



THORNTON O'CONNOR
TOWN PLANNING

Social Infrastructure Audit

Social Infrastructure Audit (incl. Schools and Childcare)

Prepared in Respect of a Proposed
Housing Development at Ravel, Dunleer,
Co. Louth.

Prepared on Behalf of Louth County Council

April 2024

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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 Louth County Council in support of a proposed housing development at Ravel, Dunleer, Co. Louth. 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; and
- 2024 HSE – ‘Find Your Local Health Service’

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 social infrastructure have been categorised into a defined number of typologies that correspond to those discussed in Chapter 4 of the *Louth 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, and reflects the latest social housing design guidance outlined by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage within the *Design Manual for Quality Housing* (2022) in terms of ‘sustainable neighbourhoods’. It is also aligned with the principles of the policy objectives for social infrastructure assessment outlined in Section 4.6 of the *Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027* (outlined in greater detail in Section 2).

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 Audit

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

1.2 Study Area and Accessibility

Dunleer is located along the R132 Regional Road, approximately 12.5 km north of Drogheda and approximately 1.2 km from the M1 Motorway at Exit 12. This development proposal is for lands located to the north-west of Dunleer, at R170 Road (Figure 1.1). The site is an open, greenfield site bounded by residential, commercial and educational uses. The subject site benefits from good accessibility with its close proximity to Drogheda on the R132 Regional Road. Dunleer bus stop is located within c. 350 m of the site which provides quality bus transportation from the town to larger urban centres (such as Drogheda) on Bus Éireann Route No. 100.

The immediate area is largely residential in nature comprising existing and newly developed housing estates, educational, commercial and agricultural uses.



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 kilometre radius of the subject site, equivalent to a c. 12- to 14-minute walking distance, which is considered accessible for future residents of the proposed development. A distance of c. 1 km has also been defined by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage as the optimal spatial assessment for evaluating social and community infrastructure. The guidance notes that accessibility and mobility of social housing tenants is considered more limited when compared to private occupiers. Access to public transport in rural areas is usually limited, yet access to private car is notably lower for social housing tenants.



Figure 1.2: Study Area

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

Dunleer is serviced by the Bus Éireann Route No. 100 and 100X services from Dundalk to Drogheda and Dublin to Dundalk. The site is located adjacent the northern Dunleer bus stop (c. 350 metres) which crosses from the north of the town, through the centre, and onward to the south of the town. This will provide convenient bus transportation access and connectivity to the subject site when the development is complete. This route will provide the resident population who do not have access to a private car a regular service to larger urban centres of Drogheda and Dundalk (and Dublin) offering higher order services, employment and education opportunity (Dundalk Institute of Technology, large supermarkets, GPs, hospitals, sports and community facilities). A trip from the Dunleer bus stop to Dundalk takes approximately 25 minutes. The town would benefit from improved bus infrastructure including a shelter and seating.

The site is to both the Dundalk and Drogheda train stations, which provide local and commuter services on the Dublin–Belfast railway line.

1.3 Proposed Development

The proposal intends to deliver a residential development on a c. 3.17 Ha development site. The site is predominantly zoned 'A2', with a portion to the west zoned 'A1', and a portion to the south zoned 'G1' under the *Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027*. A2 refers to 'new residential

phase 1' lands, which are to provide for new residential neighbourhoods and supporting community facilities. A1 refers to 'existing residential' lands, which are to protect and enhance the amenity and character of existing residential communities. G1 refers to 'community facilities' lands, which are to provide for and protect civic, religious, community, education, health care and social infrastructure. The development will consist of 70 No. residential units, with public and/or communal open space provided. The unit mix is provided in Table 1.2 below:

Unit Type	Number of Units	% of Total
2-bed (3- and 4-person) units	45	64%
3-bed (5-person) units	20	29%
4-bed (7-person) units	5	7%
Total units	70	100%

Table 1.2: Schedule of Accommodation

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

Per the Statutory Notices, Louth County Council intend to carry out the following development:

'The construction of 70no. houses including 9no. 2-bed bungalows, 24no. two storey 2-bed houses, 18no. two storey 3-bed houses, 5no. two storey 4-bed houses, and 2no. 3-bed bungalows, and 12no. sheltered accommodation 2-bed bungalows on a site of 3.17 hectares in the townland of Ravel, Dunleer, Co. Louth.

The development will also include the construction of new connections to the existing estate road; provision of new cycleway, footpath, and public lighting along the boundary with the R170; new estate roads and homezones within the site; 123no. car parking spaces including both on-street and in-curtilage parking; cycle parking; hard and soft landscaping including public open spaces, playground, and private gardens; boundary treatments; ESB substation; lighting; laying of underground sewers, mains and pipes; underground pump station and attenuation tank; and all associated works.'



Figure 1.3: Site Layout Plan

(Source: EML Architects, 2024)

1.4 Layout of this Report

The remaining Sections of the report will follow the approach outlined in Section 1.1 as a structural framework with the identification and categorisation of all current 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** provides principal conclusions.

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 *Louth 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. Principal elements of the NPF's overall strategy for spatial planning is to deliver compact growth that is integrated in terms of land-uses and transportation. The proposed development will correspond with this in that it will provide much needed social housing within an existing settlement proximal to Drogheda and Dundalk along the Dublin-Belfast / M1 corridor.

The NPF also identifies planning, development and placemaking priorities for the Eastern Midland Region, an area which the subject lands are located in, including: "*A focused approach to compact, sequential, and sustainable development of the larger urban areas along the Dublin – Belfast economic and transport corridor, along which there are settlements with significant populations such as Dundalk and Drogheda.*" The NPF promotes coordinated spatial planning, in particular through the development of "*critical mass and potential in the Dublin-Belfast Corridor, in particular the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network to compete with other large cities*". The subject site, located in Dunleer, forms part of a strategically selected area identified to accommodate future housing development.

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 social infrastructure, including access to educational facilities and childcare, as essential to good quality of life, and state that new development should take into consideration the SI needs of the community and the existing provision of same. Under the chapter titled 'Sustainable and Compact Settlements', the process for the delivery of successful quality placemaking is reviewed and the provision of key community facilities such as amenities, schools, crèches and other community services are referenced as forming essential elements. In applying this methodology, the guidelines note it will be necessary to make an "informed estimate of net developable area taking account of factors such as the need for roads and parks, schools" and planning for same.

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

- a) *"In city and town centres and at high capacity public transport nodes and interchanges (defined in Table 3.8), development should consist of high intensity mix-use development (residential, commercial, retail, cultural and community uses) that responds in scale and intensity to the level of accessibility. At major transport interchanges, uses should be planned in accordance with the principles of Transport Orientated Development.*
- b) *In city and town centres, planning authorities should plan for a diverse range of uses including retail, cultural and residential uses and for the adaption and re-use of the existing building stock (e.g. over the shop living). It is also important to plan for the activation of outdoor spaces and the public realm to promote more liveable city and town centres. Much of this can be achieved through the implementation of urban enhancement and traffic demand management measures that work together to free up space for active travel and create spaces that invite people to meet, mingle and dwell within centres.*
- c) *In areas that are less central, the mix of uses should cater for local services and amenities focused around a hierarchy of local centres that support residential communities and with opportunities for suitable non-residential development throughout.*
- d) *In all urban areas, planning authorities should actively promote and support opportunities for intensification. This could include initiatives that support the more intensive use of existing buildings (including adaption and extension) and under-used lands (including for example the repurposing of car parks at highly accessible urban locations that no longer require a high level of private car access).*
- e) *It will be important to align the integration of land uses and centres with public transport in order to maximise the benefits of public transport.*
- f) *The creation of sustainable communities also requires a diverse mix of housing and variety in residential densities across settlements. This will require a focus on the delivery of innovative housing types that can facilitate compact growth and provide greater housing choice that responds to the needs of single people, families, older people and people with disabilities, informed by a Housing Needs Demand Assessment (HNDA) where possible. Development plans may specify a mix for apartment and other housing developments, but this should be further to an evidence-based Housing Needs and Demand Assessment."*

This 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 Design Manual for Quality Housing

The *Design Manual for Quality Housing* (2022) seeks to promote a consistent approach nationally by local authorities and AHBs in respect of design priorities and space standards predominantly for social housing developments. The Manual sets out the urban design and placemaking priorities, consistent with compact growth, to assist in the delivery of high-quality and sustainable housing developments. With regards to the provision of community and social infrastructure the document notes that:

"...the site should be located close to as wide a range of facilities as possible, with the general minimum proximity to a school, shop and means of public transport. It is normally accepted that a ten-minute walk's distance, or about one kilometre, is the standard for what is considered proximate."

"From these requirements, it can be seen that peripheral locations are not generally supported, as their development is inconsistent with planning guidance and can place an unreasonable burden on residents who may not have access to private transport. Consistent with the Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework (NPF), town centres, brownfield sites and other locations with easy access to facilities are favoured. When considering the development of social housing in a small town or village, in addition to need, the local authority should be mindful of the extent to which facilities are available for tenants who may not have access to private transport. This is an even more important consideration in respect of housing for older people, who need easy access to a wide range of facilities."

Critically, it is noted that the mobility of social housing tenants to access services, facilities and amenities is considered to be generally more limited than private occupiers. Access to public transport in rural areas is usually limited, and access to private car is notably lower for social housing tenants. The analysis of social and community infrastructure carried out in this report refers to areas within a 1km radius of the proposed site. It is considered that this radius provides the best representation of local walkable infrastructure for future social housing resident population.

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;
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

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

"Planning authorities should require the provision of at least one childcare facility for new housing areas unless there are significant reasons to the contrary for example, development consisting of single bed apartments or where there are adequate childcare facilities in adjoining developments. For new housing areas, an average of one childcare facility for each 75 dwellings would be appropriate..."

"The threshold for provision should be established having regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas."

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

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

2.2 Regional Planning Policy

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

The *Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region* (RSES) states that social infrastructure plays an important role in developing strong and inclusive communities. In terms of the settlement hierarchy set out in the RSES (and supplemented by the *Louth County Development Plan 2021–2027*), Dunleer is identified as being a "Self-Sustaining Growth Town" which is a growing town with a high level of self-sustaining employment and services, good public transport, but is car dependent. The RSES refers to supporting the ongoing collaboration with regional stakeholders to ensure that SI such as education, health and community facilities are provided in tandem with the development of housing, and in particular to ensure that opportunities for social as well as physical regeneration are realised.

The RSES includes the following Regional Policy Objectives which relate to access to social infrastructure and its overall improvement:

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

RPO 9.18 – *"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 LECs to effectively plan for social infrastructure needs."*

RPO 9.20 – *"Support investment in the sustainable development of the Region's childcare services as an integral part of regional infrastructure to include:*

- *Support the Affordable Childcare Scheme.*
- *Quality and supply of sufficient childcare places.*
- *Support initiatives under a cross Government Early Years Strategy.*
- *Youth services that support and target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability.”*

Section 9.7 highlights that 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 *Louth County Development Plan 2011-2027*

The *Louth County Development Plan 2021–2027* (Development Plan) was adopted by the Elected Members of Louth County Council at a Special Council Meeting on 30th September 2021. The Plan came into effect on 11th November 2021. On 18th July 2022, the Elected Members of the Council adopted Variation No. 1 to the Development Plan, with the amendments consisting of updates to take account of the methodology and housing projections as set out in the Section 28 Guidelines *Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning* and the *Projected Housing Demand by Local Authority Area 2020-2031 - ESRI NPF Scenario Housing Supply Target* provided by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in December 2020. This was to ensure that the housing provision in the Development Plan is consistent with, and aligned with, national and regional policy.

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, as sought by Policy Objective CS 3:

“To support and manage the self-sufficient sustainable development of all settlements in a planned manner, with population growth occurring in tandem with the provision of economic, physical and social infrastructure.”

Given the aforementioned key priority of the Council to create sustainable neighbourhoods, the Development Plan also includes several Policy Objectives relating to the provision of SI, including, but not limited to:

Policy Objective SC 26 – *“To reserve sites for educational use in those areas identified for significant population increase or where there is likely demographic demand for further school places and to ensure the development of educational facilities to meet the educational requirements of the citizens of County Louth.”*

Policy Objective SC 35 – *“To support and facilitate the sustainable provision of childcare facilities in*

appropriate and suitable locations and seek their provision concurrent with new residential development, all having regard to the Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001) and Childcare Regulations (2006) and any subsequent guidelines, in consultation with the Louth County Childcare Committee. Such facilities will be directed to settlements identified in the Settlement Hierarchy."

Policy Objective SC 40 – *"To support the provision of healthcare facilities on suitable lands within the existing Level 1, 2, 3 and 4 Settlements and on sites convenient to pedestrian and public transport."*

Policy Objective SC 25 – *"To ensure that adequate lands are zoned and reserved to cater for the establishment, improvement and expansion of all educational facilities in the County."*

Policy Objective SC 7 – *"To reserve lands for social and community facilities and encourage the provision of facilities suitable for intergenerational activities accessible to all members of the community in appropriate locations"*

Policy Objective SC8 – *"To support the planning provision of easily accessible social, community, cultural and recreational facilities and ensure that all communities and all ages have access to a range of facilities that meet the needs of the communities they serve, are physically integrated with residential and employment areas and are provided concurrently with new residential development."*

Policy Objective SC9 – *"To support the sharing and clustering of social and community facilities at appropriate locations to improve viability of and accessibility to these facilities"*

Policy Objective SC12 – *"To consider the cultural diversity and ethnic minorities in planning for the needs of communities and ensure community facilities and social services provided are accessible for all individuals, communities and sectors of society."*

Policy Objective SC16 – *"To support the provision of playgrounds in a variety of land use zoning categories where appropriate."*

Policy Objective SC20 – *"To support and facilitate the provision, improvement and expansion of sports and recreational facilities, in particular through land use zoning, where appropriate."*

The proposed development is consistent with the abovementioned policy objectives. It provides for high-quality social housing, on lands zoned for residential use in Dunleer, in accordance with the Core Strategy of the Development Plan, and in close proximity to the range of social and community infrastructure. The proposed development will provide needed housing development to support the existing and future population, and Louth's role in driving economic growth along the Dublin-Belfast corridor.

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 assessment of the subject lands was examined using the Census 2016 and 2022 results, as the latest Census available on the CSO website. The scope of the assessment is determined by overlaying the 1km radius buffer zone over the development lands and assessing the relevant spatial unit in demographic analysis. For the subject site, the CSO defined Settlement of Dunleer 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 CSO Settlement Area) is also compared to wider trends within Louth County below.

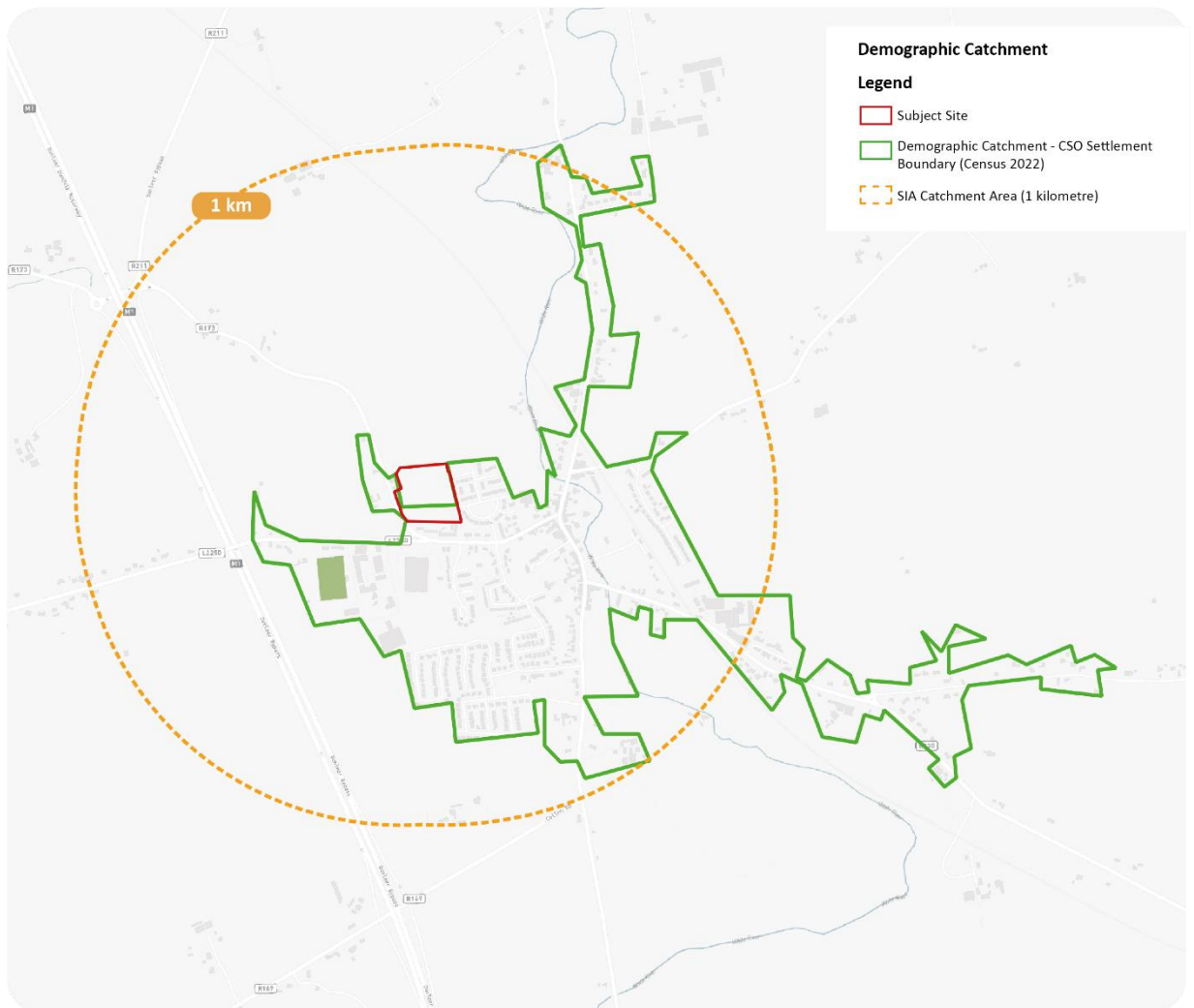


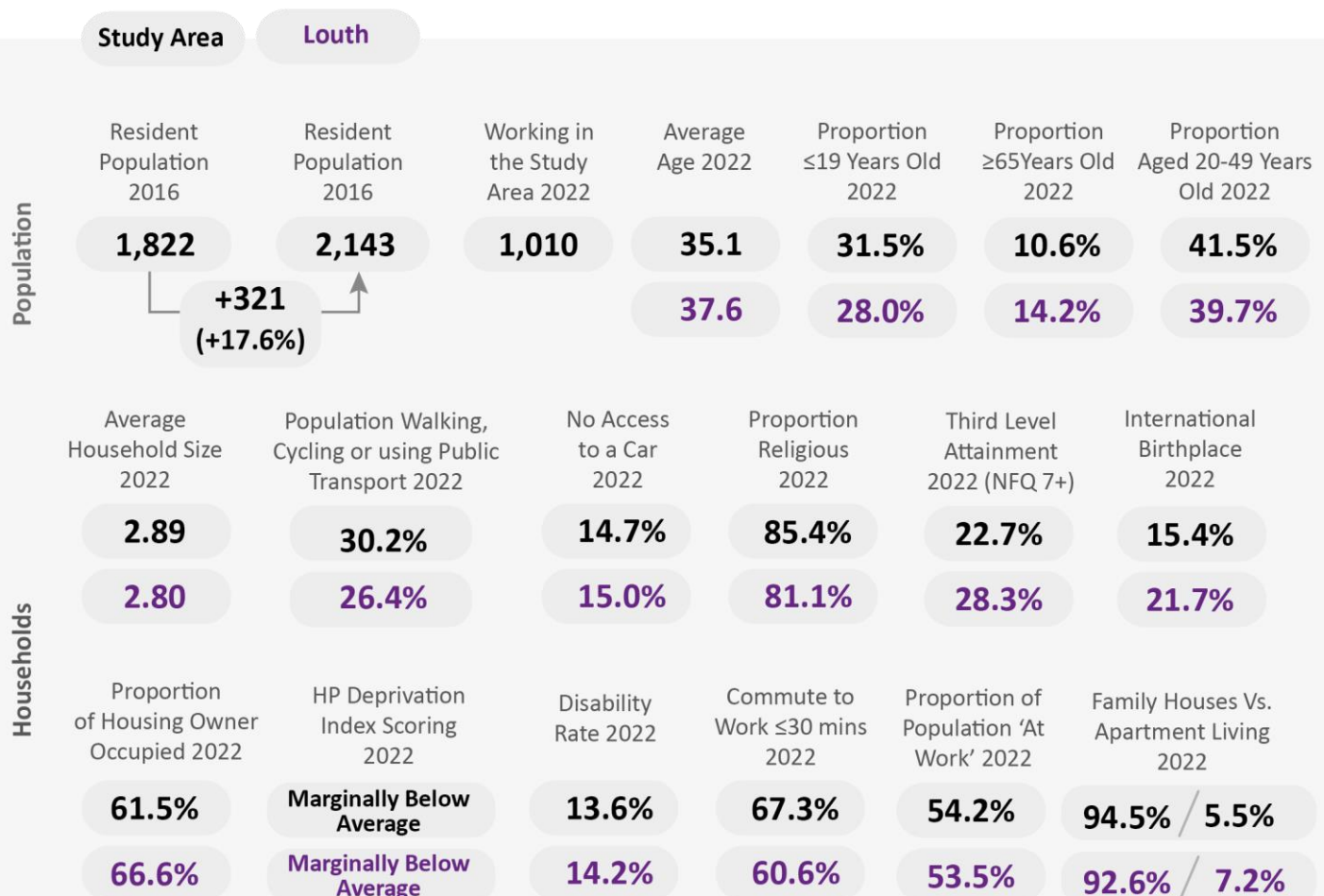
Figure 3.1 Extent of Demographic Study Area comprising the CSO defined Settlement of Dunleer

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

3.1 Demographic Drivers

To fulfil the strategic priorities of Louth 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 Louth 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.

There has been a strong population growth in Louth between 2016-2022 during which the population increased from 128,884 to 139,703. This is an increase of 10,819 persons (8.4%). The annual average population increase during this period was 1,803 persons. This rate of growth is much higher than that which took place between 2011-2016, when the population increased by 5,987 persons (4.9%). Population growth in the County has been concentrated in the larger urban settlements, with 57.5% (6,219 persons) of the population growth taking place in Drogheda and Dundalk. This is consistent with the growth strategy of the Development Plan, which seeks to create a critical mass of population in the Regional Growth Centres. The smaller urban centres in the County are also experiencing strong levels of growth with almost 20% of the population increase occurring in the Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns, and Small Towns. The population of the rural/countryside areas also continues to grow with 22.9% of the population growth (2,474 persons) taking place there.



Over the same period, the population within the Study Area grew at a much more rapid rate of 17.6% (321 No. additional persons). The analysis of CSO data illustrates a strong representation of working age population within the 20-65 age groupings, with 60.8% of total resident population classified within these age cohorts. The 20-49 age cohort further highlights this concentration of young professionals, with 41.5% of total population classified in this group. The area has a low average age at 35.1 with a low proportion of population in older age cohorts. Some 24.2% of the population is aged under 14 years old and just 10.6% of the population are aged over 65 years old.

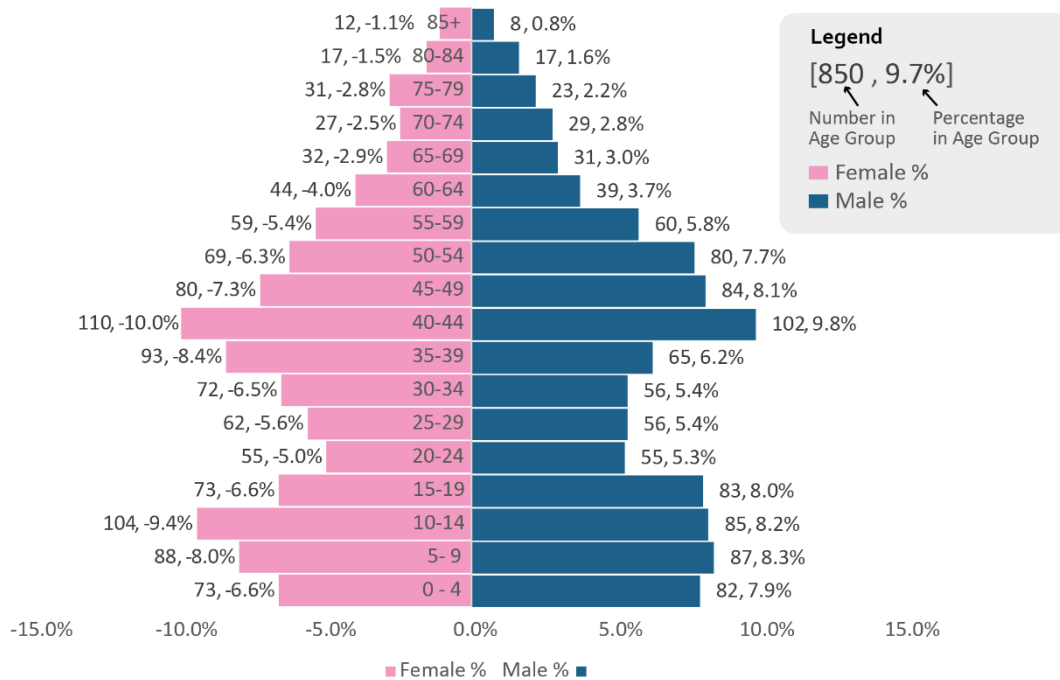


Figure 3.1 Population of the Study Area by Age 2022.

(Source: CSO, 2022)

Given the proximity of the Study Area to one of the principal economic and employment opportunities in County Louth, this increase in the population of working age is likely to continue into the future. The proportion of population under 14 years of age has remained static at 24.3% since 2016, but increased in absolute terms over that period, indicating sustained 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 94.5% of dwellings in 2022 registered as such. The average household size in 2016 was 2.89 persons per household, above the average for Louth County. Some 18.1% of all household consist of 1 person, with 33.2% of all households consisting of 4 or more persons living together.

Household Type	Study Area Households 2022	Louth County Households 2022
1 Person Households	18.1%	22.7%
2 Person Households	29.5%	27.0%
3 Person Households	19.2%	18.8%
4 Person Households	18.8%	17.6%
5+ Person Households	14.5%	14.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.1 Persons Per Household 2022 in the Study Area and Louth County

(Source: CSO, 2022)

Compositional data indicates that 50.3% of all households have children, with a further 22.0% 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 consisting predominantly in the pre-family stage, or families with children.

The economic profile 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 2016 (54.2%). Yet, the percentage of people unemployed in the area is higher (8.4%) than Louth County (6.5%). Similarly, the percentage of people retired in the Study Area is lower (12.0%) than Louth County (15.6%). The percentage of students (9.9%) in the Study Area is lower than the percentage of students in Louth County (11.4%).

When reviewing the levels of educational attainment, the largest proportion of residents had completed 'Third Level' education (38.4%) in 2022 (Table 3.2). This is marginally lower than the levels of educational attainment in Louth County, with 39.0% of the population having completed 'Third Level' education. It should be noted that just 6.1% of the population has also completed 'Post-graduate Education or Higher' at the time of the Census, compared to 8.7% in Louth County and just 4.4% were recorded as having 'No Formal Education'. These figures indicate a high level of educational attainment in the Study Area, and comparable to (but slightly lower than) the average for the County as a whole.

Education Level	Study Area	% of Total	Louth County	% of Total
No Formal Education	59	4.4%	2,940	3.3%
Primary Education	148	11.0%	7,873	8.8%
Secondary Education	496	36.9%	30,385	33.8%
Third Level Education (Any Level)	516	38.4%	35,024	39.0%
Postgraduate or Higher	82	6.1%	7,861	8.7%
Not Stated	43	3.2%	5,807	6.5%
Total	1,344	100.0%	89,890	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 Electoral Divisions) that is classified as 'Marginally Below Average' indicating the area is below average in educational attainment, unemployment, age, rates of disability, etc. relative to other parts of the country.

Within the study area, just 9.9% of the population identify as 'Not Religious' with the remaining 85.4%¹ identifying as religious and likely have some need for religious place of worship. Equally, ensuring there is adequate SI to help diverse communities feel included and empowered is critical. The Study Area has a small international community with 15.4% of the local population born outside of Ireland.

Some 30.2% of people rely on green modes of transport for daily activities, with 'Bike' (1.4%), 'Walking' (21.7%), and 'Public Transport' (7.1%) making up a large portion of transportation. Daily commuting patterns show 67.3% of trips to work/school are under 30 minutes, with just 9.9% indicating a travel time of over an hour. Trips by 'Private Car (Driver or Passenger)' constitute just 55.6% of all daily movements.

The daytime population of the Study Area was registered at 2,561 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 1,010 persons are employed within the Study Area, classifying it as a medium scale employer in Louth County. Those working in the area largely do so in either 'manufacturing, mining and quarrying' (39.0%) or 'wholesale, retail trade' (20.1%).

3.2 Summary

The majority of the population in the catchment of the Study Area are living in low density family housing estates. They are more likely to live in owner-occupied family houses, rather than private or socially renting, than recorded nationally. The significant majority of households have access to at least one car and their daily movements would be classified as car dependent. Population in the catchment has grown over the past 6 years by 321 No. persons, largely living within the 82 No. new units recorded as completed since 2016. The population has lower than average levels of ethnic diversity corresponding with a higher than average proportion of persons stating their country of birth as Ireland. The population of the Study Area are characterised by a young population within the active workforce age bracket, and a large minority are young families with children. A low proportion of population in older age groups indicating a potentially lower demand for health facilities and aged care in the Study Area. Jobs in the catchment reflect the major employers in the area (Dimplex, and various retail) requiring a mix of skill levels, but including those with manufacturing skillsets. The area is classified as 'Marginally Below Average' in terms of affluence and deprivation, signifying below average rates of educational attainment, employment, and family structures, and usually indicates a greater demand for social infrastructure for resident populations.

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.

¹ 4.7% of the population were classified as 'Not Stated' in 2022 and constitute the remaining percentage value

4.0 FACILITIES AUDIT

As stated previously, the subject site, measuring c. 3.17 Ha, is located to the north-west of Dunleer, at the R170 Regional Road. The site is an open, greenfield site bounded by residential, commercial and educational uses. The subject site benefits from good accessibility due to its close proximity to Drogheda on the R132 Regional Road. The closest bus stop in Dunleer is located within c. 350 metres of the site which provides quality bus transportation from the town to larger urban centres (such as Drogheda) on Bus Éireann Route No. 100. The development will consist of 74 No. dwellings, with public and/or communal open space provided.

The Study Area for this assessment is defined by a c. 1 kilometre radius of the subject site, equivalent to a c. 12- to 14-minute walking distance considered accessible to future residents of the proposed development. National guidance notes that accessibility and mobility of social housing tenants is considered more limited when compared to private occupiers. Access to public transport in rural areas is usually limited, and access to private car is notably lower for social housing tenants. Therefore, the local provision of SI is important to meet the needs of the community.

The survey identified a large range of community facilities within the study area. A total of 7 No. categories of facilities that align with the policies set out in the Development Plan, were utilised for this audit. The baseline study undertaken identified a range of services and facilities which contribute to quality of life for local residents, comprising 31 No. facilities within close proximity to the subject site. Some 11 No. childcare and school assets were identified, in addition to 20 No. other supporting social and community infrastructures within the respective catchment.

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 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)

Context Map

Legend

-  Subject Site
-  Bus Eireann - Local Transport Network
-  Study Catchment Area (1 kilometre)

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 development 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. Developing a county level profile of per capita enrolment;
2. Defining a Study Area using relevant spatial jurisdictions and accessibility criteria;
3. A demographic and socio-economic evaluation of the composition of population within the Study Area;
4. Determining the extent and provision of existing educational facilities and schools within the Study Area; and
5. 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 lands 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 Louth County Enrolment Capacity

In order to better understand the level of provision of school places in County Louth, an analysis of per capita infrastructure provision was carried out. A County level profile, using Census 2022 data and DES total enrolments data was generated to compare school capacity with age cohort specific populations. The total (primary and post-primary) school enrolment for 2022 was divided by the respective student population, aged 5-12 years old for primary schools and 13-18 years old for post-primary school. This produced a ratio of school enrolment to the student population, and facilitated a comparative analysis of State and intercounty provision. See Table 4.2 for further details.

The analysis indicates that Louth has the third highest ratio of primary school places per child aged 5-12 resident in the country. Moreover, that some 20 of 31 Local Authority areas have a negative primary enrolment ratio in 2022, and 21 of 31 Local Authority areas have a negative post-primary enrolment ratio. The ratio of 1.04 would indicate that Louth generally has high capacity to support its total student population. Similarly, Louth has the second highest ratio of post-primary school places per person aged 13-18 resident in the county. The ratio of 1.13 is 13% above a 1-to-1 ratio, and implies that Louth is a net 'importer' of second level students from neighbouring counties, and that it has high capacity to support its total student population.

Louth demonstrates a strong surplus provision of both primary and post primary places in 2022, and sufficient capacity to meet the capacity requirements for its entire resident student

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 are included in this list. Data was published June 2023.

population. While there is a need to consistently monitor this ratio, the wider deficit in capacity that exists at a national scale, is not resulting from an under provision in Louth. In 2022, Louth has enough capacity for its entire resident student population.

Area	Population Age 5-12	Primary School Enrolments 2022	Primary Ratio	Population Age 13-18	Post-primary School Enrolments 2022	Post primary Ratio
Carlow	6,882	7,469	1.09	5,390	6,479	1.20
Cavan	9,944	9,918	1.00	7,330	6,474	0.88
Clare	14,093	13,366	0.95	10,994	9,401	0.86
Cork City	20,520	13,837	0.67	15,202	12,135	0.80
Cork County	43,483	48,361	1.11	31,953	34,742	1.09
Donegal	19,038	18,729	0.98	14,807	14,210	0.96
Dublin City	47,870	46,632	0.97	34,711	32,300	0.93
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	23,756	20,514	0.86	17,111	16,819	0.98
Fingal	42,248	36,699	0.87	29,301	27,454	0.94
Galway City	7,202	7,465	1.04	5,486	6,120	1.12
Galway County	22,691	22,672	1.00	17,153	16,147	0.94
Kerry	16,062	15,898	0.99	12,560	12,026	0.96
Kildare	29,985	29,290	0.98	22,391	21,305	0.95
Kilkenny	12,075	10,983	0.91	9,082	8,549	0.94
Laois	11,606	10,960	0.94	8,593	6,722	0.78
Leitrim	4,024	3,843	0.96	2,959	2,855	0.96
Limerick City and County	22,033	22,505	1.02	16,636	17,173	1.03
Longford	5,546	5,270	0.95	4,150	4,419	1.06
Louth	16,370	16,949	1.04	12,668	14,257	1.13
Mayo	14,796	14,551	0.98	11,102	11,086	1.00
Meath	28,536	26,515	0.93	20,538	17,134	0.83
Monaghan	7,924	7,896	1.00	5,721	5,959	1.04
Offaly	9,702	9,315	0.96	7,433	6,800	0.91
Roscommon	7,971	7,985	1.00	5,911	4,566	0.77
Sligo	7,480	7,345	0.98	5,675	5,629	0.99
South Dublin	36,054	35,041	0.97	25,696	24,625	0.96
Tipperary	18,566	18,178	0.98	14,355	15,099	1.05
Waterford City and County	13,879	13,919	1.00	10,844	10,175	0.94
Westmeath	11,180	11,286	1.01	8,150	8,857	1.09
Wexford	18,292	18,128	0.99	14,192	14,017	0.99
Wicklow	18,376	17,670	0.96	13,626	12,923	0.95
Ireland	568,184	549,189	0.97	421,720	406,457	0.96

Table 4.2: Comparative Analysis of Per Capita Enrolments Data for Louth

(Source: DES, 2022, and CSO, 2022)

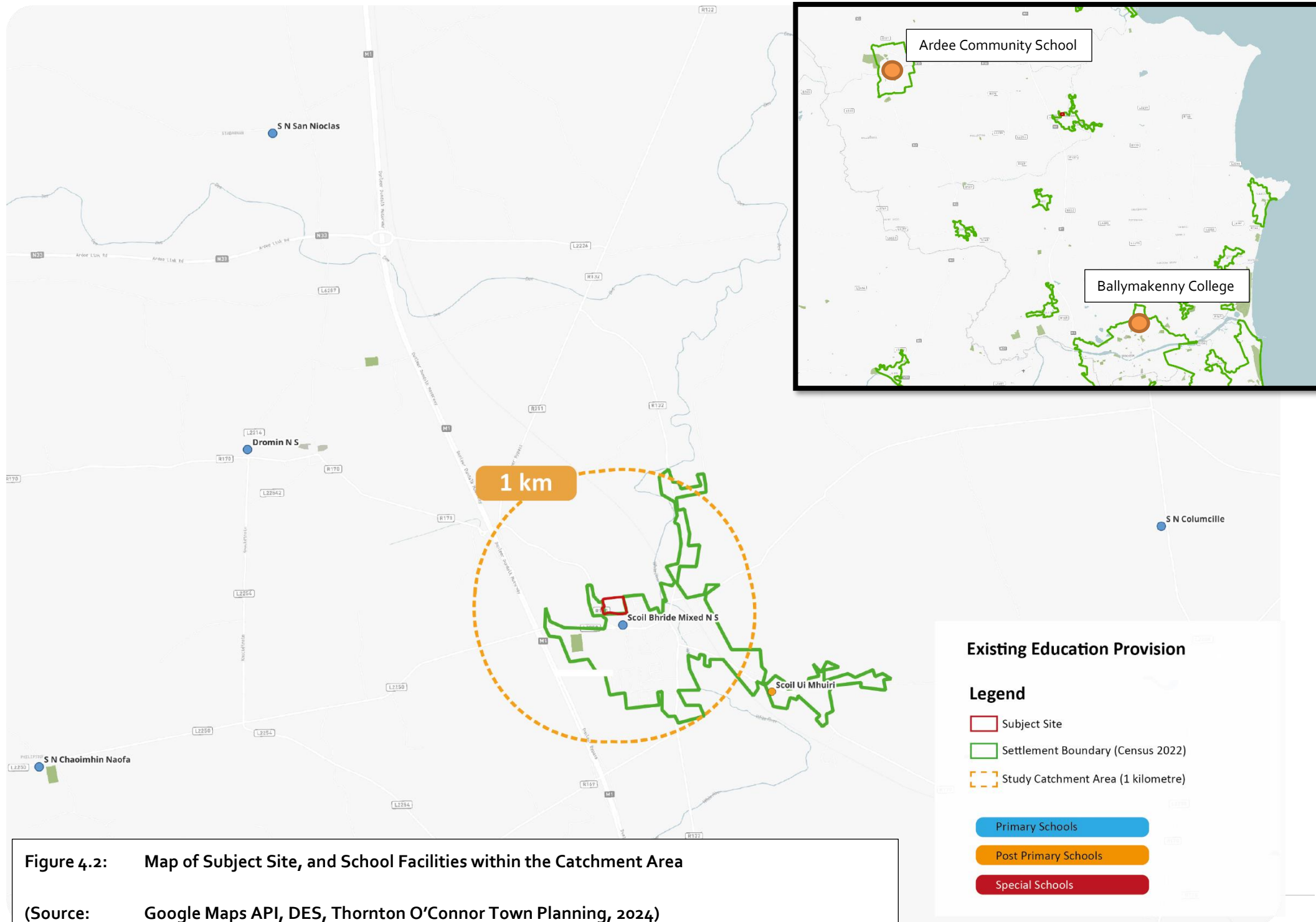


Figure 4.2: Map of Subject Site, and School Facilities within the Catchment Area

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

4.1.1.1 Primary Schools

The 5 No. existing primary schools identified within a reasonable distance from the subject site (Figure 4.2) held a combined provisional enrolment of 711 No. students during the 2022/2023 school year as per Department of Education and Skills (DES) records. All the schools identified were co-educational (mixed) schools. The primary school that is located nearest to the subject site (SCOIL BHRIDE MIXED National School - identified in blue in Table 4.3), held a co-educational enrolment of 227 No. students in 2022/2023.

Supplementary to the enrolment information acquired from the DES, a review of the schools' websites and the 2024/2025 Schools' Admission Notice was carried out in November 2023 by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning to ensure that available spaces in classes are captured in this audit. Table 4.3 provides a detailed breakdown of this available capacity per school. As per Section 63 of the *Education (Admissions to School) Act 2018*³, the 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 117 No. students in the catchment (112 No. spaces for Junior Infants, and 5 spaces for Other Years). These 117 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	2022-2023 Enrolment	Available Capacity per School Websites (2024/25)		
							Junior Infants	Other Years	Total
1	18148I	SCOIL BHRIDE MIXED NS	Located in Town	111	116	227	34	0	34
2	06576N	DROMIN NS	3.0km	46	47	93	14	0	14
3	01434O	S N COLUMCILLE	4.2km	80	91	171	30	5	35
4	18019U	S N CHAOIMHIN NAOFA	4.5km	56	70	126	19	0	19
5	18126V	S N SAN NIOCLAS	4.6km	35	59	94	15	0	15
Total				328	383	711	112	5	117

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

Table 4.3: Recorded Enrolments for Primary Schools (5 closest Primary Schools)

(Source: DES, 2022, and Individual School Admission Notices, 2023)

Table 4.4 below provides information on each of the primary schools, inclusive of their enrolment numbers for the previous 5 No. academic years 2018-2019 to 2022-2023. The overall enrolment figure associated with the 5 No. primary schools has fluctuated during this period, but is down by 9 No. children or 1.3%. SCOIL OILIBHÉIR NAOFA National School (identified in blue in Table 4.4) saw a decrease of 87 No. students between the 2018-2019 academic year and the 2022-2023 academic year. No new National Schools have opened in the area in the last 5 years, but the general decline suggests that there is some available capacity within the existing primary schools.

³ Section 62 of this Act requires that, from 1 February 2020, boards of management have 3 months to revise their Admission Policies in line with the commenced provisions of the Act.

School	Roll No.	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
SCOIL BHRIDE MIXED N S	18148I	212	208	231	213	227
DROMIN N S	06576N	105	99	97	91	93
S N COLUMCILLE	01434O	173	173	174	177	171
S N CHAOIMHIN NAOFA	18019U	132	128	133	124	126
S N SAN NIOCLAS	18126V	98	97	98	95	94
Total		720	705	733	700	711

Table 4.4: Existing Primary Schools' Enrolment Figures 2018-2019 to 2022-2023

(Source: DES, 2023)

4.1.1.2 Post Primary Schools

There were 3 No. post-primary schools identified within a reasonable distance of the subject site which held a combined co-educational enrolment of 2,811 No. students during the 2022-2023 school year, as per Department of Education and Skills (DES) records. The post-primary school located nearest to the subject site (Scoil Ui Mhuiri – identified in blue in Table 4.5) held an enrolment of 631 No. students in 2022-2023 and is located in the town.

Supplementary to the enrolment information acquired from the DES, a review of the schools' websites and the 2024/2025 Schools' Admission Notice was carried out in November 2023 by Thornton O'Connor Town Planning to ensure that available spaces in classes are captured in this audit. Table 4.5 provides a detailed breakdown of this available capacity per school. As per Section 63 of the *Education (Admissions to School) Act 2018*, the 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 2024/25 academic year, the admissions notices for post-primary schools indicated a total enrolment capacity of 606 No. students in the catchment (590 No. spaces for *First Years*, and 16 No. spaces for *Other Years*). These 606 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	2022-2023 Enrolment	Available Capacity per School Websites (2024/25)		
							First Years	Other Years	Total
1	71780G	Scoil Ui Mhuiri	1.3km	303	328	631	150	12	162
2	91441T	Ardee Community School	9.7km	545	642	1,187	260	0	260
3	91573N	Ballymakenny College	11.8km	508	485	993	180	4	184
Total				1,356	1,455	2,811	590	16	606

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

Table 4.5: Recorded Enrolments for Post-Primary Schools (3 closest Post Primary Schools)

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

Table 4.6 provides an overview of the post-primary schools within the catchment, inclusive of their enrolment numbers according to data published by the DES of the academic years 2018-2019 to 2022-2023.

School	Roll No.	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Scoil Ui Mhuiri	71780G	544	538	550	579	631
Ardee Community School	91441T	889	967	1042	1109	1187
Ballymakenny College	91573N	670	843	921	955	993
Total		2,103	2,348	2,513	2,643	2,811

Table 4.6: Existing Post-Primary Schools' Enrolment Figures 2018-2019 to 2022-2023

(Source: DES, 2023)

As highlighted in Table 4.6, the overall enrolment figure associated with the 3 No. post-primary schools in the catchment area has increased during this period from 2,103 No. pupils to 2,811 No. pupils; 708 No. additional pupils (33.7%). This indicates recent growth in demand for Post-Primary school infrastructure within the catchment.

4.1.1.3 Historic Enrolment Statistics

Historic enrolment trends for the catchment show declines at the primary school level for the historic 5-year interval, with an overall decrease of 21 No. students (c. -2.9% decrease) within the cohort from 2017/2018 to 2022/2023. The primary school SCOIL BHRIDE MIXED N S, located in the town, recorded a c. 2.3% increase in enrolments in the recent 5-year period.

Overall decreases in primary school enrolments were identified for the historic 10-year interval with the majority of schools experiencing drops in student numbers over the period. The majority of this decline occurred within SCOIL BHRIDE MIXED N S accounting for 29 No. fewer students over the period. Over the past 10 years, only 1 No. primary school has experienced growth in student numbers, while 4 No. have declines in enrolments.

Catchment		Enrolment Year			Historic Change	
Roll No.	School Name	12/13	17/18	22/23	5-year	10-year
18148I	SCOIL BHRIDE MIXED N S	256	222	227	5	-29
06576N	DROMIN N S	99	107	93	-14	-6
01434O	S N COLUMCILLE	184	170	171	1	-13
18019U	S N CHAOIMHIN NAOFA	129	132	126	-6	-3
18126V	S N SAN NIOCLAS	91	101	94	-7	3
Total		759	732	711	-21	-48

Table 4.7: Historic Change in Enrolment (Primary) in Recent 5- and 10-year Period

(Source: DES, 2023)

With respect to post-primary schools in the area, enrolment rates have increased notably in the recent 5-year period, as shown in Table 4.8, with c. 49.4% increase recorded for the cohort from 2017/2018 to 2022/2023. We note that the post-primary school closest to the subject site, Scoil Ui Mhuiri, has seen an increase of 45 pupils in the past 5 years from 602 No. students to 631 No. students. When viewing enrolments over a longer 10-year horizon at post-primary level, there are 1,524 No. more students (118.4%) enrolled in schools within the catchment than there were a decade ago.

Catchment		Enrolment Year			Historic Change	
Roll No.	School Name	12/13	17/18	22/23	5-year	10-year
71780G	Scoil Ui Mhuiri	602	586	631	45	29
91441T	Ardee Community School	685	806	1187	381	502
91573N	Ballymakenny College	0	490	993	503	993
Total		1,287	1,882	2,811	929	1,524

Table 4.8: Historic Change in Enrolment (Post Primary) in Recent 5-year Period and 10-year Period

(Source: DES, 2023)

4.1.2 Future Demand Analysis

4.1.2.1 Demographic Growth Projection

In November 2021, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) reported that enrolment figures for primary schools in Ireland were likely to have reached peak levels in 2020, 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."

⁴ Source: Projections of Full-Time Enrolment: Primary and Second Level, 2021-2040 (DES, November 2021), p.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 anticipates that the 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.

The study also concluded that post-primary 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."

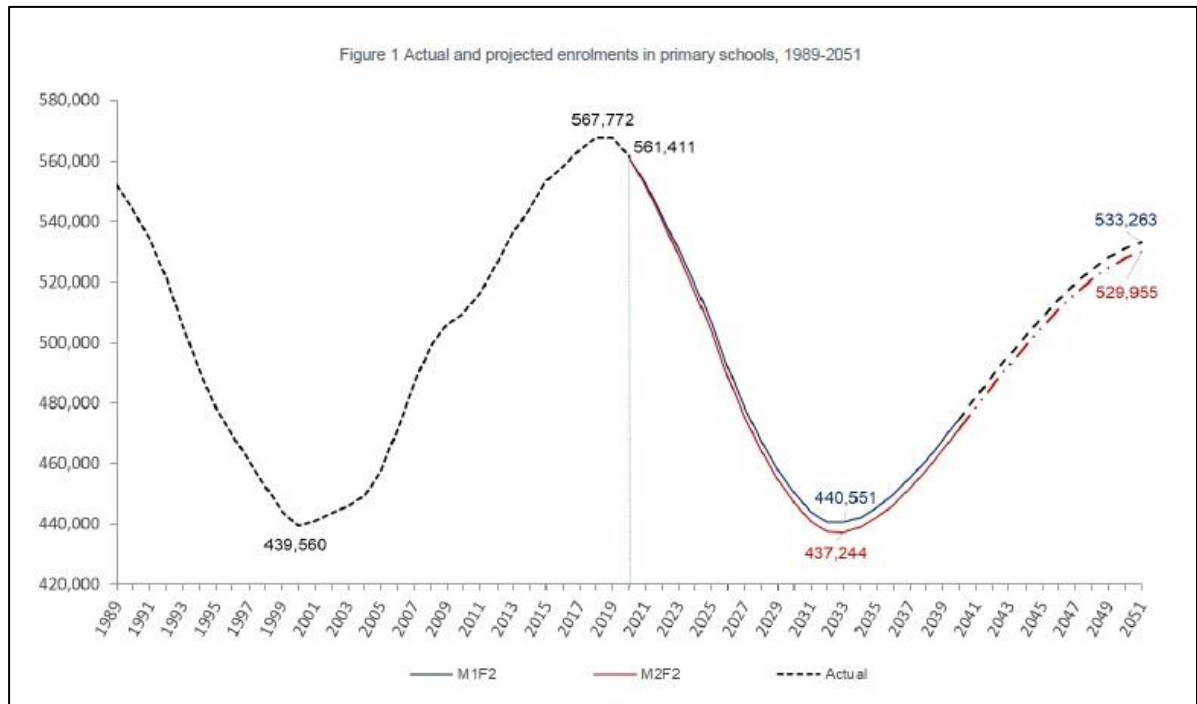


Figure 4.3: Projections of Enrolment at Primary Level, 1989–2051, organised by growth projection scenarios created by the CSO.

(Source: DES, November 2021)

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

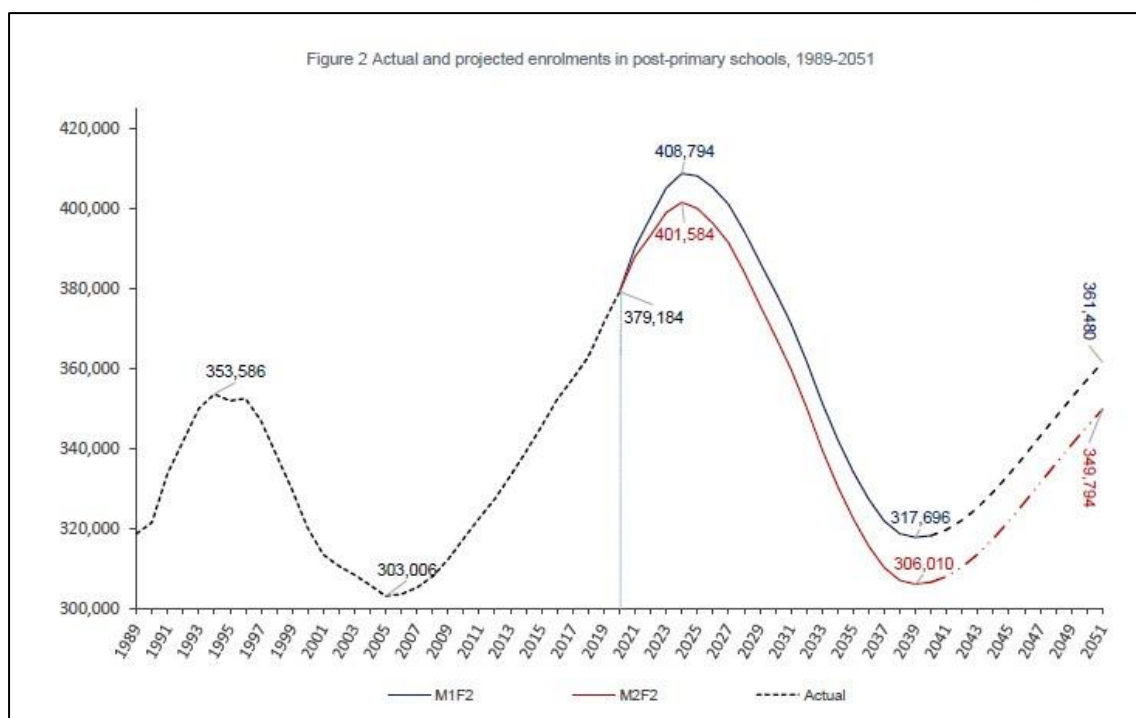


Figure 4.4: Projections of Enrolment at Post-Primary Level, 1989–2051, organised by growth projection scenarios created by the CSO.

(Source: DES, November 2021)

4.1.2.2 Potential Impact on Catchment Schools

Using the projected enrolment figures⁷ for the Mid-East Region, produced within the Department of Education’s publication *Projections for full-time enrolment: Primary and Second Level, 2021-2040*, the study can extrapolate future enrolment for the 2026-27 academic year for the catchment. The report projects the enrolment figures in primary schools within Mid-East region to drop by 11.9% between academic years 2022/23 and 2026/27. Applying this future projection figure to the current enrolment figures within the catchment it is estimated that the enrolments in 13 No. primary schools identified in the assessment are set to reduce by 85 No. spaces by 2026/27 academic year.

At the post-primary level, the report projects the enrolment figures to increase by 0.1% between academic years 2022/23 and 2026/27. This would result in an increase of 3 No. children in the 3 No. post-primary schools identified within the catchment by 2026/27 academic year. We note that the indicative change figures provided are an estimate of potential enrolments at each school level based on the regional population projections included in the DES report⁸ and do not represent localised values.

Catchment	Enrolment Year		% Change Est.	Change
	22/23	26/27		
Primary Schools (5)	711	626	-11.9% decrease	-85
Post-Primary Schools (3)	2,811	2,814	+0.1% increase	3

Table 4.9: Projected Enrolment Trends – 2022 to 2027.

(Source: DES, 2023)

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

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

4.1.2.3 Projected Demand Generated by Scheme

The proposed development will comprise 70 No. units of various typologies. For the purposes of this analysis 58 No. units are capable of supporting families with children (this excludes the 12 No. sheltered accommodation units). The average household size in the Study Area recorded by the 2022 Census was 2.89 No. persons per household, which generates a total indicative population of 168 No. persons when applied to the proposed development.

The average number of children per family recorded in the State in Census 2022 was 1.34 children⁹, which generates an indicative population of 78 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 61 No. children would be considered school age (including 34 No. primary school children and 27 No. post-primary school children), as per the age cohorts recorded for Louth¹⁰ in 2022 (see Table 4.10).

Age Group	Pre-school children (0-4 years)	Primary school children (5-12 years)	Secondary school children (13-18 years)	All children (0-18 years)
Louth 2022 Population	8,260	16,370	12,668	37,298
% of Total Cohort	22.15%	43.89%	33.96%	100%

Table 4.10: Breakdown of 0-18 Year Age Cohort for Louth County Council.

(Source: CSO, 2022)

Taking this into account, the development has the potential to generate an additional 168 No. persons within the area, including an estimated 61 No. school-age children (including 34 No. primary school children and 27 No. post-primary school children), when the proposal is fully occupied.

4.1.2.4 Completed and Planned Infrastructure

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) list of current status of large-scale projects being delivered under the School Building programme was consulted as part of this exercise (October 2023). It notes based on projected demands, 4 No. new primary, 2 No. new special schools and 0 No. post-primary schools are to be established in the county over the next few years. The details of which can be found in Table 4.11 below. Several capital projects are currently planned or underway in the area, including new facilities in Ardee. The additional capacity being provided by all of these projects is being considered in the context of the projected future requirements in the area.

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

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=E3003&PLanguage=0>

No.	Type	Nearest Settlement	Roll No.	School Name & Address	Current Status
264	Primary	Ardee	01554B	Baile An Phusta Ns, Ardee	On Site
265	Special	Drogheda	18936K	St. Ita'S Special School, Drogheda	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
266	Special	Drumcar (Near Dunleer)	19214A	St. Mary's Special School, Drumcar	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
267	Primary	Drogheda	19215C	Sn Ard Mhuire C, Marymount	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
268	Primary	Ardee	20171P	Ardee Etns	On Site
269	Primary	Dundalk	71750U	Bush Post Primary School, Riverstown, Dundalk	On Site

Table 4.11: Status of Large-Scale Projects in Louth

(Source: DES, October 2023)

4.1.3 Conclusion

The analysis indicates that Louth has a high existing per capita enrolment capacity compared to the wider region and nationally. Louth demonstrates a strong surplus provision of both primary and post primary places in 2022, and sufficient capacity to meet the requirements for its entire resident student population.

There are 5 No. existing primary schools, and 3 No. post-primary schools currently operating in the catchment area, to which the subject site belongs. These facilities cater to a student population of c. 711 No. primary school students and c. 2,811 No. post-primary students and have demonstrated different levels of growth in the recent 5-year period, with Primary School enrolments decreasing by 1.3%, while Post-Primary enrolments increased by 33.7% during the same period.

With respect to future enrolments, we note that a c. 11.9% decrease in enrolments at the primary school level and a c. 0.1% increase in post-primary school enrolments is anticipated from 2022/23 to 2026/27, but will fall gradually to a low point by 2039, with respect to the most recent regional population projections published by the DES. **The visible decline in enrolments at primary level is in line with government demographic projections, and is expected to continue to 2033. Post-primary enrolments are projected to peak in 2025/2026, and it is likely that Louth will see a significant reduction in the need for places into the remainder of the decade.**

6 No. additional school facilities or improvements are currently proposed to be delivered within Louth in the short-term under the national school building programme. 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 Louth 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 years.

Admissions Notices from schools within the catchment indicate a healthy combined total of **723 spaces available next year** for incoming First Year/Junior Infants, of which 117 spaces catered to primary schools and 606 spaces to post primary schools.

The proposed development has the potential to generate an additional 168 No. persons within the area, including an estimated **61 No. school-age children (including 34 No. primary school children and 27 No. post-primary school children)**, when the proposal is fully occupied. It is judged that the potential demand generated from the proposed development can readily be absorbed by the available capacity.

4.2 Childcare

This assessment identifies 3 No. TUSLA registered childcare facilities within 1km radius of the subject site, it illustrates their maximum potential capacities based on the latest TUSLA inspection data, and their levels of accessibility with respect to walkable distances from the subject lands. These facilities were reported as having a combined total capacity of 75 No. childcare places at the time of the survey (November 2023). The demographic profile of this area provided in Section 3.0 also provides a baseline for understanding pre-school age population and the emerging demand for childcare facilities in the area.

As part of the data discovery process, each of the relevant TUSLA childcare facilities were contacted via email to gather information on enrolment and vacancy in November 2023. We also note that the Louth Childcare Committee was consulted in the course of this assessment but was not able to provide additional 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 Facility Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2001) recommend that a crèche or childcare facility with capacity for 20 No. children should generally be provided for every 75 No. dwellings within new residential developments. Louth County Council further advise in the LCDP 2021-2027 that this provision should have regard to the guidelines, but the Council will take account of existing childcare provision when considering the delivery of new facilities as part of residential development in order to avoid over provision. This development would not generally meet the threshold to require a childcare facility, however, this report has assessed the relationship between supply and demand to conclude that an additional facility would not be needed in the settlement.

This assessment aims to determine what the nature of local supply and demand is within the catchment, in parallel with the estimation of planned 0–6-year-old residents that may reside in the proposed development. The total number of units in the scheme which are included in this estimation amounts to 58 No. (which excludes the 12 No. sheltered accommodation units). In order to calculate the number of 0–6-year-old residents in the proposed development, the study utilises 3 No. key number of indicators:

1. The proposed unit mix of the development;
2. Persons per unit proposed (this is calculated by using the average household size within the Study Area, established as 2.89 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 10.31% 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 4.12, it is estimated that 17.3 No. children (rounded to 18) aged 0–6 years may reside in the proposed development.

¹¹ CSO statistics record a total of 2,156 no. residents in 746 no. households within the catchment in 2022.

Description	No.	Value	Method
Units in Proposed Development*	a	58	a
Average Household Size	b	2.89	b
Potential Residents (Number)	c	168	a * b = c
0-6 Years (% of Total Population)	d	10.31%	d
Potential 0-6 Years (Number)	e	17.3	d * c = e

* Note: 12 No. Units for Sheltered and Elderly Accommodation have been removed from calculations

Table 4.12: 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

In 2022, the Central Statistics Office, as part of the latest Census release, provided a detailed statistical module¹² on the rates of take-up for childcare in Ireland and at county level for 2022. This analysis highlighted that almost one-third (331,783) of children under the age of 15 in the State were in some form of childcare. This release is relevant for this assessment as it indicates the extent to which childcare facilities are utilised by the general population. An adaption of a table found within this module (Table 4.13), shows the range of methods parents used for the purposes of childcare for their pre-school or early primary school attending children in the State and at County level.

Type of Childcare	Parent/ Partner	Unpaid Relative/ Friend	Paid Relative/ Friend	Childminder/ Au-Pair/ Nanny	Childcare Facility	Other
Louth	60%	12%	3%	7%	17%	1%
State	55%	10%	2%	10%	22%	1%

Table 4.13: Type of Childcare Utilised by Parents of Pre-School Children (Aged 0-8).

(Source: CSO, 2022)

The study indicates that the vast majority of pre-school children across Ireland are cared for by their parents or partners of their parents, while 22% of pre-school children attend a childcare facility nationally, and just 17% in County Louth. 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 4.14 applies the CSO's 17% figure to the estimated number of residents aged 0-6 year-old¹³, as determined under the quantitative demographic analysis above. The results indicate a potential need for c. 3 childcare places to be available to support the additional local need (value of 3 rounded from 2.9).

¹² Census of Population - CSO, 2022. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp3/censusofpopulation2022profile3-householdsfamiliesandchildcare/childcare/>

¹³ This analysis adopts the rate of childcare utilisation for children aged 0-8 years old for County Louth. While a like-for-like analysis of those aged 0-6 would be ideal, the CSO only provide outputs for specific cohorts (specifically 0-2, 3-4, and 5-8, 9-14, and under age 15 cohorts). In order to capture the key demographic of childcare take-up for those children aged 5-6, the percentage rate of take-up for all children aged 0-8 was selected and applied to the study.

Description	Ref.	Value	Method
Units in Proposed Development*	a	58	a
o-6 Years (Number)	b	17.3	b
o-6 Years Total at 17%	c	2.9	b *17% = c

* Note: 12 No. Units for Sheltered and Elderly Accommodation have been removed from calculations

Table 4.14: Number of Pre-School Children Requiring Access to Childcare Facilities.

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

4.2.2 Catchment Childcare Facilities

Table 4.15 below provides facility-level detail for each of childcare providers considered 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 3 No. TUSLA registered childcare facilities within 1km radius of the subject site, it illustrates their maximum potential capacities based on the latest TUSLA inspection data, and their levels of accessibility with respect to walkable distances from the subject lands. These facilities were reported as having a combined total capacity of 75 No. childcare places at the time of the survey (November 2023).

TUSLA ID	Childcare Facility	Distance from Site (km)	Service Type	Indicative Max Capacity
TU2015LH049	Little & Big Rascals	0.25	Full Day / Part Time / Sessional	50
TU2015LH066	Naonra Oiriall	0.54	Sessional	9
TU2015LH103	Tir na nOg Montessori Pre-School	1.00	Sessional	16
Total (within 1km)				75

Table 4.15 Current Capacity of Existing Childcare Facilities in and bordering a 1km Study Area

(Source: Combination of: TUSLA Inspections (based on AM) and TUSLA listing (November 2023) provided by LCC, Thornton O'Connor Town Planning, 2024)

4.2.3 Planned Facilities Network

An examination of LCC's Online Planning Register showed no granted Planning Applications for additional childcare facilities in the Study Area as of November 2023. Additionally, there were no Planning Applications granted to increase capacity within existing facilities in Dunleer.

4.2.4 County Childcare Facilities (Enrolments and Vacancy)

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth was contacted during this analysis who directed us to the recently produced 'Early Years Sector Profile Report 2020/2021' (May 2022)¹⁴ which provides detail in relation to childcare capacity in the County. Surveys carried out as part of this report illustrated that there are 181,565 children enrolled across early years services in the country, a 12% decrease on the previous release (from 2018/2019), with a total national capacity for 220,500 children. At the time of the survey, services reported that the number of vacant places tripled since 2018/19 to 38,935 in 2021¹⁵. By comparison, the number of

¹⁴ 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

¹⁵ 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.

children enrolled decreased by 24,736 in the same period. The average number of children per service stood at 41 No.

There were 3,301 children enrolled across early years services in Louth in 2021, a 23.2% decrease on the previous release (from 2018/2019), with a total capacity for 4,097 children at the end of 2021. Table 4.16 below highlights the current capacity and vacancy within the childcare infrastructure in Louth. At the end of 2021, there was a c. 24.1% rate of vacancy, with 797 places available for incoming students.

Area	Capacity	Enrolled	Vacant places	Vacancy rate
Louth	4,097	3,301	797	24.1%

Table 4.16 County breakdown of Louth Childcare Enrolments 2021

(Source: Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth, 2022)

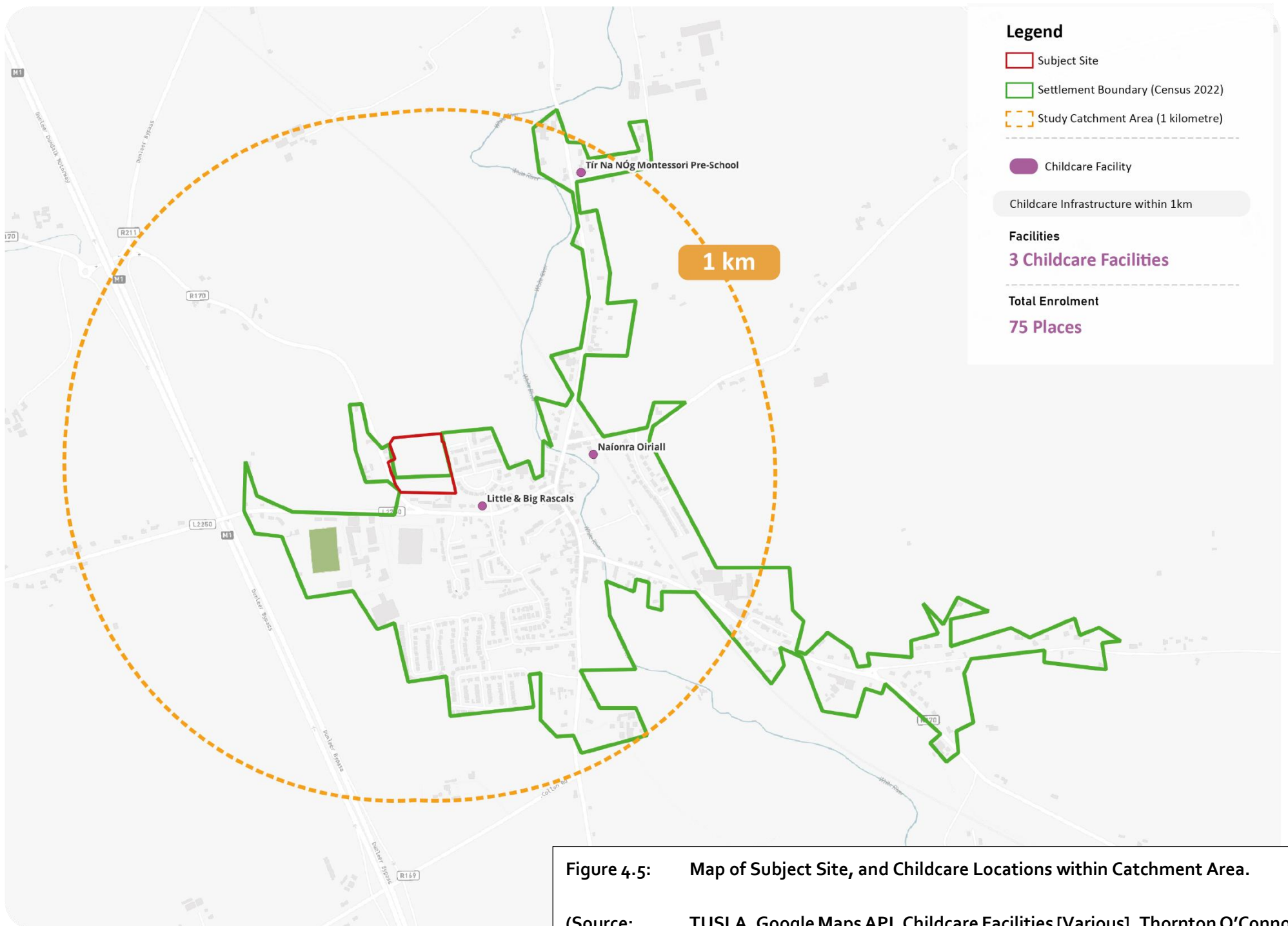


Figure 4.5: Map of Subject Site, and Childcare Locations within Catchment Area.

(Source: TUSLA, Google Maps API, Childcare Facilities [Various], 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. Over the past 6 years (between 2016-2022), the population of the Study Area increased by 17.6% to 2,143. In 2022, the proportion of this total population aged between 0- to 6-years old was estimated to be 10.31%. The study uses this proportion to estimate the number of 0–6-year-olds that could potentially reside in the proposed development. Using the average household size (2.89 persons per household) and the percentage of 0–6-year-olds (10.31%) in the Study Area, a calculation was made to estimate that the proposed development might accommodate 18 No. 0–6-year-old children.

Further analysis released by the CSO, based on Census 2022, indicated that only 17% of children aged between 0 and 6 in Louth attend a childcare facility. This would mean that from the potential 18 No. 0–6-year-olds resident at the proposal, only 3 No. children would 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 relatively substantial (38,935 places). Louth has a vacancy rate in excess of 24% and a strong capacity to support more children within the existing childcare infrastructure.

The subject development comprises 70 No. units, of which 58 No. can reasonably accommodate families. The potential childcare uptake of the proposal is likely to be 3 No. places, and the local childcare network has an indicative maximum capacity of 75 No. spaces, in 3 No. existing facilities (5.0% of existing capacity in the catchment). Although there are currently no planning applications granted in the town for additional capacity, it is judged that given the extent of overflow vacancy in the county (at 24.1%), and the minimal childcare demand generated by the proposed development, that additional childcare facilities at this location would not be necessary, and can be effectively absorbed by the existing facilities network.

4.3 Introduction - SIA

The Study Area for this assessment is defined by a c. 1 kilometre radius of the subject site, equivalent to a c. 12- to 14-minute walking distance considered accessible to future residents of the proposed development. The survey identified a range of community facilities, totalling some 20 No. assets (Table 4.17). When including childcare and schools this number increases to 31 No. social infrastructure facilities. These facilities are mapped in Figure 4.6 overleaf.

No.	Name of Asset	Facility Type
1	The Medical Centre	Healthcare and Emergency Services
2	Allcare Pharmacy Dunleer	Healthcare and Emergency Services
3	McGoey Pharmacy	Healthcare and Emergency Services
4	Scientific Dental Arts	Healthcare and Emergency Services
5	Dunleer Fire Station	Healthcare and Emergency Services
6	Dunleer Garda Station	Healthcare and Emergency Services
7	Dunleer Parish Parochial House	Faith
8	Dunleer Church of Ireland	Faith
9	St Brigid's Church	Faith
10	The Market House	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
11	Dunleer Library	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
12	An Post Dunleer	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
13	Dunleer Parish Credit Union Limited	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
14	Dunleer Train Station	Social, Community and Culture Facilities
15	SPAR	Retail Centres and Services
16	Circle K Dundalk Road	Retail Centres and Services
17	Centra Dunleer	Retail Centres and Services
18	Dunleer Playground	Open Space and Recreation
19	Lann Léire GAA Club	Open Space and Recreation
20	Bodysculpt	Open Space and Recreation

Table 4.17 Social and Community Infrastructure within c. 1km.

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

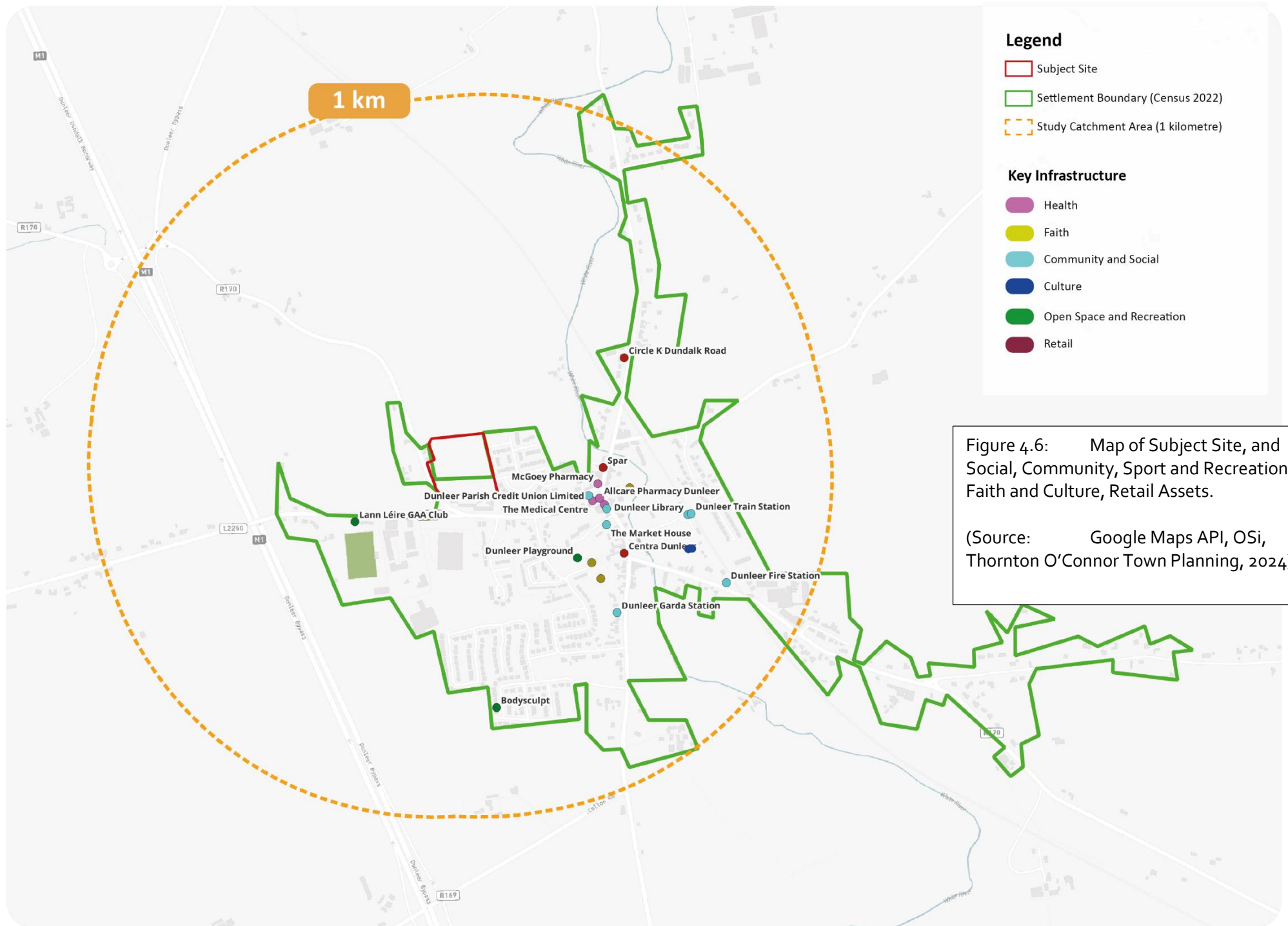


Figure 4.6: Map of Subject Site, and Social, Community, Sport and Recreation, Faith and Culture, Retail Assets.

(Source: Google Maps API, OSi, 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.

Dunleer is a dynamic town that has succeeded in recent years to attract new residents, consolidate its employment and business base, and expand its provision of primary and secondary school education. It is also a town with a strong sense of community. This is illustrated by the numerous community, educational, cultural and sporting activities that are hosted by different institutions and community groups (under the umbrella of the Dunleer Community Development Board) throughout the year. There is a risk, however, that growth and change can challenge the full integration of all social groups in Dunleer.

The baseline study undertaken identified 5 No. community services and facilities in the Study Area, including a credit union, a post office, a community centre, and a library.

The Market House community centre is an excellent amenity for the town offering community events, spaces to work, and tourism opportunities.

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. A total of 6 No. health services and facilities, comprising, a General Practitioner's and Health Centre, two Pharmacies, a Dental Dare facility, and both a Garda and Fire Station were identified within and bordering the Study Area during the baseline survey.

Some 9 No. GPs are located in Dunleer Medical Centre serving a population of 2,143 residents in 2022. This provides a healthy GP to resident population ratio of 1 GP for every 238 residents. The Oireachtas Health Committee recommendations that an area should have between 1.02-1.1 GPs per 1,000 of resident population. Thus, general practice medical provision is considered very high and likely attracts resident populations from surrounding smaller towns that could not otherwise viably support a local GP.

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 bordering the Study Area.

A Fire Station and Garda Station were identified within the Study Area during the baseline survey. As the Study Area only has a relatively small population, the existing proximity of the subject site to these emergency-related infrastructure is sufficient to support the needs of current and future residents.

4.6 Open Space and Recreation

The town of Dunleer 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, 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, 3 sports and recreation facilities were identified in and around the Study Area during the baseline survey which include a sports clubs, a playground, a gym. Moreover the town is small in size with many parks in close proximity. Given the population and age profile of the study there will be a continued need to provide a variety of sports and recreation facilities within the Study Area can cater to the needs of children, adults and the elderly. All of the facilities identified in the audit appear to be of good quality and we understand that there are no capacity issues at present.

4.7 Religious Institutions

The predominant religion in the Republic of Ireland is Christianity, with the largest denomination being the 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 85.4% of the population identify as religious, and 77.1% 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 3 No. places of worship were identified within and bordering the Study Area during the baseline survey. These faith facilities largely relate to the primary faith of the population, namely Catholicism, although numerous places of worship related to other faiths are also present outside the catchment nearer Drogheda.

All of these faith facilities appear to be in good condition and there are no reported capacity issues and no specified unmet needs at present. 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

The subject site is served by 3 No. small convenience retail centres. Within the Development Plan, Dunleer is designated as a Self-Sustaining Growth Town offering access to a range of retail and commercial activity. Given the current size of the settlement a larger convenience offering (e.g. Lidl, Tesco etc) may not be feasible or viable. Access to a range of larger convenience retail offerings can be reached in nearby Drogheda. The town has a wide range of supporting shops such as a butcher or chemist and personal services like hairdressers and post offices serving the small, localised catchment population. There is very little retail vacancy identified and there is no deficit of retail facilities in the area. 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

In our opinion, there is sufficient existing provision of social infrastructure in the vicinity of the subject site (i.e., within c. 1 km radius) to support the proposed development. As the above survey demonstrates, there is an adequate supply of education/childcare, healthcare, and community facilities within reasonable walking distance of the subject lands, as well as a number of parks and amenity areas, playing pitches and sporting facilities available to local residents. The area has a frequent public transport link to quickly connect the subject site directly to a wider range of facilities located in nearby Drogheda. The proposed development will stitch into an already established neighbourhood with adequate local facilities.

The baseline study undertaken identified a significant range of services and facilities which contribute to quality of life for local residents, comprising 31 No. facilities within close proximity to the subject site (1 km radius). The Study Area is particularly well served in terms of healthcare provision, faith infrastructure, and retailing amenities.

The baseline study undertaken identified a significant range of services and facilities which contribute to quality of life for local residents, comprising 31 No. facilities within close proximity to the subject site. Some 11 No. childcare and school assets were identified, in addition to 20 No. other supporting social and community infrastructures within the respective catchment. The Study Area is particularly well served in terms of community services, and retailing amenities.

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 *Louth 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. Despite this, 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.**