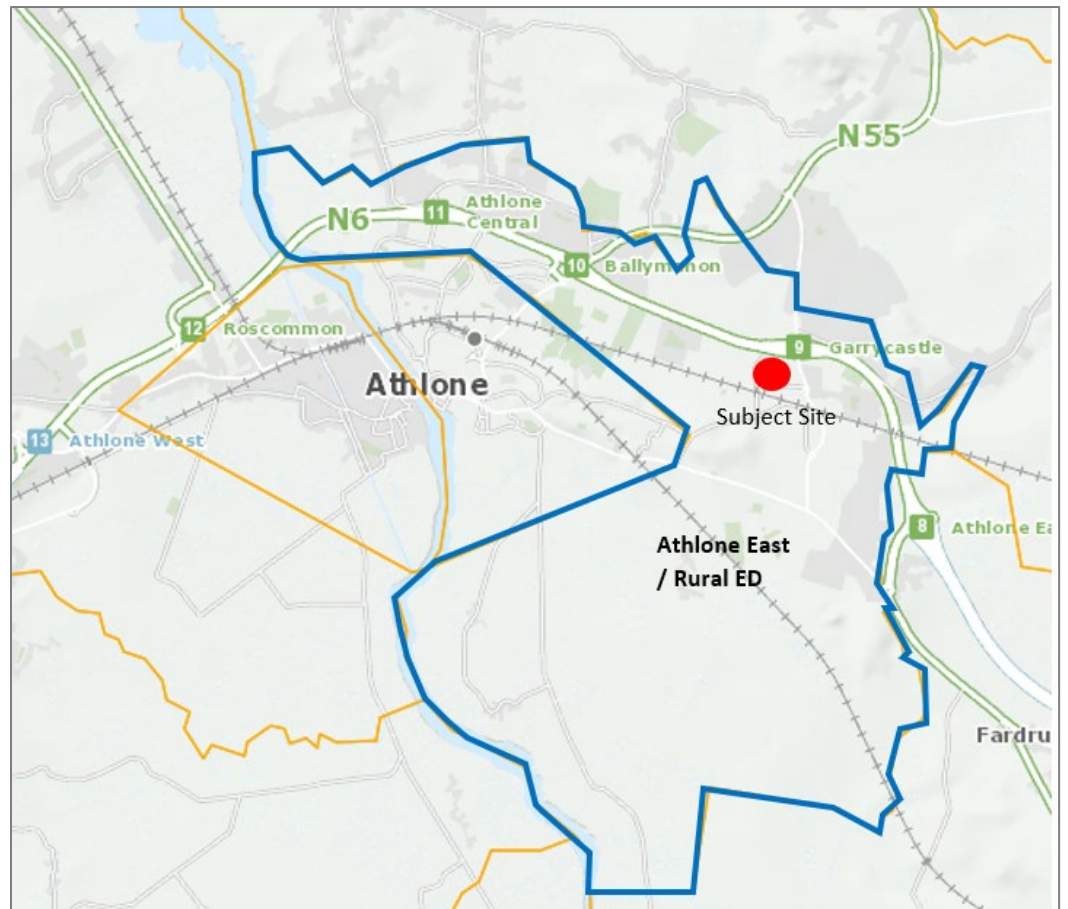


Figure 3.2 Defined Electoral Division

The proposed development is located within the Electoral Division of Athlone East Rural. This is a sizable ED which includes areas to the north and east of Athlone Town Centre, as well as rural areas to the south and east of the River Shannon in the administrative area of Westmeath such as Carrickobrien.

The resident population of the ED catchment is 7,560. Within this figure, the total population between the ages of 0 and 5 years (inclusive) amounted to 692 individuals or 9% of the overall population in 2016. This figure is the equivalent average of 9% for the Westmeath County area for this age cohort.

### 3.3 Existing and Planned Childcare Provision

The following resources were also investigated to establish the number of existing childcare services in the vicinity of the subject site:

- TUSLA Inspection Reports;
- Pobal Maps – Childcare Services

There are 16 existing childcare facilities in close proximity to the subject site. Based on available pre-school inspection reports, there are approximately 380 available childcare places in these facilities. It is recognised that identified capacity numbers represent a

snapshot in time, as recorded on the date of the childcare site inspections. We have used the most recent figures where possible for this analysis. It is also acknowledged that some reports were carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, where attendance levels may have fluctuated.

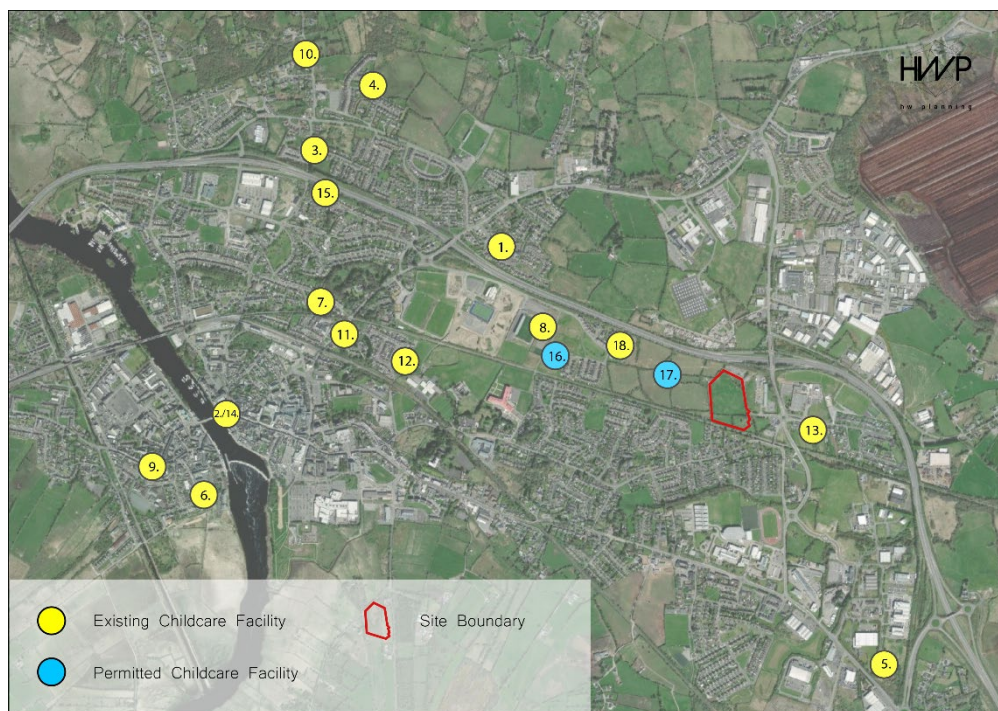


Figure 3.3 Distribution of Existing Childcare Facilities in the Vicinity of Subject Site

In addition to the existing facilities, there are also 2 no. newly permitted creches to the immediate west of the subject site, reference ABP-309513-21 refers. These facilities have a combined capacity of c.145 no. childcare places.

### 3.4 Commentary

As part of the preparation of the subject application, engagement took place with the agents acting on behalf of Alanna Roadbridge prior to the submission of permitted reference ABP-309513-21. As part of this consultation, it was noted that the Lissywollen South Framework Plan identifies the specific need for two childcare facilities in the study area which were both provided for under the Alannah Roadbridge scheme (16 and 17 above). It was advised that the rationale for including two creches in that scheme was to specifically address the two separate policy requirements of P1-KS06 and P2-KS05. Based on discussions, the agents for this project identified that they would include some additional places on modelled demand for their development. A review of the application documentation confirms that this extended to 7 no. additional childcare places. For context, the permitted creche to the east of the site (identified as 17 above) is within 250 metres of the subject site boundary. This creche is identified to be delivered in the first phase of housing development in the scheme. Alongside the two new permitted creches, there will be four facilities within a c.750 metres area between Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí and the Spar at Garrycastle Roundabout.

As set out, when 1 and 2-bedroom apartments are discounted, the proposed development is on the threshold of the prescribed 75 unit level set out in the 2001 Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities.

The above position was set out in emailed correspondence to Westmeath County Childcare Committee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2021. No feedback was obtained in respect of their views on whether an additional childcare facility was needed as part of the proposed development. In the absence of any feedback, and notwithstanding our view that there is sufficient childcare provision locally, a decision was taken to include a 20-childcare creche as part of the proposed development in compliance with the Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001. This meets the threshold set out in Appendix 2 of the Childcare Facilities Guidelines requiring one childcare facility per 75 dwellings in new housing areas providing 20 childcare places.

# 04. Summary

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## 4.1 Summary Findings

This assessment has been prepared in accordance with the adopted policies of Westmeath County Council and the National Childcare Facilities Guidelines. The key findings of the assessment is as follows:

- The policies of the Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-2024 require the provision of two additional childcare facilities in the area. To meet this requirement, two new creches were included in the permitted Alannah Roadbridge SHD, the nearest of which is within 250 metres of the subject site.
- The combined capacity of the two creches on the adjoining land is 145 childcare places, which as outlined above has been oversized by 7 no. places. Any demand from the subject site will help fill these additional places and support the viability of these new enterprises.
- Once the two creches are built on the Council lands as part of the Alanna Roadbridge development, there will be 4 no. facilities in the Lissywollen South Framework area.
- A review of pre-school inspection reports for existing facilities confirms the potential availability of c. 380 no. childcare places in the local area.

Local evidence suggests that policy requirements in respect of new childcare provision have been satisfied and there is notable space childcare capacity locally. Notwithstanding this, and in the absence of feedback from Westmeath County Childcare Committee, provision has been made for a 20-childcare creche as part of the proposed development in compliance with the Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001.

## Appendix A: Local Childcare Facilities

Number	Name	Tusla Number	Identified Capacity (Potential Capacity)
1	Busy Kids Creche	TU2015WH034	105 (70)
2	Clonbrusk Childcare Centre	TU2015WH028	95 (64)
3	Clonros	TU2015WH079	12 (5)
4	Coosan Childcare Centre	TU2015WH072	52 (13)
5	Grovelands Childcare Ltd	TU2015WH052	147 (120)
6	Little Acorns Montessori	TU2015WH010	22 (4)
7	Na Fea Montessori Pre-School	TU2017WH501	22 (8)
8	Naionra Lios Na Nog	TU2015WH055	22 (0)
9	Peek A Boo Pre-School	TU2015WH025	22 (5)
10	Réalta Geal Montessori School	TU2015WH051	55 (10)
11	Regina Bushell T/A Grovelands Childcare	TU2016WH001	40 (11)
12	Sarsfield Childcare Project	TU2015WH027	22 (18)
13	Scallywags Childcare Centre	TU2015WH023	50 (27)
14	St. Kieran's Childcare Centre	TU2015WH019	40 (23)
15	Treasures Island Pre-school	TU2015WH003	22 (2)
16	Permitted under ABP-309513-21	-	Design Capacity of 83 Places
17	Permitted under ABP-309513-21	-	Design Capacity of 62 Places
18	Brawny After School Service <sup>1</sup>	-	30(0)
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>903 (525)</b>

<sup>1</sup> Figures not available from TUSLA at time of writing. Capacity derived from Alanna Roadbridge Childcare Survey (Submitted in support of ABP-309513-21)



HW Planning  
5 Joyce House,  
Barrack Square,  
Ballincollig, Co. Cork

[www.hwplanning.ie](http://www.hwplanning.ie)  
[info@hwplanning.ie](mailto:info@hwplanning.ie)  
+353 (0)21 487 3250

