



THORNTON O'CONNOR
TOWN PLANNING

Social Infrastructure Audit

Social Infrastructure Audit (incl. Schools and Childcare)

Prepared in Respect of a Proposed Large-scale
Residential Development at Ballybin Road,
Ratoath, Co. Meath.

Prepared on Behalf of Marshall Yards
Development Company Limited

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Social Infrastructure Audit (SIA) (incl. Schools and Childcare) has been prepared by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning (TOC) on behalf of Marshall Yards Development Company Limited in support of a proposed residential development at Ballybin Road, Ratoath, Co. Meath. The report provides a detailed review of the statutory, strategic and policy context that relates to the provision of social infrastructure with the following aims:

- To provide a survey and audit of existing community and social infrastructure, open space and amenities serving the identified Study Area and the subject site;
- Catalogue all infrastructure under the facilities categories identified through policy guidance;
- Establish if suitable social infrastructure is provided in the area to support the needs of the existing population; and
- Assess the nature of the infrastructure and likelihood of the capacity of the existing facilities to support the needs of future residents.

This report, therefore, identifies existing community facilities in the local area and includes analysis and identification of potential shortfalls in infrastructure.

1.1 Approach

As part of this development proposal, we have carried out an assessment of the existing facilities in the area in order to assess the need for social and community 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;
- 2010-2024 Department of Education and Skills - Irish Schools;
- 2024 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Register of Private Higher Education Institutions in Ireland;
- 2024 Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Reports – Registered Childcare Facilities;
- 2024 HSE – 'Find Your Local Health Service'; and
- 2024 Meath County Council Planning Application Database

Social infrastructure (SI) includes a range of services and facilities that contribute to quality of life. SI is a key part of the fabric of an area, not just in terms of wellbeing, but also in terms of creating a sense of place for the population of the area and forming a part of the local identity. For the purpose of this report, the array of services and facilities defined as SI have been categorised into a defined number of typologies that correspond to those set out in Chapter 7 and Chapter 11 of the *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027* (Table 1.1).

A radius of 1 km from the subject site was used as the focus for this assessment as it is considered a relatively short distance for residents to access via foot, bicycle or public transport. It is also aligned with the principles of the policies and objectives for social infrastructure assessments outlined in Section 7.7.2 of the *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027* (outlined in greater detail in Section 2 below).

Category	Facility Type
Education and Training Services	Primary, Post-Primary, Third Level, Further Education And Other Lifelong Training Centres
Childcare Facilities	Registered Childcare Facilities Incl. Full Day, Part-Time And Sessional Services
Social, Community and Cultural Facilities	Community Centres, Libraries, Senior And Youth Centres, Post Offices, Banks And Credit Unions, Museums, Galleries, Theatres, Cinemas, Music Venues, Historical Cultural Sites
Healthcare and Emergency Services	Hospitals, Health Centres, Primary Care Centres, Doctors And Specialty Clinics, Dental, Physiotherapy, Counselling, Optician, Pharmacy, Garda Stations, And Fire Stations
Open Space and Recreation	Parks, Playing Pitches, Playgrounds, Sports Centres And Clubs, Leisure Centres, Gyms And Training Facilities, Swimming Pools
Religious Institutions	Areas Of Worship, Churches, Cemeteries
Retail Centres and Services	Convenience Retailing, Other Relevant Retail

Table 1.1 Social and Community Infrastructure Categories applied to this Audit

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

1.2 Study Area and Accessibility

The site, covering approximately c. 5.48 hectares, is located in the settlement of Ratoath, Co. Meath (Figure 1.1). Ratoath is a well-connected town, approximately c. 40–50 minutes by car or via the 103 Bus Éireann route from Dublin City Centre. Dublin Airport is located within c. 25 km and served directly by the 109A Bus Éireann route. Ratoath is located c. 5 km from Ashbourne to the east, the second largest town in Co. Meath, and c. 6 km from Dunshaughlin to the west. Key transport infrastructure includes the M2/N2 and M3/N3 motorways / national primary roads, which connect Dublin to the north and north-west of the country.

The subject site is located to eastern edge of Ratoath, and is generally bound by existing residential development to the west, north and east, and by currently undeveloped lands and an existing crèche to the south. The subject site is located along the Main Street (R125), with the Ratoath Ballybin Roundabout Bus Stop located within the applications site extent, but immediately south of the main proposed residential area. The site is served by the 103, 105 and 105X and 109A Bus Éireann routes. The proposed development would be located within walking distance of the town centre, nearby schools and childcare, and high-quality public transport infrastructure links as well as social and community infrastructure within the settlement boundary.

It should be noted that whilst the total site extends to c. 5.48 hectares, this includes part of Main Street (R125), Jamestown Road, Ballybin Road and part of the open space in Fox Lodge Manoe for c. 1.82 hectares to facilitate road works, water services infrastructure and open space amalgamation. The main residential area is contained to the existing agricultural lands (with 2 No. dwellings and agricultural shed) immediately north of Main Street (R125) and west of Ballybin Road. **Accordingly, the subject site as assessed by, and used in, this report is defined as the**

main residential area only (see Figure 1.1 below and throughout this Report).



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 which is considered accessible to future residents of the proposed development. While an exact spatial area has not been defined by Meath County Council within the *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027*, it is judged that a c. 1km radius is used as a development standard for future community and social audits in other administrative areas. Given that the subject site is located at the edge of a rapidly growing settlement, an additional indicative catchment of c. 2 km has also 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 Ratoath. This was deemed appropriate given the relatively contained size of Ratoath and its internal accessibility via foot and cycle.



Figure 1.2: Site Location and Study Area

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

1.3 Proposed Development

The proposed development is described as follows:

"The proposed development is at a site with a total area of 5.48 hectares principally located at Main Street/R125 and Ballybin Road, Ratoath, Co. Meath. The total site contains a proposed residential development site with an area of 3.66 hectares (bisected by a proposed realigned Ballybin Road) and a proposed infrastructural development site with an area of 1.82 hectares (principally for road and related works, water services and open space amalgamation). The site is generally bound by: Fox Lodge Woods and Fox Lodge Manor to the west and north; existing agricultural lands and residential development to the north and east; existing Ballybin Road and Moulden Bridge to the east; and Main Street/R125 and Jamestown Road/L1016 to the south. The site also incorporates parts of: the existing Ballybin Road (north and west of Moulden Bridge), Main Street/R125, Jamestown Road/L1016 and green open space in Fox Lodge Manor.

The proposed development principally consists of the demolition of 2 No. dwellings (594 square metres gross floor area combined) and 1 No. agricultural shed (988.7 square metres gross floor area) and the construction of 141 No. residential dwellings with a gross floor area

of 12,428 square metres in buildings of 2 No. and 3 No. storeys. The dwellings include 117 No. houses (57 No. 2-bed, 52 No. 3-bed, 7 No. 4-bed and 1 No. 5-bed) and 24 No. maisonette/duplex units (18 No. 1-bed and 6 No. 3-bed).

The development also proposes a reconfiguration of the road layout at the south (Main Street/R125 and Jamestown Road/L1016) and east (Ballybin Road) of the site. Specifically, it is proposed to demolish/remove the existing 5-arm roundabout and to replace same with a new 4-arm signalised junction and reconfigured access to the existing Ratoath Childcare site. The new junction arrangement will facilitate a proposed realignment of the southern section of the existing Ballybin Road (approximately 172 metres) as the northern arm of the new signalised junction and a revised entrance for the existing dwelling to the north-east of the site at Ballybin Road (known as 'Fox Lodge Farm', Eircode A84 KF97). The proposed road infrastructure works also include: road markings, traffic signals, traffic signage, footpaths and cycle infrastructure.

The development also proposes:

- 2 No. new multi-modal accesses onto the proposed realigned Ballybin Road to serve the bisected residential site;
- 2 No. pedestrian accesses onto Main Street/R125 and 1 No. pedestrian access onto the realigned Ballybin Road;
- Relocation of existing eastbound bus stop at Main Street/R125 approximately 130 metres to the west;
- Repurposing of the closed section of Ballybin Road as a pedestrian/cycle greenway;
- Internal roads and footpaths;
- 228 No. car parking spaces;
- Cycle parking spaces;
- Hard and soft landscaping, including public open space, communal amenity space and private amenity space (as rear gardens and terraces/balconies facing multiple directions);
- Demolition of the wall at the north-west corner of the site interfacing with Fox Lodge Manor and the amalgamation of existing public open in the estate and proposed public open space;
- Boundary treatments;
- Public lighting;
- Rooftop PV panels;
- 2 No. ESB sub-stations; and
- All other associated site and development works above and below ground..”

The proposed mix of units is as summarised in Table 1.2 below and the *Site Plan* is presented as Figure 1.3.

Unit Type	Units	% of Total
1-Bedroom Units	18	12.8%
2- Bedroom Units	57	40.4%
3- Bedroom Units	58	41.1%
4- Bedroom Units	7	5.0%
5-Bedroom Units	1	0.7%
Total units	141	100%

Table 1.2: Schedule of Accommodation

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



Figure 1.3: Site Plan

(Source: John Fleming Architects, 2024)

1.4 Updates to this Report Since the LRD Meeting and LRD Opinion

Several matters in relation to SI and this SIA were raised during the LRD Meeting and in the LRD

Opinion issued by the Council. To address these, additional context and insights have been provided in Sections 4.1.4.4 (Item 3(c)), 4.2.2 (Item 4(a)) and 4.5 (Item 3(d)). A letter from Ratoath Childcare, confirming their physical capacity for additional enrolments and constraints related to staffing, is included as Appendix A.

1.5 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 community, recreational and social 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 community, recreational and social infrastructure; and
- **Section 5.0** identifies gaps in the existing provision of community infrastructure and makes recommendations to address deficiencies.

2.0 RELEVANT POLICY GUIDANCE

For the purposes of this *Social Infrastructure Audit*, a range of national, regional and local planning policies relating to SI have been reviewed, including the *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027*. These documents provide guidance with respect to the provision of new social and community facilities in residential development areas in a number of categories, including education and childcare services, healthcare facilities, cultural institutions, recreational facilities and other key services. 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 of Ireland to 2040 which is to be implemented through regional, county and local plans. 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 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 SI, 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, childcare 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 audit has regard to these Guidelines which set out the distribution of uses and community infrastructure as being most relevant in the development of new residential areas. These criteria were considered in the development of the comprehensive infrastructure categories applied during the course of the study area audit.

2.1.3 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 include 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 Guidelines, all the one-bedroom units within the proposed development have been discounted in estimating the total number of minors (children aged 0–4 years) and school going children (5–18 years) expected to reside within the development. Instead, the 123 No. two-, three-, four- and five-bedroom units have been included. The estimation of child population and the likely demand for childcare services arising from them has been further detailed in the Audit in Section 4.0.

2.1.4 Action Plan for Education (Statement of Strategy 2023–2025)

The Department of Education has operated an *Action Planning Framework* to provide an overview of the activity associated with the strategic progress of the 2021-2023 strategy and priorities since 2021. The plan sets out key priorities on an annual basis, with the most recent Plan published in September 2023. This Plan translates the strategic priorities to actions and makes progress towards achieving the high-level goals for the Department and the sector. The high-level roadmap of how to achieve the Department’s priorities over 2023–2025 are:

1. Enable the provision of high-quality education and improve the learning experience to meet the needs of all children and young people, in schools and early learning and care settings;
2. Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all children and young people are supported to fulfil their potential;
3. Together with our partners, provide strategic leadership and support for the delivery of the right systems and infrastructure for the sector; and
4. Organisational Excellence and Innovation

The *Action Plan for Education (Statement of Strategy 2023–2025)* provides useful insights into the requirements for new schooling infrastructure and the standards to ensure high-quality learning for all students.

2.1.5 The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice

The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice is part of a wider package of initiatives designed to facilitate the provision of schools and schools-related infrastructure within the planning system and in line with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development. The following core objectives aim to provide an effective integration of schools in relation to the planning system:

1. Schools provision should be an integral part of the evolution of compact sustainable urban development and the development of sustainable communities;

2. The provision of any new schools (both primary and post-primary) should be driven by and emerge from an integrated approach between the planning functions of planning authorities and the Department of Education; and
3. Local authorities, as planning authorities, will support and assist the Department in ensuring the timely provision of school sites.

The document provides guidance when assessing future development potential of certain areas and establishing demand for schools. This document states that in some cases it *"may be more complex as it involves not just an assessment of likely population growth but also an appraisal of the capacity of existing post-primary schools, coupled with an assessment of the enrolment patterns in existing and anticipated 'feeder' national schools."*

The Code of Practice stipulates the methodology for forecasting future education demand. Identification of future primary school demands should be based upon:

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

The report addresses reasonable estimates of future demand based on the influx of population arising from the proposed development in a manner that is consistent with national and regional estimates sourced by CSO results.

2.1.6 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 states 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 SI 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, education facilities and community/recreational facilities is key to creating healthier places. The RSES includes the following Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) 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 9.18 – *"Support the implementation of local authority Local Economic and Community Plans, in collaboration with Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and through the use of spatial planning policies, to seek to reduce the number of people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the Region."*

RPO 9.19 – *"EMRA shall work collaboratively with stakeholders including the wide range of service providers through the LECPs 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."*

RPO 9.27 - *"In areas where significant new housing is proposed, on assessment of need regarding schools' provision should be carried out in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills and the statutory plans shall designate new school sites at accessible, pedestrian, cycle and public transport friendly locations."*

Section 9.7 highlights that SI 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 *Social Infrastructure Audit* to ensure the range of services, community facilities, and standards deemed to improve quality of life are considered.

2.3 Local Planning Policy

2.3.1 Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027

The *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027* was adopted on 22nd September 2021. 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.

"Community infrastructure is an essential part of all communities. Facilities such as community centres, sports centres, libraries and playgrounds can serve as a focal point for communities they serve, and provide venues for local sporting, cultural, community, education and social events. The Council recognises that the provision of good quality community facilities in existing and developing areas is a key element in the development of sustainable, healthy communities across the County... Different levels of service provision are appropriate to settlements of different sizes, it is therefore important that the Council ensures that an appropriate range of community facilities are provided in all communities, taking account of the population profile and growth targets identified in the Core Strategy." [Section 7.7, Meath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027]

The following policy prescribes the requirement to prepare this *Social Infrastructure Audit* in respect of the proposed development:

SOC POL 6: Community and Social Infrastructure Audit: *"To require that all new residential development applications of 50 units or more on zoned lands are accompanied by a Social Infrastructure Assessment (SIA) to determine if social and community facilities in the area are sufficient to provide for the needs of the future residents (of all age cohorts). This should include details regarding the following essential facilities: Playgrounds, parks and other green spaces, education, childcare, health, and others such as shops, banks, post offices, community meeting rooms/centres and recreational facilities. The assessment should identify membership and non-membership facilities which allow access for all groups. Where deficiencies are identified, proposals will be required to accompany the Planning application to address the deficiency. In certain cases, however, residential development under these thresholds may, at the discretion of the Planning Authority, require the submission of a SIA."*

Other key policies with respect to SI provision set out in the Development Plan include:

Policy SOC 1: *"To promote and facilitate the delivery of the objectives and actions set out in the Meath Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 (or any subsequent replacement)."*

Policy SOC 2: *"To support the provision and distribution of a range of community infrastructure facilities in accordance with the Settlement and Core Strategies to meet the needs of the County's population in conjunction with other statutory, voluntary,*

private sector and community groups."

Policy SOC 3: *"To ensure that, where practicable, community, recreational and open space facilities are clustered, with the community facilities being located in local centres or combined with school facilities, as appropriate. Community facilities should be located close to or within walking distance of housing, accessible to all sectors of the community and facilitate multi-use functions through their design and layout."*

Policy SOC 4: *"To seek to ensure the efficient and timely delivery of community facilities commensurate with the needs of the resident population and to assist in the delivery of such facilities."*

Policy SOC 5: *"To require, as part of all new large residential and commercial developments, and in existing developments, where appropriate, that provision is made for facilities including local/neighbourhood shops, childcare facilities, schools and recreational facilities, and to seek their provision concurrent with development."*

SOC POL 7: *"To promote and encourage social inclusion through universal access to services and facilities and to encourage the upgrade of community facilities."*

SOC POL 8: *"To continue to provide care facilities for older people, such as own homes (designed to meet the needs of older people), sheltered housing, day-care facilities, nursing homes and specialised care units at appropriate locations throughout the County."*

SOC POL 9: *"To provide and promote adaptability and flexibility in the design of homes and community facilities."*

SOC POL 10: *"To require that all residential care facilities for the elderly comply with all relevant standards set out in the 'National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People in Ireland' published by the Health Information and Quality Authority (February 2009) or the relevant standards for any subsequent national guidelines."*

SOC POL 11: *"To support the implementation of the Meath County Age Friendly Strategy, 2017-2020 (or its replacement) in consultation with the relevant agencies and authorities."*

SOC POL 12: *"To support the implementation of the Meath Joint Policing Strategy, 2015-2020 (or its replacement) in consultation with the relevant agencies and authorities."*

SOC POL 13: *"Ensure that all buildings, public and open spaces, recreational and amenity areas are accessible for people with disabilities, having regard to the Building Regulations, the objectives of 'Building for Everyone' (National Disability Authority) and 'Access for the Disabled' (No. 1 to 3) (National Rehabilitation Board)."*

SOC POL 14: *"To support the implementation of the Joint Migrant Integration Strategy, 2019-2022 (or its replacement) in consultation with the relevant agencies and authorities."*

With respect to new significant development and SI provision, the Development Plan states that it should only take place where sufficient schools, parks and other resources 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, on lands zoned for residential use, 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 Ratoath.

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

3.0 DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT

The demographic profile of the area was examined using the results from the Census 2016 and 2022 (the latest available on the CSO website). The scope of the assessment is determined by overlaying the 1 km radius buffer zone over the subject site and assessing the relevant spatial unit in demographic analysis. For the subject site, given the lack of residential development and population in the area immediately surrounding the subject site, the CSO defined Settlement of Ratoath boundary (as outlined in green in Figure 3.1) was selected as the statistical unit.

This Study Area provides insight into the composition of the local population and relevant demographic trends. Specifically, the study reviews the population's age profile, educational attainment and economic status to best understand the needs of the population regarding social and community services and facilities. This Study Area (based on the CSO Settlement Area) is also compared to wider trends within County Meath..



Figure 3.1: Extent of Demographic Study Area Comprising the CSO Defined Settlement of Ratoath

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

3.1 Demographic Drivers

To fulfil the strategic priorities of Meath County Council, it is essential that all areas have a

strong sense of community, provide access to natural surroundings, and are well integrated with essential services, public amenities and open spaces. This will contribute to fostering a healthy, resilient and sustainable community. To gain insights into the specific requirements of the local residents, an in-depth examination of the demographic features of both the Study Area and the broader Meath County has been conducted using data from the Census of 2016 and 2022. This analysis aims to identify the significant traits of the local population.

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. Meath's population stood at 220,826 at the time, an increase from 2016 of 13.2%, or just over 25,000 people. The County hence accounts for 4.3% of Ireland's population. Meath's population is expected to continue to grow with the *Meath Development Plan 2021–2027* forecasting that the County's population will increase by over 30,000 people by 2031 to 225,500. Notably, the population of Meath was projected to reach between 216,000 and 221,000 persons by 2026, a target it is likely to breach the upper range of by 2023. Between 2016 and 2022, Meath was the second fastest growing County in Ireland, with only Longford (+14.4%) growing at a faster pace. Further breakdowns show that 28.7% of the Meath population was under 19 years old in 2022, while 88,813 people (40.2%) were under 30. This compares to 30.6% of the population under 19 years of age and 41.6% under 30 years in 2016. The proportion of the population under 30 years of age in Meath was higher than the national average, where 38% of the population was under 30 years.

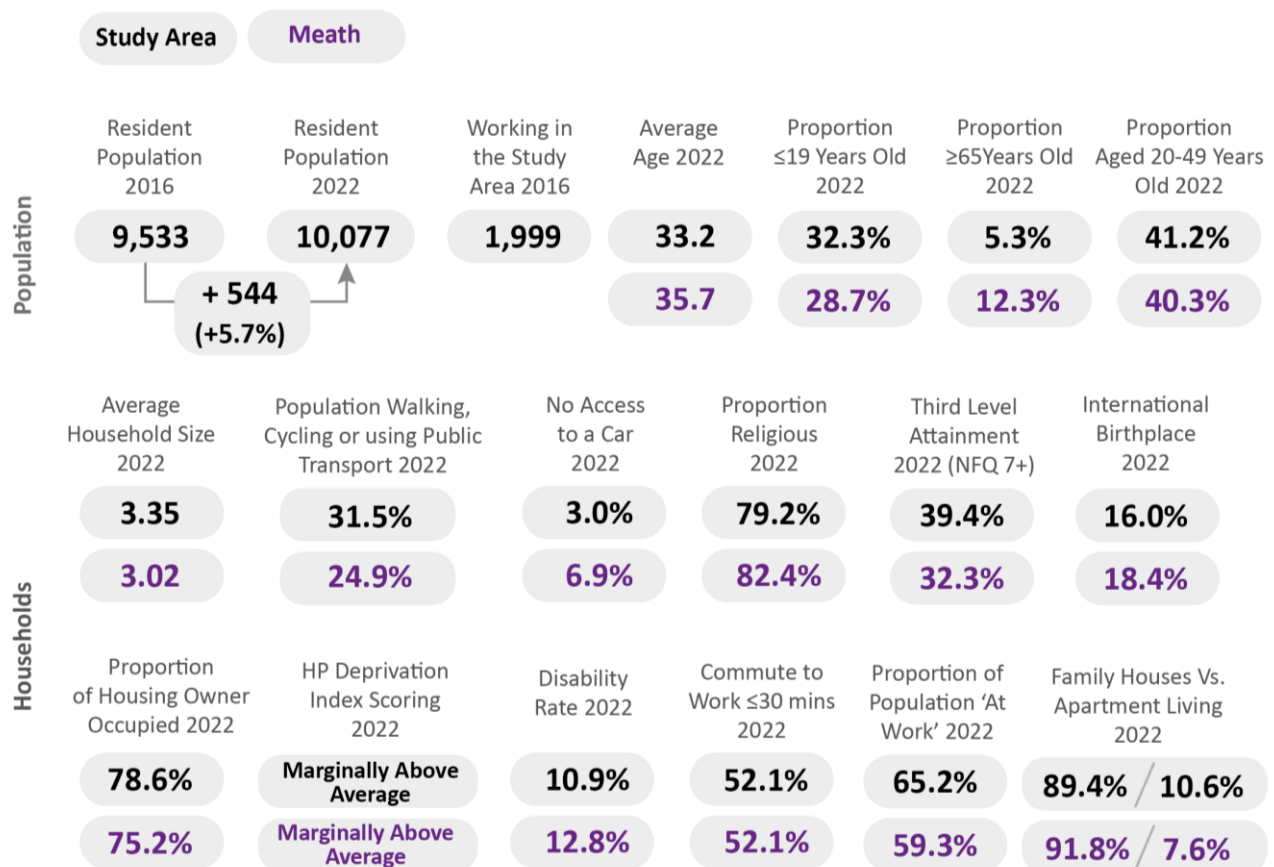


Figure 3.2: Summary Demographic Findings of Study Area and Meath County

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

Over the same period, the population within the Study Area grew at a slower rate of 5.7% (544 No. additional persons). The analysis of the CSO data illustrates a strong representation of working age population within the 20–65 years age groupings, with 60.6% of the total resident

population classified within these age cohorts. The 20–49 years age cohort further highlights this concentration of young professionals, with 41.2% of the total population classified in this group. The area has a low average age at 33.2 years with a lower proportion of the population in older age cohorts. Some 24.0% of the population is aged under 14 years old, while just 5.3% of the population are aged over 65 years old. Notably, while the population of Ratoath increased by 5.7% in the period since 2016, the overall population under 15 years of age has decreased markedly by 543 No. persons (-18.4%), indicating a potentially lowering of demand for schooling and childcare infrastructure into the future.

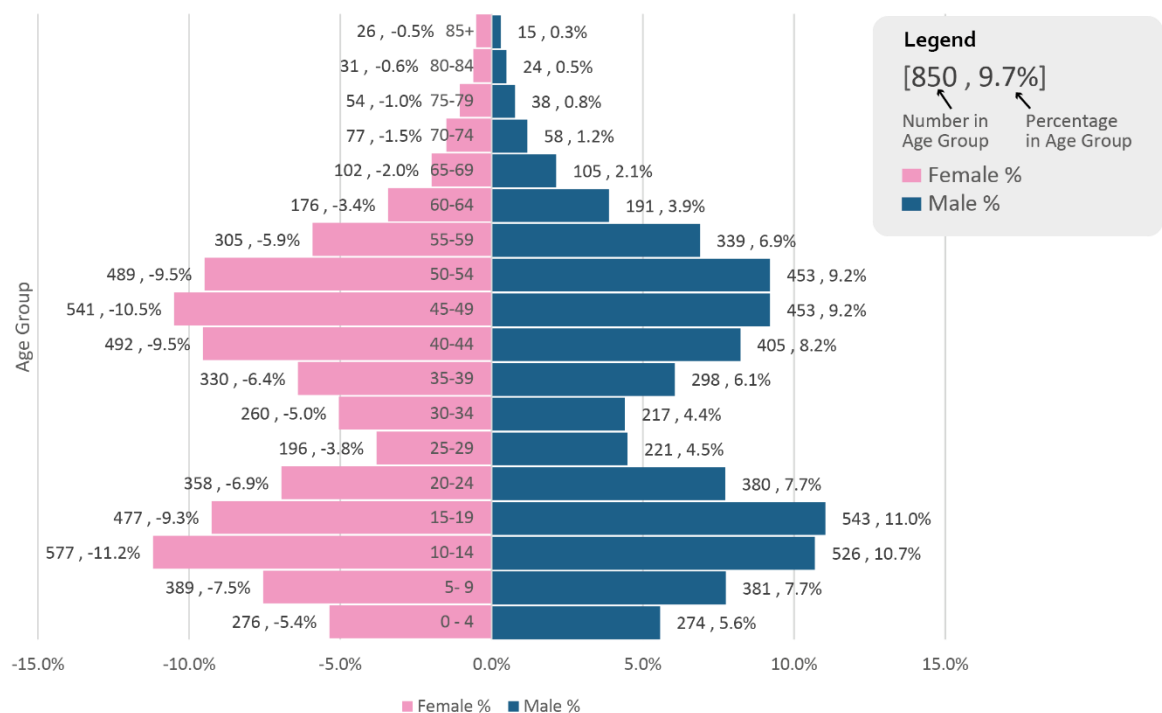


Figure 3.3: Population of the Study Area by Age – 2022

(Source: CSO, 2022)

While the area immediately around Ratoath would not be classified as a major hub of employment, given the proximity of the Study Area to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport, this increase in the population of working age is likely to continue into the future. Higher concentrations of population in younger age groups would indicate a strong demand for facilities and services such as childcare and sport and recreation. A very low proportion of population in older age groups indicates potential lower demand for health facilities and aged care in the Study Area.

The Study Area predominantly consists of houses with 89.4% of dwelling units in 2022 registered as such. The average household size in 2022 was 3.35 persons per household, above the average for Meath County. Some 11.0% of all households consist of 1 No. person, with 49.3% of all households consisting of 4 No. or more persons living together.

Household Type	Study Area Households 2022	Meath County Households 2022
1 Person Households	11.0%	17.3%
2 Person Households	20.0%	26.0%
3 Person Households	19.7%	18.8%
4 Person Households	28.3%	21.1%
5+ Person Households	21.0%	16.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.1: Persons Per Household in the Study Area and Meath County – 2022

(Source: CSO, 2022)

Compositional data indicates that 70.4% of all households have children, with a further 15.8% of all households consisting of either a 'single' person, or 'non-related' persons living in Group Accommodation (Shared). Taken collectively, the data suggests that the unit typology of the catchment area are persons living in family houses, predominantly in the pre-family stage, or families with children.

The economic profile, based on Census 2022, suggests a relatively young population within the active workforce age bracket, with a higher percentage at work, and lower retired and student percentages. The majority of the population over 15 years of age are categorised as 'At Work' in 2022 (65.2%). The percentage of people unemployed in the area is lower (4.1%) than Meath County (4.8%). The number of people retired in the Study Area is lower (6.2%) than Meath County (13.2%). The percentage of students (16.2%) in the Study Area is higher than the percentage of students in Meath County (11.2%).

When reviewing the levels of educational attainment, the largest proportion of residents had completed 'Third Level' education (47.2%) in 2022. This is higher than the levels of educational attainment in Meath County, with 42.7% of the population having completed 'Third Level' education, and is significantly higher than the national average. It should be noted that a further 13.9% of the population have also completed 'Post-Graduate Education or Higher' at the time of the Census, compared to 10.7% in Meath County, and just 1.1% were recorded as having 'No Formal Education'. Taken together, these figures indicate a very well-educated population in the Study Area, which surpasses attainment in the wider county and nationally.

Education Level	Study Area	% of Total	Meath	% of Total
No Formal Education	67	1.1%	3,173	2.3%
Primary Education	189	3.2%	9,150	6.6%
Secondary Education	1,759	29.8%	46,216	33.4%
Third Level Education (Any Level)	2,791	47.2%	59,084	42.7%
Postgraduate or Higher	823	13.9%	14,817	10.7%
Not Stated	279	4.7%	5,986	4.3%
Total	5,908	100.0%	138,426	100.0%

Table 3.2: Population Aged 15+ Years by Highest Level of Education Completed

(Source: CSO, 2022)

The purpose of an affluence and deprivation index is to assess social conditions using a single indicator. The Pobal HP Deprivation Index (2022) is used by public bodies across Ireland to identify potentially disadvantaged communities and target investment/policy to improve the quality of life and access to opportunities for those living in them. The subject site is located in

an area (based on Small Areas) that is classified as 'Marginally Above Average' indicating that the area is relatively prosperous with higher-than-average educational attainment, low unemployment, low age dependency, etc. relative to other parts of the country.

Within the Study Area, just 15.5% of the population identify as 'Not Religious' with the remaining 79.2%¹ identifying as religious and likely have some need for a place of religious worship. Equally, ensuring there is adequate SI to help diverse communities feel included and empowered is critical. The Study Area has a sizeable international community with 16.0% of the local population born outside of Ireland.

Some 31.5% of people rely on 'green' modes of transport for daily activities, with 'Bike' (2.0%), 'Walking' (19.6%), and 'Public Transport' (9.9%) making up a large portion of transportation. Trips by 'Private Car (Driver or Passenger)' constitute 52.7% of all daily commuting movements. Daily commuting patterns show 52.1% of trips to work/school are under 30 minutes, with just 12.6% indicating a travel time of over an hour.

The daytime population of the Study Area was registered at 7,399 No. persons in 2016. This refers to those persons that are typically located within the area during the daytime hours for school, work or living and not leaving for work. Some 1,999 No. persons are employed within the Study Area, classifying it a smaller employment destination in Meath County. Those working in the area largely do so in either 'wholesale, retail trade' (27.1%) or 'education, human health and social work activities' (24.9%).

3.2 Summary

The majority of the population in the catchment of the Study Area are living in lower density family housing estates. They are more likely to live in owner-occupied family houses, rather than private or socially renting, than recorded nationally. Population in the catchment has grown moderately over the past 6 years by 544 No. persons, largely living within the 209 No. new units recorded as completed since 2016. The level of growth is significantly lower than that experienced at a county level (13.2%). The population has a high ethnic diversity, with an above average number of residents from India, EU accession countries and countries outside of Europe, aligning with a lower-than-average proportion of persons stating their country of birth as Ireland.

The population of the Study Area is characterised by a young population within the active workforce age bracket, and a large minority are young families with children. Jobs in the catchment reflect the major employers in the area (schools and retail) requiring a mix of lower skilled residents and those with higher educational attainment. The resident population of the catchment is very highly educated with a plurality commuting outside of Ratoath to Dublin for employment. The area is classified as 'Marginally Above Average' in terms of affluence and deprivation, signifying high average rates of educational attainment, employment, within stable family structures, and usually indicates higher disposable income, demand for social infrastructure, but also greater social mobility and means to travel.

The demographic assessment indicates that a higher proportion of community facilities may be required for the working population and families with school-aged children in this area than other demographic groups. However, the reality of this is to be seen given the reduction in size of the population aged under 15 years.

¹ 5.4% of the population did not state their religion in 2022, which constitutes the remaining percentage value.

4.0 FACILITIES AUDIT

As stated previously, the subject site, covering approximately c. 5.31 hectares, is located to eastern edge of Ratoath, Co. Meath. Ratoath is a well-connected town, approximately c. 40-50 minutes by car or via the 103 Bus Éireann route from Dublin City Centre. Dublin Airport is located within c. 25km and served directly by the 109A Bus Éireann route. Ratoath is located c. 5km from Ashbourne to the east, the second largest town in Co. Meath, and c. 6km from Dunshaughlin to the west. Key transport infrastructure includes the M2/N2 and M3/N3 motorways / national primary roads, which connect Dublin to the north and north-west of the country.

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. While an exact spatial area has not been defined by Meath County Council within the *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027*, it is judged that a c. 1km radius is used as a development standard for future community and social audits in other administrative areas. Given that the subject site is located at the edge of a rapidly growing settlement, an additional indicative catchment of c. 2km has also 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 Ratoath.

The survey identified a large range of community facilities within the Study Area. A total of 7 No. categories of facilities (Table 4.1) that align with the policies set out in the Development Plan were utilised for this Audit. Some 50 No. SI facilities were identified as part of this Audit within a radius of 1 km of the subject site, with that figure increasing to 66 No. SI facilities located within 2 km of the subject site.

Category	Facility Type
Education and Training Services	Primary, Post-Primary, Third Level, Further Education, Other Lifelong Training Centres
Childcare Facilities	Registered Childcare Facilities Incl. Full Day, Part-Time and Sessional Services
Social, Community and Cultural Facilities	Community Centres, Libraries, Senior and Youth Centres, Post Offices, Banks and Credit Unions, Museums, Galleries, Theatres, Cinemas, Music Venues, Historical Cultural Sites
Healthcare and Emergency Services	Hospitals, Health Centres, Primary Care Centres, Doctors and Specialty Clinics, Dental, Physiotherapy, Counselling, Optician, Pharmacy, Garda Stations, Fire Stations
Open Space and Recreation	Parks, Playing Pitches, Playgrounds, Sports Centres and Clubs, Leisure Centres, Gyms and Training Facilities, Swimming Pools
Religious Institutions	Areas of Worship, Churches, Cemeteries
Retail Centres and Services	Convenience Retailing, Other Relevant Retail

Table 4.1: Community Infrastructure Categories Applied to Audit

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

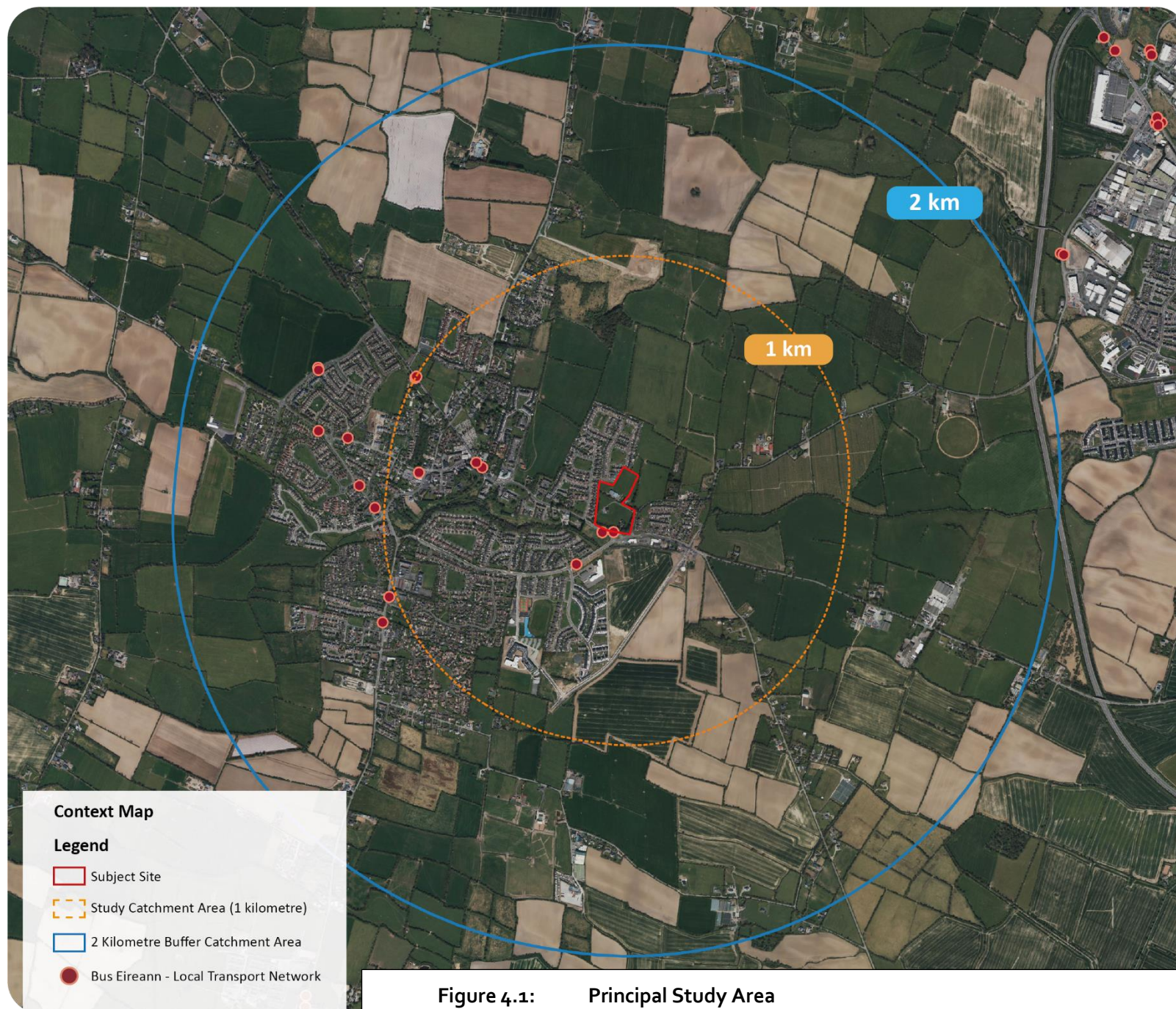


Figure 4.1: Principal Study Area

(Source: Bing Maps, Annotated By Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

4.1 Education Facilities

A Schools Demand Assessment has been carried out to examine the capacity of existing primary and post-primary school facilities located in the vicinity of the subject site, alongside the demographic demands, to understand the direction of demand and the resulting need for additional schooling infrastructure in the future.

A methodology for the assessment of educational facilities and schools has been developed in accordance with the directions provided in planning policy, and it involves the following steps:

1. Defining a Study Area using relevant School Planning Areas (SPA) as developed by the Department of Education (DES);
2. A demographic and socio-economic evaluation of the composition of population within the Study Area;
3. Determining the extent and provision of existing educational facilities and schools within the Study Area; and
4. Estimating the level of demand for schools that may arise from the development proposal.

In accordance with current guidelines, the following Section provides an examination of local need for educational facilities at the subject site and its wider surroundings. Accordingly, the latest data was obtained from the Department of Education and Skills, Primary Online Database (POD)² and the National School Census, for existing educational facilities in the locality. Reporting also provides detail on the current and future capacity of existing and planned schools in the area. The aim of this assessment is to establish projected demand for school places within the existing schools network generated by the proposed development.

4.1.1 Existing Infrastructure Analysis

4.1.1.1 School Catchment Area

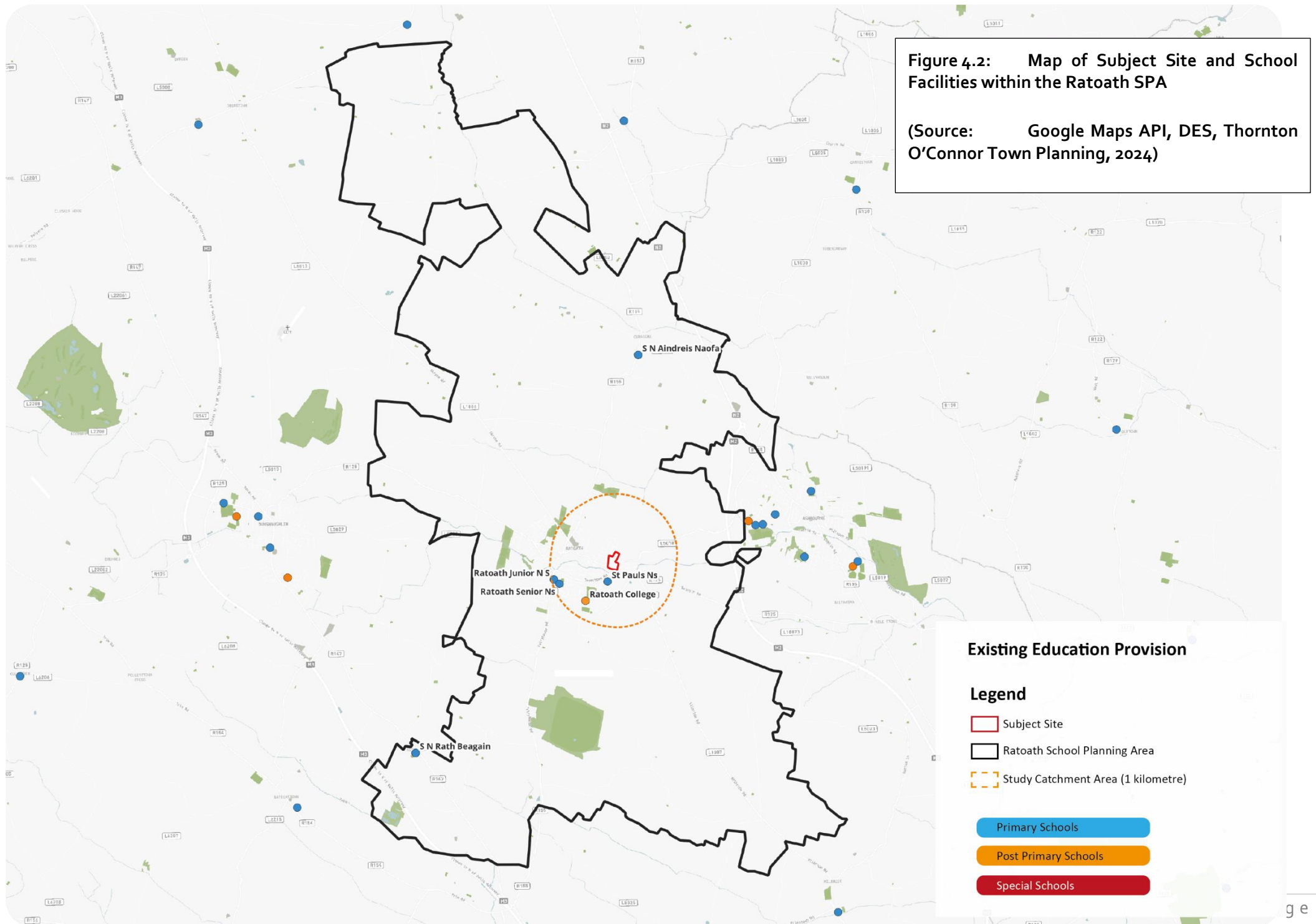
The proposed development site is located within the Ratoath SPA identified by the DES as shown in Figure 4.2, which is adjoined by the Dunshaughlin SPA to the west, Ashbourne SPA to the east, and Dunboyne SPA to the south.

The Ratoath SPA comprises 5 No. existing primary schools and 1 No. post-primary school.

² Department of Education and Skills – National School Annual Census for 2023/2024, which is returned via the Primary Online Database (POD). This includes both the Census and the Special School Annual Census. Only schools aided by the Department of Education and Skills are included in this list. Data was published June 2023.

Figure 4.2: Map of Subject Site and School Facilities within the Ratoath SPA

(Source: Google Maps API, DES, Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)



4.1.2 Primary Schools

The 5 No. existing primary schools identified within the Ratoath SPA held a combined provisional enrolment of 1,557 No. students during the 2023/2024 school year as per DES records. All of the schools identified are co-educational (mixed) schools. The primary school that is located nearest to the subject site (ST PAULS National School – identified in blue in Table 4.2) is the largest school in the SPA, and held an enrolment of 576 No. students in 2023/2024.

Supplementary to the enrolment information acquired from the DES, a review of the schools' websites and the 2024/2025 Schools' Admission Notices was carried out in January 2024 by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning to ensure that available spaces in classes are captured in this Audit. Table 4.2 provides a detailed breakdown of this available capacity per school. As per Section 63 of the *Education (Admissions to School) Act 2018*³, schools are required to publish an Annual Admissions Notice each year with key information about the annual admissions process.

This review helped determine the trend in schools for admitting students into the classes each year. For the 2024/2025 academic year, the Admissions Notices for primary schools indicated a total enrolment capacity of 243 No. students in the catchment (243 No. spaces for Junior Infants, and 0 No. spaces for Other Years). These 243 No. places refer to the places made available each academic cycle resulting from graduating students, rather than any additional capacity to the overall schooling infrastructure. Where schools have not provided sufficient information on their intake for the next academic year, these have been assumed to be zero.

No.	Roll No.	School Name	Distance from Site (km)	Females	Males	2023-2024 Enrolment	Available Capacity per School Websites (2024/25)		
							Junior Infants	Other Years	Total
1	00885T	RATOATH JUNIOR N S	0.9km	139	115	254	38	0	38
2	20200T	RATOATH SENIOR NS	0.8km	191	214	405	62	0	62
3	20215J	ST PAULS NS	0.2km	272	304	576	75	0	75
4	18448U	S N RATH BEAGAIN	4.6km	105	108	213	49	0	49
5	17857J	S N AINDREIS NAOFA	3.4km	51	58	109	19	0	19
Total				758	799	1,557	243	0	243

**Note: Where there was no information on the number of spaces made available, we have assumed that the capacity is 0.*

Table 4.2: Recorded Enrolments for Primary Schools

(Source: DES, 2023, and Individual School Admission Notices, 2024)

Table 4.3 below provides information on each of the primary schools, inclusive of their enrolment numbers for the previous 5 No. academic years (2019–2020 to 2023–2024). The overall enrolment figure associated with the 5 No. primary schools within the catchment has decreased significantly over the past 5 No. years (282 No. fewer children, -15.3%), and has continued to shrink despite the overall increases in population in and around Ratoath. ST PAULS National School (identified in blue in Table 4.3), has decreased by 89 No. students over the same 5-year period indicating the school would have enough capacity to grow with increases in the population of the area into the future, and would indicate that there is available capacity within the existing primary schools.

³ Section 62 of this Act requires that, from 1st February 2020, Boards of Management have 3 No. months to revise their Admission Policies in line with the commenced provisions of the Act.

School	Roll No.	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
RATOATH JUNIOR N S	00885T	377	334	300	273	254
RATOATH SENIOR NS	20200T	495	480	470	448	405
ST PAULS NS	20215J	665	640	609	575	576
S N RATH BEAGAIN	18448U	189	183	170	187	213
S N AINDREIS NAOFA	17857J	113	113	112	107	109
Total		1,839	1,750	1,661	1,590	1,557

Table 4.3: Existing Primary Schools: Enrolment Figures 2019–2020 to 2023–2024

(Source: DES, 2023)

4.1.2.1 Historic Enrolment Statistics

Historic enrolment trends for the catchment show consistent decreases at primary school level for the historic 5-year interval, with an overall decrease of 282 No. students (c. 15.3% decrease) from 2019/2020 to 2023/2024. Over the past 10 No. years, St Pauls National School has experienced decreases in student numbers of 108 No. students or 15.8% (Table 4.4). The analysis of student population change over the past 10 No. years indicates a consistently decreasing demand for primary school places within the town.

Catchment		Enrolment Year			Historic Change	
Roll No.	School Name	13/14	19/20	23/24	5-year	10-year
00885T	RATOATH JUNIOR N S	475	377	254	-123	-221
20200T	RATOATH SENIOR NS	450	495	405	-90	-45
20215J	ST PAULS NS	684	665	576	-89	-108
18448U	S N RATH BEAGAIN	198	189	213	24	15
17857J	S N AINDREIS NAOFA	104	113	109	-4	5
Total		1,911	1,839	1,557	-282	-354

Table 4.4: Historic Change in Enrolment (Primary) in Recent 5- and 10-year Period

(Source: DES, 2023)

No special education facilities were identified within the Ratoath SPA, however, the area appears to be served by 1 no. special education facility to the west in Harristown, Kilclone – Stepping Stones Special School (Table 4.5). This facility recorded a provisional enrolment of 30 no. students during the 2023/2024 school year as per DES records. It was not possible to determine the enrolment capacity in the 2024–2025 academic year from Admissions Notices.

No.	Roll No.	School Name	Females	Males	2023–2024 Enrolment	Available Capacity per School Websites (2024/25)
1	20379Q	Stepping Stones Special School	2	28	30	-
Total					30	No Data

Table 4.5: Recorded Enrolments for Special Education School

(Source: DES, 2023, and Individual School Admission Notices, 2024)

Table 4.6 indicates that the enrolment figures for the special education school at this location has remained generally consistent from the 2019–2020 academic year to the 2023–2024 academic year.

School	Roll No.	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Stepping Stones Special School	20379Q	30	30	29	30	30
Total		30	30	29	30	30

Table 4.6: Existing Special Education School: Enrolment Figures 2019–2020 to 2023–2024
(Source: DES, 2023)

4.1.3 Post-Primary Schools

There was 1 No. post-primary school identified within the Ratoath SPA which held a co-educational enrolment of 1,158 No. students during the 2023–2024 school year, as per DES records. The post-primary school, Ratoath College, is a mixed/co-educational school located in the settlement, just a short walking distance of the subject site.

Supplementary to the enrolment information acquired from the DES, a review of the schools' website and the 2024/2025 Admission Notice was carried out in January 2024 by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning to ensure that available spaces in classes are captured in this Audit. Table 4.7 provides a detailed breakdown of this available capacity. As per Section 63 of the *Education (Admissions to School) Act 2018*, schools are required to publish an Annual Admissions Notice each year with key information about the annual admissions process.

This review helped determine the trend in the school for admitting students into the classes each year. For the 2024/2025 academic year, the Admissions Notice for the post-primary school indicated a total enrolment capacity of 228 No. students (210 No. spaces for First Years, and 18 No. spaces for Other Years). These 228 No. places refer to the places made available each academic cycle resulting from graduating students, rather than any additional capacity to the overall schooling infrastructure.

No.	Roll No.	School Name	Distance from Site (km)	Females	Males	2023–2024 Enrolment	Available Capacity per School Websites (2024/25)		
							First Years	Other Years	Total
1	76088T	Ratoath College	0.7km	580	578	1,158	210	18	228
Total				580	578	1,158	210	18	228

Table 4.7: Recorded Enrolments for Post-Primary School

(Source: DES, 2023, and Individual School Admission Notice, 2024)

Table 4.8 provides an overview of the post-primary school within the catchment, inclusive of its enrolment numbers according to data published by the DES for the academic years 2019–2020 to 2023–2024. As highlighted in the table, the overall enrolment figure associated with the 1 No. post-primary school in the catchment area has increased during this period from 1,069 No. to 1,158 No. pupils; growth of 89 No. additional pupils (8.3%). This indicates recent growth in demand for post-primary school infrastructure within the catchment.

School	Roll No.	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Ratoath College	76088T	1,069	1,091	1,112	1,163	1,158
Total		1,069	1,091	1,112	1,163	1,158

Table 4.8: Existing Post-Primary School: Enrolment Figures 2019–2020 to 2023–2024

(Source: DES, 2023)

4.1.3.1 Historic Enrolment Statistics

Historic enrolment trends for the catchment show increases at post-primary school level for the historic 5-year interval, with an overall increase of 89 No. students (c. 8.3% increase) from 2019/2020 to 2023/2024. Over the past 10 No. years, Ratoath College has experienced growth in student numbers of 167 No. additional students or 16.9% (Table 4.9). The analysis of student population growth over the past 10 No. years indicates a continued demand for additional post-primary school places within the town.

Catchment		Enrolment Year			Historic Change	
Roll No.	School Name	13/14	19/20	23/24	5-year	10-year
76088T	Ratoath College	991	1069	1158	89	167
Total		991	1,069	1,158	89	167

Table 4.9: Historic Change in Enrolment (Post-Primary) in Recent 5- and 10-year Period

(Source: DES, 2023)

4.1.4 Future Demand Analysis

4.1.4.1 Demographic Growth Projection

In November 2021, the DES reported that enrolment figures for primary schools in Ireland were likely to have reached peak levels in 2019, and will fall gradually to a low point in 2033 (see Figure 4.3), in line with revised migration and fertility assumptions for the country as a whole. The latest statistical release⁴ by the DES in this respect states:

"Enrolments in primary schools in Ireland in 2020 stood at 561,411 down by almost 6,000 on 2019 (567,716). Enrolments are now projected to fall over the coming years under all scenarios, and under the M1F2⁵ scenario will reach a low point of 440,551 by 2033. This is 120,860 lower than today's figure. Enrolments will rise again thereafter and are projected to stand at 474,888 by 2040, a rise of some 34,300 over the seven years 2033 to 2040."

The study also concluded that post-primary school enrolments, however, will continue to rise in the short-term and will likely reach peak enrolment levels in 2024 (see Figure 4.4). The DES Report⁶ states:

"Enrolments in post-primary schools have risen by 26,923 (8%) over the past five years and are projected to continue rising over the short term. Under M1F2 they are projected to peak in 2024 with 408,794 pupils, some 29,610 higher than in 2020."

⁴ Source: *Projections of Full-Time Enrolment: Primary and Second Level, 2021–2040* (DES, November 2021), pg. 6.

⁵ The CSO's Regional Population Projections utilise six variant scenarios with relative assumptions in relation to regional fertility, mortality trends and external migration from and to each region. The Department of Education and Skills anticipates that M1F2 is the most likely scenario regarding migration and fertility, which encompasses the assumption of high migration and low fertility falling from 1.8 to 1.6 by 2031.

⁶ Source: *Projections of Full-Time Enrolment: Primary and Second Level, 2021–2040* (DES, November 2021), pg. 11.

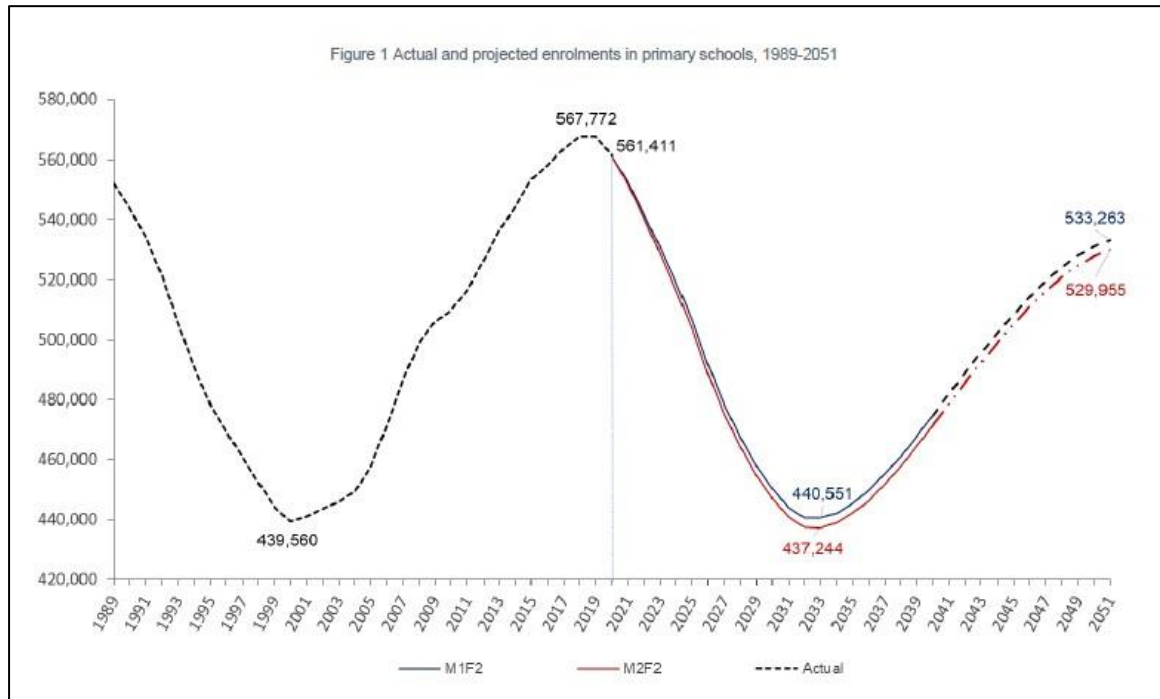


Figure 4.3: Actual and Projected Enrolments in Primary Schools, 1989–2051, Organised by Growth Projection Scenarios Created by the CSO

(Source: DES, 2021)

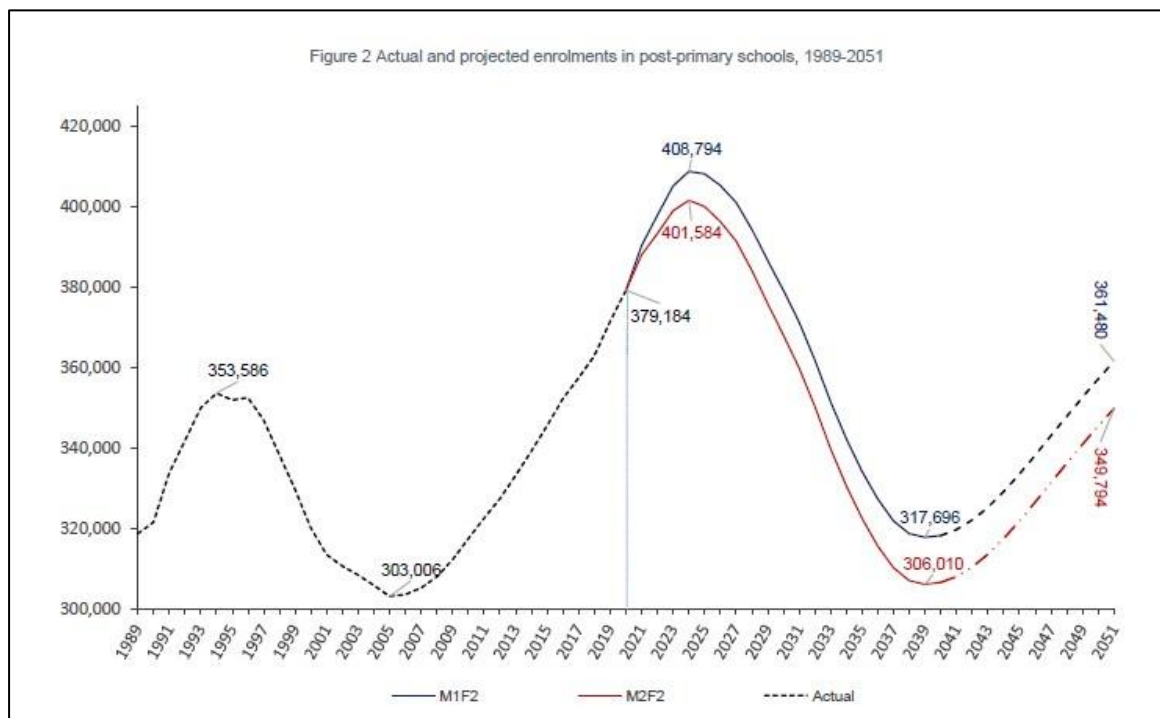


Figure 4.4: Actual and Projected Enrolments in Post-Primary Schools, 1989–2051, Organised by Growth Projection Scenarios Created by the CSO

(Source: DES, 2021)

4.1.4.2 Potential Impact on Catchment Schools

Using the projected enrolment figures⁷ for the Mid-East Region, as set out in the DES's *Projections for Full-Time Enrolment: Primary and Second Level, 2021–2040*, the study can extrapolate future enrolment for the 2027/2028 academic year for Ratoath. The 2027/2028 academic year has been selected in this study as an approximate year for the proposed development to be completed and occupied. The Report projects the enrolment figures in primary schools within the Mid-East Region to drop by 9.4% between the academic years 2023/2024 and 2027/2028 (4-year period). Applying this future projection figure to the current enrolment figures within Ratoath it is estimated that enrolments in the 5 No. primary schools identified in the Assessment are set to reduce by 146 No. spaces by the 2027/2028 academic year. At the post-primary level, the Report projects the enrolment figures to decrease by 2.1% between the 4 academic years from 2023/2024 to 2027/2028. This would result in a decrease of 24 No. children in the 1 No. post-primary school identified within the catchment by the 2027/2028 academic year.

We note that the indicative change figures provided are an estimate of potential enrolments and are based on the regional population projections included in the DES Report⁸ and do not strictly represent localised values. However, they reflect recent demographic change highlighted in Section 3.0, as well as the falling primary school enrolments that will eventually carry through to post-primary level.

Catchment	Enrolment Year		% Change Estimate	Change
	23/24	27/28		
Primary Schools (5 No.)	1,557	1,411	-9.4% decrease	-146
Post-Primary Schools (1 No.)	1,158	1,134	-2.1% decrease	-24

Table 4.10: Projected Enrolment Trends in Ratoath – 2023 to 2028

(Source: DES, 2023)

4.1.4.3 Projected Demand Generated by Proposed Development

The proposed development will comprise 141 No. units of various typologies, although 123 No. units when 1-bed units are excluded, as they unlikely to accommodate families. The average household size in the Study Area recorded by the 2022 Census was 3.35 No. persons per household, which generates a total indicative population of 412 No. persons when applied to the development's 123 No. units.

The average number of children per family recorded in the State in Census 2022 was 1.34 No. children⁹, which generates an indicative population of 165 No. children (between the ages of 0–18 years) when applied to the number of units that can accommodate families within the proposed development. Of this figure, an estimated 127 No. children would be considered school age (including 75 No. primary school children and 52 No. post-primary school children), as per the age cohorts recorded for Meath¹⁰ in the Census 2022 (Table 4.11).

⁷ Source: *Projections of Full-Time Enrolment: Primary and Second Level, 2021–2040* (DES, 2021), Table 4.

⁸ Source: *Projections of Full-Time Enrolment: Primary and Second Level, 2021–2040* (DES, 2021), Table 7.

⁹ Source: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp3/censusofpopulation2022profile3-householdsfamiliesandchildcare/>

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=E3003&PLanguage=o>

Age Group	Pre-School Children (0–4 years)	Primary School Children (5–12 years)	Post-Primary School Children (13–18 years)	All Children (0–18 years)
Meath 2022 Population	14,217	28,536	20,538	63,291
% of Total Cohort	22.46%	45.09%	32.45%	100.00%

Table 4.11: Breakdown of 0–18 Year Age Cohort for Meath County Council
(Source: CSO, 2022)

Having regard to the foregoing, the development has the potential to generate an additional 412 No. persons within the area, including an estimated 127 No. children (including 75 No. primary school children and 52 No. post-primary school children), when fully occupied.

4.1.4.4 Cumulative Projected Demand Generated by Residential Development in Ratoath SPA

In order to gain an understanding of cumulative impacts, this report has utilised data related to total future residential development and population growth within the wider Ratoath SPA area to establish the expected additional demand for school places. The analysis calculates the total cumulative future demand for school places based all granted residential development within the full SPA area. This analysis can be broken up into the follow actions;

1. Analysis of total existing population in 2022 (with a focus on specific school-going age cohorts);
2. Identification of all Granted Planning Permission for Residential Development (and unit numbers) within the Ratoath SPA area;
3. Estimating the level of demand for schools that could conceivably arise from the development proposal and other permitted residential developments in the area. Application of Average Household Size to this quantum of units as a proxy to establish future cumulative projected population (and resulting demand for school places).
4. Determination of Capacity within SPA to support that level of future development.

Existing Schools

The proposed development site is located within the Ratoath School Planning Area identified by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) as shown in Figure 4.2, which is adjoined by the Dunshaughlin School Planning Area to the west, Ashbourne School Planning Area to the east, and Dunboyne School Planning Area to the south. This SPA comprises 5 No. existing primary schools, and 1 No. post-primary schools. Table 1.12 below provides information on each of the primary schools, inclusive of their enrolment numbers for the previous 5 No. academic years (2019–2020 to 2023–2024). The overall enrolment figure associated with the 5 No. primary schools within the catchment has decreased significantly over the past 5 No. years (282 No. fewer children, -15.3%), and has continued to shrink despite the overall increases in population in and around Ratoath. **Total enrolment was 1,557 in the latest academic year.**

School	Roll No.	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
RATOATH JUNIOR N S	00885T	377	334	300	273	254
RATOATH SENIOR NS	20200T	495	480	470	448	405
ST PAULS NS	20215J	665	640	609	575	576
S N RATH BEAGAIN	18448U	189	183	170	187	213
S N AINDREIS NAOFA	17857J	113	113	112	107	109
Total		1,839	1,750	1,661	1,590	1,557

Table 1.12: Existing Primary Schools: Enrolment 2019–2020 to 2023–2024

(Source: DES, 2023)

Table 1.13 provides an overview of the post-primary school within the catchment, inclusive of their enrolment numbers according to data published by the DES for the academic years 2019–2020 to 2023–2024. As highlighted, the overall enrolment figure associated with the only post-primary school in the catchment area has increased during this period from 1,069 No. to 1,158 No. pupils; 89 No. additional pupils (8.3%). **Total enrolment was 1,158 in the latest academic year.**

School	Roll No.	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Ratoath College	76088T	1,069	1,091	1,112	1,163	1,158
Total		1,069	1,091	1,112	1,163	1,158

Table 1.13: Existing Post-Primary School: Enrolment Figures 2019–2020 to 2023–2024

(Source: DES, 2023)

Existing Population

In 2022, the settlement of Ratoath had a population of 10,077 persons. When the wider spatial area of the Ratoath SPA is taken into consideration (using CSO Small Area data) the population increases to 12,744 persons. Some 1,678 persons were aged 5-12 years old, with 1,488 persons aged between 13-18 years old within this SPA in 2022. **This broadly aligns with the current demography of Meath County, where 12.9% of total population are between the ages of 5 and 12 years old in 2022 (Table 1.3), and a further 9.3% are between the ages of 13 and 18 years old.**

Age Group	Primary school children 5-12 years)	Secondary school children (13-18 years)	Total Population
Meath 2022 Population	28,536	20,538	220,826
% of Total Cohort	12.9%	9.3%	100%

Table 1.14: Breakdown of 5–18 Year Age Cohort for Meath County Council

(Source: CSO, 2022)

Primary School - The enrolment figures at Primary level are consistent within the Ratoath SPA, with all appropriately aged children likely attending school within the SPA. For example, in the 2021-2022 academic year there were 1,661 enrolments in Ratoath SPA schools, and 1,678 children aged between 5 and 12 years old. Notably, there has been a visible decline in enrolments from 1,839 students in 2019/2020 (c. 282 students over the past 5 years), in line with DES projections of a persistent reducing cohort demand for primary places over the next 15 years.

Post-primary School - The enrolment figures at Post-primary level are less consistent within the Ratoath SPA, indicating that there is likely to be a small cohort of children within the Ratoath SPA that receive their secondary education from outside of the SPA. For example, in the 2021-2022 academic year there were 1,112 enrolments in Ratoath SPA schools, and 1,488 children aged between 13 and 18 years old. While the latest DES projections indicate that post-primary enrolment numbers will begin declining next year for the Mid-East region (similar to that experienced at Primary level), the current figures do not yet indicate a reducing demand for places in the coming years.

Future Demand Calculations (Cumulative Assessment)

An examination of Meath County Council's Online Planning Register showed the residential planning and development pipeline consists of 9 No. Planning Application in the Study Area as of 19th June 2024 (7 No. granted applications, alongside 2 No. Applications pending decision, and the proposed development). If these developments are delivered, the number of units in the SPA area would increase by 462 No. (although, of those 462 No. units, only 412 No. units would be units that contain families with children). Table 1.15 below provides the total granted and proposed units to be developed in Ratoath.

Ref	Address	Units Granted	Net Units (excl. 1 Bed)	Comment
N/A	Ballybin Road, Ratoath	141	123	
SH305196 / 305196	Jamestown	228	207	
RA201957	Corn Mill	18	N/A	Sheltered Accommodation: No school requirement expected
RA190359	Ratoath Village	57	49	
RA200529	Dunshaughlin Road, Ratoath	9	9	
22882	Main Street Ratoath	1	1	
22204	Curragha Road Ratoath	17	17	
23704	Main Street Ratoath	5	2	
2467	Fairyhouse Road Ratoath	1	1	Pending
2478	Dunshaughlin Road Ratoath	3	3	RFI
Total		462	412	

Table 1.15: Granted Residential Development (incl. proposed development) in Ratoath SPA

(Source: Meath County Council, 2024)

Taking the total combined residential units as a proxy for projected population increases in the SPA over the next 5 years, the table below calculates the estimated demand for student places at primary and post-primary level. The Average Household Size for the SPA area was 3.27 persons per household in 2022.

Description	No.	Value	Method
Units Proposed (currently undeveloped)	a	412	a
Average Household Size of SPA, 2022	b	3.27	b
Potential New Residents (Number)	c	1,347	a * b
Existing Population Ratoath SPA, 2022	d	12,744	d
Total Future Population	e	14,091	e
Meath County - Proportion 5-12 Years (% of Total Population), 2022	f	12.92%	f
Meath County - Proportion 13-18 Years (% of Total Population), 2022	g	9.30%	g
Potential 5-12 Years (Number)	h	1,821	e * f
Potential 13-18 Years (Number)	i	1,310	e * g

Table 1.16 : Cumulative Estimation of Future Children Aged 5–18 Years in the Ratoath SPA

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

Taken together, this would indicate no additional pressure (beyond previous historic levels) to accommodate students within the Ratoath SPA in the future based on forthcoming consents.

- **Primary Level Assessment:** The visible decline in enrolments at primary level in local schools over the past 5 years, alongside the expected future decline based on local demographic profiling (2022), indicate that the school infrastructure could comfortably support the levels of future growth in the student population resulting from all granted residential developments in the SPA, alongside the proposed development, in our opinion. Assuming 100% of consented units are completed, the primary school population would expand to 1,821 No. students. This number still remains lower than the enrolment in existing primary schools in the SPA in 2019-2020 (1,839 students).
- **Post-primary Level Assessment:** The rise in enrolments at post-primary level in Ratoath College over the past 5 years is in line with DES projections. While this growth is expected to peak next year and begin declining, the planned residential expansion of the town is likely to create a continued demand for post-primary places supplemented by new homes. Assuming 100% of consented units are completed, the post-primary school population (aged 13-18 years old) would expand to 1,310 No. students. This number still remains lower than the existing (2022) population aged 13-18 years old in the Ratoath SPA (1,488 No. persons) which is currently able to accommodate local student populations. There is also likely to be a further decline in enrolments at both primary and post primary level not represented in the figures resulting from that rapid decrease in age cohort demand. For example, in the case of Ratoath, the population 0-6 years old reduced by 36.7% between 2016 and 2022 (a reduction of 463 children aged 0-6 years old). These changes will materially affect future demand within the SPA over the coming 15 year period. It is likely that the drop in demand for places from current levels will create available capacity to cater for the potential demands of new dwellings, thereby avoiding additional pressure (beyond previous historic levels) consents.

4.1.5 Completed and Planned Infrastructure

The *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027* provides a holistic assessment of educational needs and has regard to the requirements of *The Provision of Schools and the Planning System, A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities* (DES & DEHLG, 2008) and *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas* (2009) (although now revoked) in its identification of school sites throughout the local authority area. Relevant policies for the development of primary and post-primary schools are also set out in Chapter 7 of the Development Plan, as shown below:

SOC POL 15: *"To facilitate the development of preschool, primary, post primary, third level, outreach, research, adult, and further educational facilities to meet the educational needs of the citizens of the County."*

SOC POL 16: *"To ensure the provision of preschool, primary and post primary education facilities in conjunction with the planning and development of residential areas, maximises opportunities for use of walking, cycling and use of public transport."*

SOC POL 17: *"To ensure that adequate lands and services are zoned and reserved to cater for the establishment, improvement, or expansion of all educational facilities in the County. The Council also supports the concept of multi- campus educational facilities."*

SOC POL 18: *"To continue to support and promote existing schools serving communities in town and village centres."*

SOC POL 19: *"To encourage, support and develop opportunities to open up schools to wider community usage in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills and other stakeholders."*

We note that additional schools' requirements are identified within the Development Plan, which include requirements for a new primary and post-primary school facility within Ratoath, as follows:

"The Department of Education and Skills has identified that the following areas are likely to require additional school facilities/reservation of sites over the plan period:

- *A new primary school in Ashbourne, Navan, Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Ratoath, Trim and Kilcock Environs.*
- *A new post primary school in Drogheda Environs, Ashbourne, Navan, Dunboyne, Enfield Trim and Ratoath.*
- *A new third level (PLC) facility for Dunboyne."*

In addition to the above locations, the Plan makes provision for future educational facilities through the identification and reservation of potential new sites / sites to accommodate the potential future expansion/relocation of existing facilities. In the identification of sites, consideration needs to be given both to the co-location of childcare provision and the potential use of school facilities by the wider community outside of school hours and during school holidays. Section 7.7.3.1 of the Development Plan remarks:

"Future school provision, within new growth areas specifically, will be planned and implemented in tandem with residential development. The age profile of the County is of particular relevance and it is likely that additional schools provision will be required over the plan period... While the reservation of sites for educational use does not in itself guarantee the timely provision of necessary educational facilities, the Council will continue to liaise with the Department of Education and Skills, the Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) and other stakeholders to assist, where possible, in the development of suitable educational facilities."

The DES announced in April 2018 that more than 40 No. new primary and post-primary schools are to be established throughout the country by 2022 with subsequent additions to established lists announced in 2019, 2020 and 2021. While there are no new schools currently proposed within the Ratoath SPA, we note that as of the latest School Building Programme Release (November 2023) there were 2 No. new primary schools and 1 no. new post-primary school opened since 2021 within the feeder areas of Dunshaughlin SPA and Ashbourne SPA.

- Ashbourne CNS opened in 2023 and has 16 No. new classrooms for new students in the Ashbourne area.
- Dunshaughlin CNS opened in 2021 and has 8 No. classrooms (currently at design stage to increase to 16 classrooms)
- The post-primary school Coláiste Ríoga opened in 2021 and has capacity for 1,000 children, with currently enrolment in 2023/2024 of 112 children.

With respect to other large-scale education projects in the vicinity of the Ratoath SPA, there were 3 no. school facilities identified under the DES school building programme under development as of November 2023, including upgrades to the Coláiste Ríoga (at design stage), Dunshaughlin Community National School (at design stage) and De Lacy College within Ashbourne (at design stage).

Taken together, this will create a significant number of additional spaces for primary school

and post-primary school children in the wider area.

4.1.6 Conclusion

There are 5 No. existing primary schools, and 1 No. existing post-primary school in the catchment area, to which the subject site belongs. These facilities cater to a student population of 1,557 No. primary school students and 1,158 No. post-primary school students and have demonstrated different levels of growth in the recent 5-year period, with primary school enrolments decreasing by 15.3% and post-primary school enrolments increasing by 8.3% over the same period.

With respect to future enrolments, it is projected within the latest Department of Education and Skills' *Projections for Full-Time Enrolment: Primary and Second Level, 2021–2040* that the region will experience a c. 9.4% decrease in primary school enrolments and a c. 2.1% decrease in post-primary school enrolments between the academic years 2023/2024 and 2027/2028, and will continue to fall gradually to a low point by 2039 (Figure 4.4), with respect to the most recent regional population projections published by the DES. **The visible decline in enrolments at primary school level is in line with government demographic projections, and is expected to continue to 2033. Post-primary school enrolments are projected to peak in 2024/2025, and it is thus likely that Meath will see a marked reduction in the need for places into the remainder of the decade.**

There are no new schools currently proposed within the subject Ratoath SPA. However, we note that there were 2 no. new primary schools and 1 no. new post-primary schools recently opened within the neighbouring feeder areas of Dunshaughlin SPA and Ashbourne SPA to meet the needs of future residents. The nearby Colaiste Rioga noted capacity for 1,000 students upon completion, with just 112 students currently enrolled as of the latest 2023/2024 academic year; indicating ample capacity. A number of other primary and post primary schools are currently earmarked at design stages within DES school building programme as of November 2023, indicating further planned additional capacity in the coming years to the neighbouring SPAs of Dunshaughlin and Ashbourne. The additional capacity being provided by all of these projects is being considered in the context of the projected future requirements in the area. Moreover, the planned infrastructure for Meath has already been specifically earmarked as a result of the demographic modelling carried out by the DES across various national, regional and local levels to cater for demand over the next 20 No. years.

Admissions Notices from schools within the catchment indicate a healthy combined total of **471 No. spaces available** for incoming Junior Infants/First Years, of which 243 No. spaces are available in primary schools and 228 No. spaces are available in post-primary schools.

The development has the potential to accommodate an estimated **127 No. school-aged children (including 75 No. primary school children and 52 No. post-primary school children)**, when fully occupied. It is our professional opinion that the potential school demand generated by the proposed development can readily be absorbed by the available and emerging capacity in existing schools and by the growing capacity that is becoming available in the SPA of Ashbourne, Dunshaughlin and Ratoath.

4.2 Childcare

This Assessment identifies 9 No. TUSLA registered childcare facilities within a 1–2 km 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 site. These facilities were reported as having a combined total capacity of 233 No. childcare

places at the time of the survey (January 2024). The demographic profile of this area provided in Section 3.0 also details a baseline for understanding the 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 was contacted to gather information on enrolment and vacancy in January 2024. We also note that the Meath 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.

As stated previously in Section 2.0, the *Childcare Facilities: 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 Meath County Council further advise that regard should be had to existing childcare provision when considering the delivery of new facilities as part of residential development in order to avoid overprovision.

This Assessment aims to determine what the nature of local supply and demand is within the catchment, in parallel with the estimation of 0–6-year-old residents that may reside in the proposed development. The total number of units in the development which are included in this estimation amounts to 123 No. (i.e. it excludes 1-bed units, as allowed for by policy, as they are unlikely to accommodate young families). In order to calculate the number of 0–6-year-old residents in the proposed development, the study utilises 3 No. key figures:

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 3.35 No. persons per unit¹¹ using the Census 2022); and
3. Proportion of the Study Area's population within the 0–6 years age cohort (determined as 7.93% 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 4.17, it is estimated that 33 No. children aged 0–6 years may reside in the proposed development (rounded from 32.7).

Description	No.	Value	Method
Units in Proposed Development ¹²	a	123	a
Average Household Size	b	3.35	b
Potential Residents (Number)	c	412	a * b = c
0–6 Years (% of Total Population)	d	7.93%	d
Potential 0–6 Years (Number)	e	32.7	d * c = e

Table 4.17: Estimation of Children Aged 0–6 Years in the Proposed Development

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

4.2.1 Estimated Childcare Demand Generated

However, the above observations only provide an indication of how many children of pre-school age may reside at the development, not an indication of the demand / realised requirement for childcare places. Further analysis is required to better understand this.

In 2023, the Central Statistics Office, as part of the latest Census release, provided a detailed

¹¹ CSO statistics record a total of 10,199 No. residents in 3,041 No. households within the catchment in 2022.

¹² In line with Policy, a figure of 100 No. units was used in the calculations, discounting those units with only 1-bedroom.

statistical module¹³ on the rates of take-up for childcare at a national and 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 formal 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 4.18) shows the range of methods parents use for the purposes of childcare for their pre-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
Meath	56%	10%	3%	11%	19%	0%
State	55%	10%	2%	10%	22%	1%

Table 4.18: Type of Childcare Utilised By Parents of Pre-School Children

(Source: CSO, 2023)

The Study indicates that the vast majority of pre-school children across Ireland are cared for by their parents or partners of their parents. Nationally, 22% of pre-school children attend a childcare facility, although this rate is lower at 19% in Meath. 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 4.19 applies the CSO's 19% figure for Meath to the estimated number of residents aged 0–6 years old¹⁴ in the proposed development, as determined under the quantitative demographic analysis above. The results indicate a potential demand for c. 7 No. childcare places to be available to support the additional local need (value rounded from 6.2).

Description	Ref.	Value	Method
Units in Proposed Development*	a	123.0	A
0–6 Years (Number)	b	32.7	B
0–6 Years Total at 19%	c	6.2	b *19% = c

Table 4.19: Number of Pre-School Children Requiring Access to Childcare Facilities

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

4.2.2 Existing Childcare Facilities

Table 4.20 below provides facility-level detail for each of the existing childcare facilities identified in the study alongside indicative capacity. Figure 4.5 identifies each of these facilities on a map as they relate to the subject site. This assessment identifies 5 No. TUSLA registered childcare facilities within a 1 km radius of the subject site and a further 4 No. within the wider 2 km area, and 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 site. These facilities were reported as having a combined total capacity of 285 No. childcare places at the time of the survey (January 2024).

¹³ CSO Census of Population, 2022. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp3/censusofpopulation2022profile3-householdsfamiliesandchildcare/childcare/>

¹⁴ This analysis adopts the rate of formal childcare utilisation for children aged 0–8 years old for County Meath. While a like-for-like analysis of those aged 0–6 would be ideal, the CSO only provides outputs for specific cohorts (specifically, 0–2, 3–4, 5–8, 9–14, and under age 15 cohorts). In order to capture the key demographic of formal 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.

TUSLA ID	Childcare Facility	Distance (km)	Service Type	Current Enrolment	Facility Additional Capacity
TU2015MH058	Fox Lodge Manor Montessori & Playschool	0.11	Full Day / Part Time / Sessional	58	6
TU2015MH067	Happy Days (Ratoath)	0.85	Part Time / Sessional	37	0
TU2015MH076	Home from Home Daycare	1.37	Full Day / Sessional	36	0
TU2015MH117	Little Robyn'z Montessori	0.84	Sessional	7	No Data
TU2015MH134	Millview Childcare	1.16	Full Day / Part Time / Sessional	16	0
TU2015MH157	Ratoath Childcare Centre Limited Building B	0.21	Full Day / Sessional	67	56
TU2015MH171	Seagrave Montessori	1.26	Sessional	12	No Data
			Total (Within Catchment)	223	62

* Source: Combination of: TUSLA Inspections (Based on AM) and TUSLA Listing (January 2024) Provided By Meath County Council.

Table 4.20: Current Capacity of Existing Childcare Facilities in a 1–2 km Study Area

(Source: TUSLA Inspections (Based on AM) and TUSLA Listing (January 2024) Provided By Meath County Council, Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

Consultation with each of the childcare facilities in the catchment area indicated no notable spare capacity for new enrolments as of January 2024. The most significant concern raised in the audit by the childcare facilities, and by Meath Childcare Committee, related to limitations related to staffing, rather than floorspace or physical facilities. For example, the childcare facility located directly adjacent the site (Ratoath Childcare Centre) has a physical capacity for 123 No. children but currently just over 50% of that limit is enrolled. Notably, 2 No. other facilities were identified in the audit, but we're forced to close during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of the LRD Opinion, it was highlighted by the Council through an audit carried out by the Meath Childcare Committee that there was an overall capacity in Ratoath for 314 No. childcare places and a vacancy of 41 No. childcare places. Both studies (carried out at different times) highlighted that there is high level of per capita enrolment capacity based on population, and also sufficient available capacity identified to support the limited demand generated by the proposed development.

The subject site is located directly adjacent 2 No. existing childcare providers (Ratoath Childcare and Fox Lodge Manor Montessori & Playschool). Based on consultations, Ratoath Childcare has the floorspace and insurance capacity to provide a further 56 No. childcare places within the existing childcare facility. Therefore, it is not a case that additional childcare facilities need to be provided, as adequate physical space exists to accommodate any future children. Rather, it is a case that additional staff need to be encouraged to work in the town, a matter than falls entirely outside the remit of planning and this Planning Application. This is confirmed in the letter from Ratoath Childcare included as Appendix A to this report.

On this very point, we contend that providing a childcare facility as part of the proposed development would be contrary to proper and sustainable planning and development. It would result in an oversupply of childcare facilities in the town (especially noting a new facility is forthcoming – see below), thereby undermining existing operations and damaging their viability and sustainability into the future. It would also result in a lost opportunity due to the omission of residential dwelling to accommodate date.

4.2.3 Planned Facilities Network

An examination of Meath County Council's Online Planning Register shows the childcare planning

and development pipeline consists of 1 No. Planning Application in the Study Area as of February 2024. If this development is delivered, the childcare capacity of the settlement would increase to 286 No. childcare spaces.

As illustrated in Table 4.21 below, the proposed childcare facility relates to a new facility in a large residential development. 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 additional capacity in both the existing and planned network to accommodate the minor uplift in demand generated by the proposed development.

Plan Ref.	Status	Location	Final Grant Date	Description	Residential Units	Operator Estimated Capacity
Within 1km Study Area						
SH305196/0	Granted	Jamestown, Ratoath Co Meath	20/07/2023	1 No. Childcare Facility (343 sq m)	228	63

Table 4.21: Childcare Planning and Development Pipeline – January 2024 in the Study Area

(Source: Meath County Council – January 2024)

4.2.4 County Childcare Facilities (Enrolments and Vacancy)

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth was contacted during this analysis, and they directed us to the 'Early Years Sector Profile Report 2020/2021' (May 2022)¹⁵ which provides detail in relation to childcare capacity in the County. Surveys carried out as part of this Report illustrated that, at the time of the Survey, there were 181,565 No. 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 No. children. At the time of the Survey, services reported that the number of vacant places tripled to 38,935 No. between 2018/2019 and 2021¹⁶. By comparison, the number of children enrolled decreased by 24,736 No. in the same period. The average number of children per service stood at 41 No.

There were 3,549 No. children enrolled across early years services in Meath in 2021, a 49.2% decrease on the previous release (from 2018/2019), with a total capacity for 4,161 No. children at the end of 2021. Table 4.22 below highlights the current capacity and vacancy at the time of the survey within the childcare infrastructure in Meath. At the end of 2021, there was a c. 17.3% rate of vacancy, with 612 No. places available for incoming students.

Area	Capacity	Enrolled	Vacant places	Vacancy rate
Meath	4,161	3,549	612	17.3%

Table 4.22: County Breakdown of Meath Childcare Enrolments – 2021

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

¹⁵ 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

¹⁶ 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.

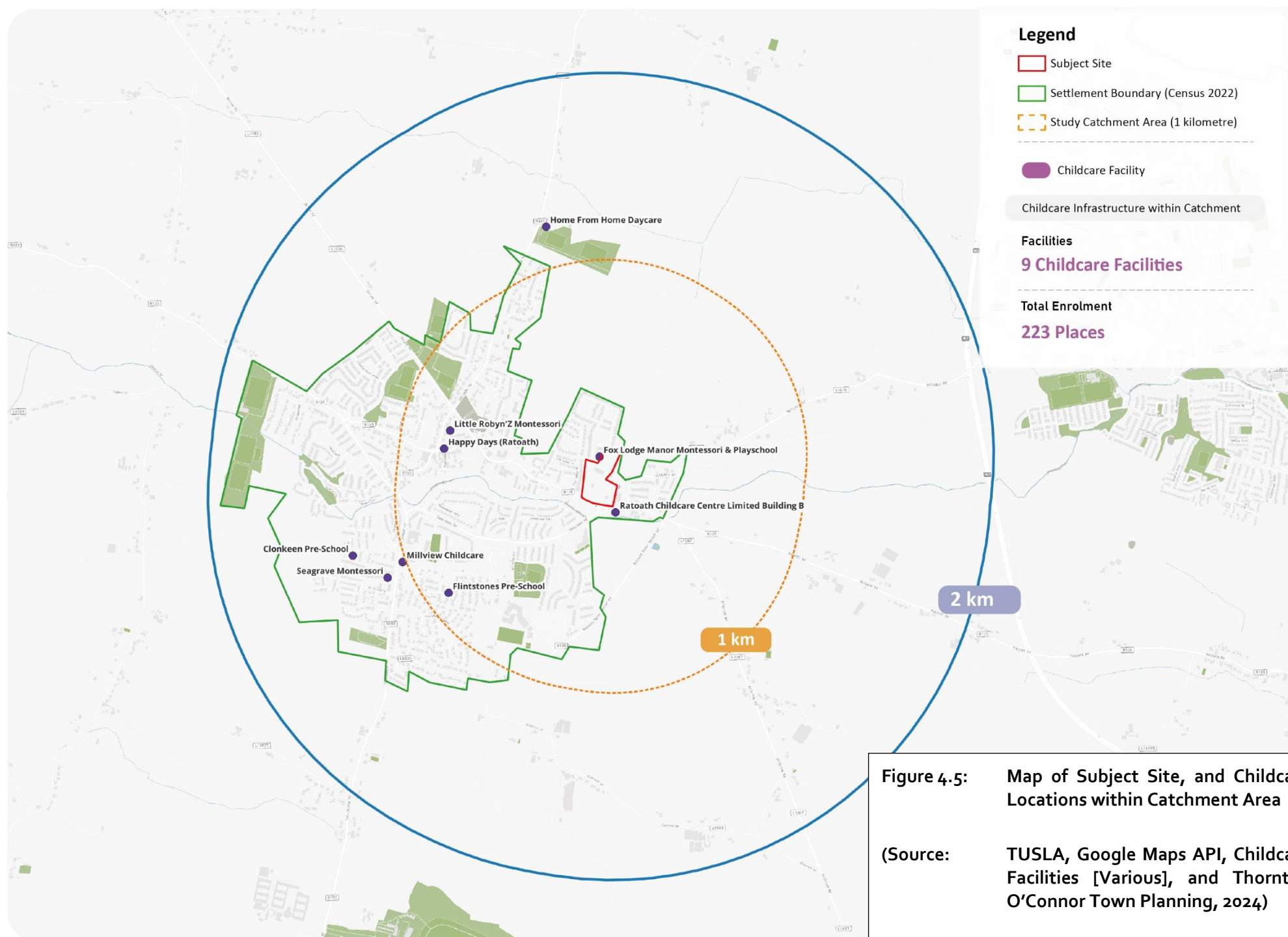


Figure 4.5: Map of Subject Site, and Childcare Locations within Catchment Area

(Source: TUSLA, Google Maps API, Childcare Facilities [Various], and Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

4.2.5 Conclusion

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. The proposed development comprises 141 No. units, of which 123 No. units can reasonably accommodate families. As per policy, there is no requirement to include one-bedroom units in any analysis of the likely generated demand on childcare facilities that may arise from a proposed new residential development.

Over the past 6 No. years (between 2016–2022), the population of the Study Area increased by 5.7% to 10,199. In 2022, the proportion of the population aged between 0–6-years old was estimated to be 7.93%. 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 (3.35 No. persons per household) and the percentage of 0–6-year-olds (7.93%) in the Study Area, a calculation was made to estimate that the proposed development could accommodate 33 No. 0–6-year-old children.

It should be noted that the recently released Census 2022 data from the Central Statistics Office illustrates a 36.7% decrease in population aged between 0-6 in Ratoath over the past 6 years (from 1,262 to 799 children), indicating a significantly decreased demand for childcare places in the town. This is likely to further decrease in line with the projected decline in the proportion of this cohort of the population in the coming years.

Further analysis released by the CSO, based on Census 2022, indicated that 19% of children in Meath attend a childcare facility. This would mean that from the potential 33 No. 0–6-year-olds residing at the proposed development, only **7 No. children may attend a childcare facility**.

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 is substantial (38,935 No. places). Meath has a vacancy rate in excess of 17.3% indicating a strong capacity to support more children within the existing childcare infrastructure.

The subject site is located directly adjacent 2 existing childcare providers. 'Ratoath Childcare' can provide a further 56 No. childcare places within the existing childcare facility building footprint on the overall landholding at this location. Therefore, there will be no market demand for another purpose-built childcare facility at this location when the proposed development is constructed and occupied.

Currently there are 9 No. childcare facilities in Ratoath which provide a combined total of approximately 223 childcare places together with an unknown number of unregistered Childminders in the area. There is a permitted childcare facility nearby (permitted under Ref: SH305196/0) which will provide for 63 future childcare places.

Given the relatively minimal demand for additional childcare places generated by the proposed development, existing capacity, the available capacity and the planned capacity it is not considered necessary to add further purpose-built childcare at this location.

The proposed development comprises 141 No. units, of which 123 No. units can reasonably accommodate families. The potential childcare uptake of the proposal is likely to be 7 No. places, and the local childcare network has an indicative capacity of 223 No. spaces. The childcare planning and development pipeline indicates 1 No. additional facility supporting 63 childcare places within the catchment area. While the survey did not identify large surpluses in available capacity within existing childcare facilities (January 2024), there was significant physical capacity identified for additional children in childcare facilities which appear to be limited by staffing constraints specifically. Given the level of existing childcare facilities in the town, the minimal childcare demand generated by the proposed development, the significantly changed demographic profile of the area, and the proposed additional childcare facility, 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.

4.3 Introduction – SIA

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. While an exact spatial area has not been defined by Meath County Council within the *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027*, it is judged that a c 1km radius is used as a development standard for future community and social audits in other administrative areas. Given that the subject site is located at the edge of a growing settlement, an additional indicative catchment of c. 2km has also 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 Ratoath.

The survey identified a large range of community facilities within the Study Area. Some 50 No. social infrastructure facilities were identified as part of this Audit within a radius of 1 km of the subject site (41 No. excluding schools and childcare), with that figure increasing to 66 No. social infrastructure facilities located within 2 km of the subject site (53 No. excluding schools and childcare). These facilities (excluding schools and childcare) are listed in Table 4.23 and mapped in Figure 4.6 below.

No.	Name of Asset	Facility Type
1	Ratoath Community Centre	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
2	An Post	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
3	Tattersalls Country House	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
4	Ratoath Allotments	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
5	Clarke Art	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
6	Ratoath Credit Union	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
7	The Venue Ratoath	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
8	Ratoath Motte and Bailey castle	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
9	Ratoath School of Music	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
10	Ratoath Scout Den	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
11	Ratoath Men's Shed	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
12	Fairyhouse Market	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
13	Holy Trinity Ratoath Parish Church	Faith
14	Ratoath Parish Cemetery	Faith
15	Ratoath Medical Centre	Healthcare and Emergency Services

No.	Name of Asset	Facility Type
16	Meadowbank Medical Centre	Healthcare and Emergency Services
17	Ratoath Vet Clinic	Healthcare and Emergency Services
18	Ratoath Orthodontics	Healthcare and Emergency Services
19	Ratoath Eyecare	Healthcare and Emergency Services
20	Ratoath Pharmacy	Healthcare and Emergency Services
21	Paul Kelly Veterinary Surgery	Healthcare and Emergency Services
22	Counselling - Calin Onitiu	Healthcare and Emergency Services
23	Silver Stream Healthcare Group Management	Healthcare and Emergency Services
24	Ratoath Dental and Implant Centre	Healthcare and Emergency Services
25	Kavanagh's Pharmacy	Healthcare and Emergency Services
26	Ratoath Manor Nursing Home	Healthcare and Emergency Services
27	Lillys Pharmacy & Health Store	Healthcare and Emergency Services
28	Ratoath Sports Injury Centre	Healthcare and Emergency Services
29	Ratoath Physiotherapy	Healthcare and Emergency Services
30	Stack's Pharmacy	Healthcare and Emergency Services
31	Ratoath Harps AFC Main Astro Pitches	Open Space and Recreation
32	Ratoath BMX	Open Space and Recreation
33	CLFitness	Open Space and Recreation
34	AllBodyPilates	Open Space and Recreation
35	Ratoath Athletic Club	Open Space and Recreation
36	Fit Kids Fit Teens Dance Classes	Open Space and Recreation
37	Ratoath Harps AFC	Open Space and Recreation
38	Ratoath Tennis Club	Open Space and Recreation
39	Ratoath Pitch & Putt Club	Open Space and Recreation
40	Ronnie Walsh Fitness	Open Space and Recreation
41	Ratoath Playground	Open Space and Recreation
42	Ger Conroy Fitness Ratoath	Open Space and Recreation
43	Ratoath Boxing	Open Space and Recreation
44	Ratoath Broadmeadow Riverwalk	Open Space and Recreation
45	Ratoath GAA	Open Space and Recreation
46	Ratoath RFC	Open Space and Recreation
47	Fairyhouse Racecourse	Open Space and Recreation
48	The Yoga Room	Open Space and Recreation
49	Ratoath Community Centre Campus	Open Space and Recreation
50	Tesco Express	Retail Centres and Services
51	Hannon's SuperValu Ratoath	Retail Centres and Services
52	Sweeney's Centra Ratoath	Retail Centres and Services
53	SPAR Maxol Forecourt	Retail Centres and Services

Table 4.23: Social and Community Infrastructure within c. 1–2 km Radius of the Subject Site

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

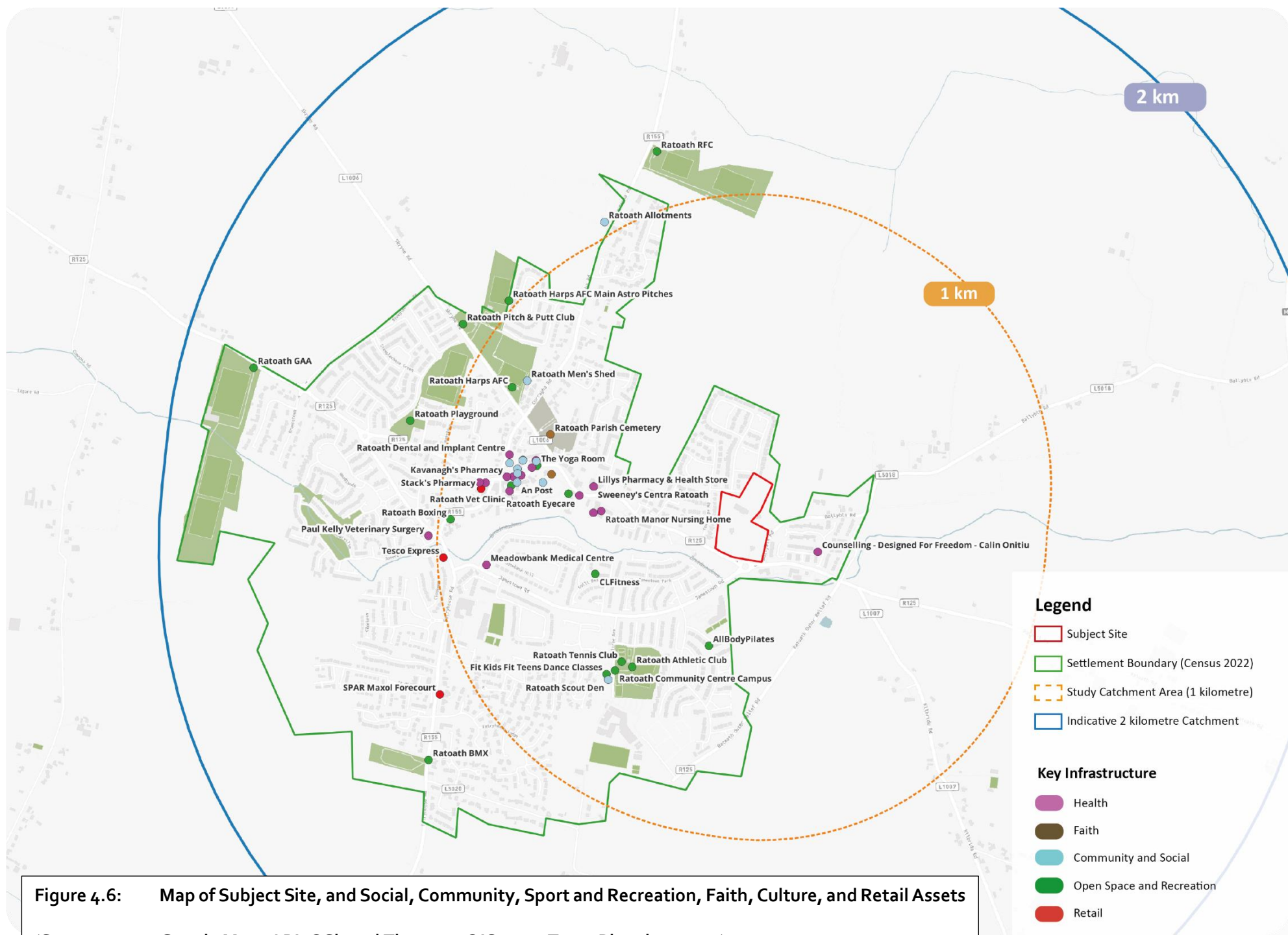


Figure 4.6: Map of Subject Site, and Social, Community, Sport and Recreation, Faith, Culture, and Retail Assets

(Source: Google Maps API, OSi, and Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

4.4 Social, Community and Culture Facilities

Access to quality community services and facilities can have a significant bearing on the quality of life and health and well-being of a community, by encouraging social interaction, promoting learning and providing support services for those living, working and visiting an area. An urban neighbourhood should be big enough to support a range of services and small enough to foster a sense of belonging and community; it should be sufficiently dense to enable all of its essential facilities to be within easy walking distance of the urban centre.

The baseline study undertaken identified 12 No. community and social services and facilities in the Study Area. The proposed development is supported by a number of local social and community service facilities, including the Ratoath Community Centre, the Ratoath Men's Shed, the Ratoath Scout Den, Ratoath Allotments and the Fairymore weekly market. Study Area is served by a small number of Arts & Culture facilities, including the Venue Theatre, Ratoath School of Music, Clarke Art School, Fit Teens Dance Class and other attractions like the Grotto and Tattersalls Ireland Country House.

The Ratoath Community Centre provides for a range of community activities including arts and culture. Many of these services can expand to accommodate future demand from the proposed developments. Moreover, the changing cultural profile of Ireland and Ratoath means that Local Authorities may need to facilitate the development of additional places to accommodate the diversity of ethnic backgrounds in the town. The centre is a multi-purpose facility catering for a wide range of community needs, including:

- Kids and community activities including – Childcare, Gymnastics, Taekwondo, Ballet, Pilates, Choir, Speech and Drama School, Youth Theatre.
- Community meeting hub – The hub encourages new groups to use the centre to hold small meetings free of charge during their set-up phase.
- Meeting Rooms – Rooms are suitable for arts and crafts, training, meetings and activities for all ages.

In addition to key community facilities, sustainable communities require a range of ancillary facilities and services such as state or local authority provided services e.g. credit unions, retail centres, recycling facilities, post offices and general community facilities. Ratoath has a post office, credit union and recycling facility.

Although a range of community assets were identified as part of this Audit, there is need to emphasise the ongoing and continued demand for new and improved community infrastructure in the area. Participation in community activities contributes to social cohesion, reduces isolation and enriches the lives of residents. As such, community infrastructure is a key social asset, and Audits such as this provide visibility on current assets, as well as potential gaps for the local area.

4.5 Healthcare and Emergency Services

Supported and facilitated by Local Authorities, access to quality health services and facilities is a key element to creating sustainable neighbourhoods. In total there is 13 no. healthcare facilities were identified in the baseline survey in the Study Area, these include Health Centres, Pharmacies, Speciality Clinics, and a Nursing Home.

A significant concentration of health facilities and infrastructure is located closer to the centre of the town, much of which is within walking distance to the subject site. These centres provide for an extensive range of services, including general medical, dental and optician services (as

examples). For specific specialist services, individuals will travel farther to specialised centres. The proposed development is located in close proximity to Dublin's wide range of health facilities and is close to the national motorway network and public transport provision by bus. This provides access to national public hospitals, private hospitals, centres of excellent, accident and emergency services, psychiatric hospitals, rehabilitation centres, orthopaedic hospitals and hospices.

Some 8 No. GPs are located in the 2 No. GP Practices and Medical Centre serving a population of 10,077 No. residents in 2022. This provides a marginally sub-optimal GP to resident population ratio of 1 GP for every 1,259 No. residents. The Oireachtas Health Committee recommends that an area should have between 1.02–1.1 GPs per 1,000 of resident population. Thus, general practice medical provision is considered below optimal. However, given the per capita provision in nearby Ashbourne it is likely that surrounding areas cater for the excess demand of resident populations from Ratoath. Moreover, an examination of Meath County Council's Online Planning Register for healthcare assets showed a consented permission (Reg. Ref. RA190359 / ABP Ref. 307599, Granted Planning in 2021) that includes a large Healthcare centre (1,613.7 sq m) with 12 No. consultation rooms within the centre of the town (Figure 4.7). If this scheme is delivered, it will provide the resident and future proposed population of Ratoath with ample GP and other medical space to meet its current and emerging requirements.

The proposed site for the Healthcare centre is also more conveniently located within the town centre and is a natural extension of the retail core, combining to bolster the sustainable mix of uses.



Figure 4.7: Map of Subject Site, Proposed Healthcare Facility within the Catchment Area

(Source: Google Maps API, DES, Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

This site of Reg. Ref. RA190359 / ABP Ref. 307599 would also provide healthcare services on a more suitable zoning designation. The objective within the *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027* for B1-zoned (Commercial/Town or Village Centre) lands is: “*To protect, provide for and/or improve town and village centre facilities and uses*”. We read this as being more supportive of delivering a range of land-uses and a broadening of local services, facilities and amenities to cater for the entire settlement and its hinterland. Furthermore, we note that ‘Health Centre’ and ‘Healthcare Practitioner’ are listed as permitted uses on lands zoned for B1 purposes. This would be a more appropriate zoning (than the subject site) for this specific use and is better located to serve the wider settlement area.

Further to the above point, we are mindful of the ample zoning of other B1 and G1 (Community Infrastructure) lands within the settlement of Ratoath. We are of the opinion that these other sites are appropriately located and have been given due consideration to support a mix of uses – and community-related uses specifically – during the plan-making process.

Finally, we contend that the delivery of additional healthcare spaces is principally the responsibility of the HSE and is also tied to local critical mass (i.e. scale of population) to warrant private operators establishing practices. On the former point, we stress that the matter is beyond the Applicant’s control and necessitates an active role by the HSE. On the latter point, the proposed development will actively increase the population, thereby improving the viability, feasibility and attractiveness of establishing GP clinics and other healthcare practices in the town.

Local Fire Station and Garda Station were identified outside the Study Area in the nearby settlement of Ashbourne during the baseline survey. Both of these facilities are located within 6 km of the subject site and would provide necessary emergency provisions as needed and are sufficient to support the needs of current and future residents.

As the demographic profile of the Study Area continues to change, it will be critical to ensure that the provision of health services and facilities takes into consideration not only the needs of the existing population but future demand for such services and facilities. As illustrated above, a range of health services and facilities are available within the Study Area. Irrespective of demographic change, the population increase that would occur as a result of the proposed development is unlikely to place any undue stress on the extensive range of health services and facilities available within and in the environs of the Study Area.

4.6 Open Space and Recreation

The town of Ratoath has a range of open space areas suitable for cycling, running and walking. For the purposes of this Study, open space and recreation facilities are considered to include parks, playgrounds, multi-use games areas, gyms, golf courses and sports pitches.

The availability of, and access to, affordable sports and recreation facilities that are within easy reach by walking, cycling and public transport is of considerable importance. In total, 19 No. sports and recreation facilities were identified in and around the Study Area during the baseline survey which include a wide range of sports clubs, a playground, a gym, pitch and putt courses, and a sports campus. Given the population and age profile of the Study Area there will be a continued requirement to provide a variety of sports and recreation facilities to cater for the needs of children, adults and the elderly. All of the facilities identified in the Audit seem to be of good quality and we are not aware of any known capacity issues at present.

The Ratoath community centre and multi-sports campus includes a community sports and physical activity hub building accommodating Ratoath Golden Gloves Boxing Club, other martial

arts sports, gymnastics, a gym area, meeting rooms, playground, and a small café. The outdoor area includes a 400m grass athletics track, a fully-equipped area developed for long jump, high jump, sprinting and conditioning, 5 No. tennis courts, 3 No. astro pitches, a rugby pitch and a spectator viewing area.

4.7 Faith Institutions

The predominant religion in the Republic of Ireland is Christianity, with the largest denomination being Catholicism. The second largest Christian denomination, the Church of Ireland (Anglican) has more recently experienced an increase, as have other small Christian denominations.

Within the Study Area 79.2% of the population identify as religious, and 71.3% within the Catholic faith. The timely provision of faith facilities is of considerable importance to ensuring the religious needs of the existing and future population is met. A total of 1 No. place of worship was identified within the Study Area during the baseline survey. The subject site is served by the Holy Trinity Church.

The church facilities appear to be in good condition, and we did not identify any capacity issues or specific unmet needs of note. However, the changing cultural profile of Ireland means that Local Authorities may need to facilitate the development of additional places of worship to accommodate different religions in the future.

4.8 Retail Centres and Services

Analysis of convenience retailing indicates that there is adequate provision within the Study Area. The offering within 1 km is largely classified as smaller top-up shopping, restaurants, take-aways, a butcher, chemists and personal services like hairdressers and post offices serving a localised catchment population (within walking distance of the site), but also includes a large SuperValu and Tesco Express for a full convenience retail experience. The nearby town of Ashbourne increases retail choice and has a substantial number of supermarkets with Lidl and Dunnes Stores all located within a short drivetime of the site. There was little retail vacancy identified. Moreover, it is considered that increasing the level of residential development in the area would contribute to the sustainability and viability of local businesses in the area.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This *Social Infrastructure Audit* has been completed with regard to national, regional and local policy relating to the provision of suitable community facilities. Consideration has also been made to the policies on social and community infrastructure in the *Meath County Development Plan 2021–2027*. The recommended types of facilities have been examined and the result of this *Social Infrastructure Audit* has identified that there is adequate existing capacity of these services and facilities within a reasonable catchment of the subject site. It is concluded that the existing and expanding school provision in the area is sufficient to cater for the needs of the current and future population of the area and the proposed development will be adequately catered for both in terms of school and childcare provision.

The baseline study undertaken identified a significant range of services and facilities which contribute to quality of life for local residents, comprising 50 No. facilities within close proximity to the subject site (1 km radius), and 66 No. facilities identified within a 2km radius. In our opinion, there is a sufficient existing provision of social infrastructure in the vicinity of the subject site (i.e. within a c. 1–2 km radius) to support the proposed development.

As the above survey demonstrates, there is an adequate supply of education, retail, and community facilities within reasonable walking distance of the subject site, as well as a number of parks and amenity areas, playing pitches and sporting facilities available to local residents. The area has a public transport link to quickly connect the subject site directly to a wider range of facilities located in nearby Ashbourne and Dublin City Centre. The proposed development will stitch into an already established community with adequate local facilities.

Overall, healthcare, sports and recreation, community, education, and other facilities are all well-represented within the area and cater for the existing and proposed new residential community. While the audit identified that childcare spaces were limited in Ratoath, on closer examination this appears to be a staff and organisational constraint as opposed to a shortfall of physical floorspace. Moreover, it is expected that the granted pipeline of new childcare facilities will further contribute to enrolment capacity into the future. Therefore, the addition of another facility as part of this development would further undermine the operational viability and feasibility of those existing and planned facilities and potentially result in a loss of opportunity at the subject site to deliver additional housing.

The proposed development also includes passive and active open spaces as well as pedestrian links throughout the site. Having regard to the above we submit that the Ratoath area provides a wide range of existing social and community infrastructure to support the development.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, it is important to continually ensure good accessibility to quality services and facilities, inclusive of but not limited to health services and facilities, education facilities, community facilities and sports and recreation facilities. **The size of the proposed development is unlikely to impact on the quality of services and facilities currently available in the locality.**

APPENDIX A – LETTER FROM RATOATH CHILDCARE



Jamestown, Ratoath, Co. Meath Tel: 01 825 6291

19/06/2024

To whom it may concern,

This letter states Ratoath Childcare Ltd situated at Jamestown, Ratoath, Meath operates at ratio capacity based on the number of staff we have employed. We have physical space available to cater for a higher number of children however cannot accommodate more children due to the limited number of staff available to us.

Should you have any queries regarding this letter please do not hesitate to contact me at any time on 01-8256291

Kind regards

Edel Matthews-Dunphy

Manager