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ASSOCIATES

**PROJECT:** Strategic Housing Development

**Childcare Demand Assessment:**

for proposed residential development at Season Park,  
Newtownmountkennedy, Co. Wicklow

**CLIENT:** Dwyer Nolan Developments Ltd

**DATE:** 26|03|2022

**Planning &  
Development  
Consultants**



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## 1.0. Introduction

This Childcare Assessment has been prepared by Armstrong Fenton Associates on behalf of Dwyer Nolan Developments Ltd. to accompany the Strategic Housing Development planning application on lands in the townland of Season Park, south of Season Park Road, Newtownmountkenny, Co. Wicklow.

This report provides a detailed review of the planning policy context relating to the provision of childcare and educational facilities. The report also outlines the existing range of childcare and educational services in the vicinity of the development proposal; describes the expected demand for these services to be generated by the development proposal; and offers insights into the future capacity of the existing facilities.



Figure 1: Application Site in the Context of Newtownmountkenny



## 2.0. Site Context

### 2.1. Site Location

The subject site is located in the development boundary of Newtownmountkennedy, in the administrative area of Wicklow County Council, which is identified in the existing Wicklow County Development Plan 2016-2022 as a *'Level 4 – Moderate Growth Town'*. Newtownmountkennedy is located just to the west of National Route N11, c.17km to the north of Wicklow Town, c.7km south-west of Kilcoole and c.9km south-west of Greystones. The national primary route N11 (Dublin – Rosslare) formerly passed through the town. A by-pass was opened in 1990 and the N11 is now located approximately 1km east of the Main Street. There is a continuous dual carriageway from Dublin City to Newtownmountkennedy and on to Wicklow.

More specifically the subject site is located on lands in the townland of Season Park, south of Season Park Road, Newtownmountkennedy, Co. Wicklow.

The application site is zoned *'R1: Proposed Residential'* which has an objective in existing Wicklow County Council 2016-2022: *'to protect, provide and improve residential amenities.'*

### 2.2. Site Description

The subject site measures approximately 8.5 hectares and is irregular in shape. Given the irregular shape of the subject site, multiple fields are included in the application site. Letters of consent are included with the application where lands included are not in their ownership.

The site is bounded by Season Park Road (L1037) to the north, by agricultural lands to the west and south, although the latter has permission for residential development under Ref.s 06/6101 & 18/381. In addition, permission exists for what is to known as the Western Distributor Road that runs through the subject site and extends south of same. The site has an area of 8.5 hectares, with the net developable area measuring 5.5ha and is irregular in shape. It is comprised five fields or field sections and is traversed centrally by field boundaries, and mature hedge planting. The site comprises a mixture of grassland and scrub, and ground levels fall from west to east.

The Season Park housing estate is located to the east. On the north side of Season Park Road are Coillte lands, including their head office.

### 2.3. Development Proposal

The SHD being put forward for permission, and as described in the public notices, is as follows:

Dwyer Nolan Developments Ltd intends to apply to An Bord Pleanála for permission for a strategic housing development on a site located on lands at Season Park, Newtownmountkennedy, Co. Wicklow. The site is bounded by Season Park Road (L1037) to the north, by agricultural lands to the west and south, although the latter has permission for development under Ref. No.'s 06/6101, PL27.227704 & 18/381.

The development will consist of 179 no. dwellings, comprised of 121 no. houses, 6 no. duplex units & 52 no. apartments. The houses are comprised of 2 storey detached, semi-detached & terraced houses with 4 no. 2 beds, 86 no. 3 beds and 31 no. 4 beds. The duplex units are accommodated in 3 storey buildings (i.e. Type H) and are comprised of 6 no. 3 bed units at first & second floor. There are 6 no. 1 bed apartments and 46 no. 2 bed apartments (i.e. Types G, H, J & J1), accommodated in 20 no. 3 storey buildings. The proposed development also provides for a crèche (189.9m<sup>2</sup>), with community use facility overhead (99.45m<sup>2</sup>) in a 3 storey building.



Access to the development will be via (i) a new vehicular entrance point off Season Park Road to the north, and (ii) via a proposed road extending south and east of the proposed housing, connecting into Main Street, Newtownmountkennedy at Fisher's Corner (as previously permitted under Ref.s 06/6101 & PL27.227704).

The proposed development provides for (i) all associated site development works above and below ground, (ii) public open spaces (9,819m<sup>2</sup>) and communal open spaces (886m<sup>2</sup>), (iii) hard & soft landscaping and boundary treatments, (iv) surface car parking (Total: 339 no. spaces), (v) bicycle parking (Total: 158 no. spaces), (vi) bin storage, (vii) public lighting (viii) substation (24m<sup>2</sup>) all on an overall application site area of 8.5Ha.

### 3.0. Planning Policy

For the purpose of this report Armstrong Fenton Associates Planning Consultants have reviewed national, regional, and local planning level planning policy relating to childcare provision. These policy documents are discussed in detail below.

#### 3.1. Project Ireland 2040 – The National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of the country to cater for a projected population increase of one million people up to the year 2040. The NPF is accompanied by the National Development Plan, a 10 year capital investment strategy, and together they are known as Project Ireland 2040.

##### Childcare, Education and Life-Long Learning.

Chapter 6, Section 6.5, of the NPF has regard to childcare provision. The NPF notes that access to affordable childcare is a critical part of the State's infrastructure and that currently childcare provision in the country is under strain with investment needed to ensure capacity is maintained for projected population growth. As such, the NPF details that the provision of childcare facilities should form an integral element of the planning process at a local level to ensure coherent development across the country.

Of relevance to this report is the following National Policy Objective:

- **National Policy Objective 31** - *"Prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with investment in:*
  - *A childcare/ECCE planning function, for monitoring, analysis and forecasting of investment needs, including identification of regional priorities;*
  - *The provision of childcare facilities and new and refurbished schools on well located sites within or close to existing built-up areas, that meet the diverse needs of local populations;*
  - *The expansion and consolidation of Higher Education facilities, particularly where this will contribute to wider regional development, and*
  - *Programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas of higher education and further education and training where skills gaps are identified"*

#### 3.2. Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019-2031

The NPF is underpinned by the establishment of statutory Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies. The Eastern & Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019 - 2031 (RSES) is the relevant regional strategy for the development proposal. The RSES is a strategic plan and investment framework which aims to shape the future development of the Eastern & Midland Region up to 2031 and beyond. The region is the smallest in terms of land area but the largest in population size and is identified as the primary economic engine of the State. To this



end, the RSES notes that the provision of childcare facilities is of critical importance not just for child development but also both for parents in the labour market.

### **Access to Childcare, Education and Health Services**

Chapter 9, Section 9.6, of the RSES has regard to childcare and school provision. It is stated that a key aim of the RSES is to:

*“address mis-alignment in the Region across a range of factors including school provision, facilities and child-friendly amenities. School provision is a key part of social infrastructure to be provided in tandem with housing provision. The RSES will seek to prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with educational investment, including the provision of new schools on well-located sites within or close to existing built-up areas that meet the diverse needs of local populations”.*

The RSES projects that the number of children in the county will continue to increase until the mid-2020s and as such, the provision of childcare and schools is a priority for the foreseeable future.

Of relevance to this report are the following Regional Policy Objectives:

- **Regional Policy Objective 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 across Government Early Years Strategy.*
  - *Youth services that support and target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability”*

This report addresses the above requirement.

### **3.3. Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009)**

The Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas set out the core principles of urban design to ensure the creation of spaces with a distinct identity and sense of place. The principles contained in the Guidelines are to be used by Planning Authorities in writing their County / City Development Plans and in assessing development proposals.

Chapter 4 of the Guidelines, *‘Planning for Sustainable Neighbourhoods’*, has regard to childcare and school provision. Regarding childcare facilities, the Guidelines refer to the 2001 Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities. These Guidelines, discussed in Section 3.4. of this report, recommend the provision of one new childcare facility catering for 20 no. childcare spaces for every 75 new dwellings. However, the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas should form part of the analysis for the provision of new facilities.

This report addresses the above recommendations.

### **3.4. Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)**



The Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities direct Planning Authorities to facilitate the provision of childcare facilities as part of the development of sustainable communities, in appropriate locations such as residential areas; places of employment; educational establishments; neighbourhood and district centres; and locations convenient to public transport nodes. The Guidelines require Planning Authorities to include childcare facilities as part of their County Development Plan objectives as a specific use in 'appropriate locations/zones'. These locations include for 'new communities / larger new housing developments'. In relation to new housing developments the Guidelines state:

*"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. Authorities could consider requiring the provision of larger units catering for up to 30/40 children in areas of major residential development on the basis that such a large facility might be able to offer a variety of services – sessional/drop in/after-school, etc."*

The Guidelines advise that sites should be identified for such facilities as an integral part of the pre-planning discussions. The Guidelines define childcare as:

*"full day-care and sessional facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours. It includes services involving care, education and socialisation opportunities for children. Thus, services such as pre-schools, naíonraí (Irish language playgroups), day-care services, crèches, playgroups, and after-school groups are encompassed by these Guidelines. Conversely childminding, schools, (primary, secondary and special) and residential centres for children are not covered by these Guidelines"*

This report addresses the above requirements and recommendations.

### **3.5. Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2018)**

The 2018 Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines update the previous 2015 version of same and were adopted in response to growing demand for apartment living in the State. In relation to childcare facilities, the Guidelines state:

*"Notwithstanding the Planning Guidelines for Childcare Facilities (2001), in respect of which a review is to be progressed, and which recommend the provision of one child-care facility (equivalent to a minimum of 20 child places) for every 75 dwelling units, the threshold for provision of any such facilities in apartment schemes should be established having regard to the scale and unit mix of the proposed development and the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of the area. One bedroom or studio type units should not generally be considered to contribute to a requirement for any childcare provision and subject to location, this may also apply in part or whole, to units with two or more bedrooms"*

### **3.7. Wicklow County Development Plan 2016-2022**



The Wicklow County Development Plan 2016-2022 (hereafter CDP) is the current statutory Development Plan relevant to the development proposal and details the overall strategic policies and objectives for NMK.

The CDP re-iterates the recommendations of the 2001 Childcare Facility - Guidelines for Planning Authorities which generally seeks the provision of 20 no. new childcare spaces for every 75 new dwellings.

Of relevance to this report are the following CDP Policies:

*'CD22 To facilitate the provision of childcare in a manner which is compatible with land-use and transportation policies and adheres to the principles of sustainable development.'*

*'CD23 To facilitate the provision of a network of childcare facilities that reflects the distribution of the residential population in the County, in order to minimise travel distance and maximise opportunities for disadvantaged communities.'*

*'CD24 Where considered necessary by the Planning Authority, to require the provision of childcare facilities in all residential developments comprising 75 houses or more (including local authority and social housing schemes). In accordance with Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government guidelines, childcare places shall be provided at a ratio of 20 places per 75 residential units, having regard to cumulative effects of permitted development, (unless it can be demonstrated that having regard to the existing geographic distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of the area that this level of childcare facilities is not required). Without substantial cause, it is the policy of the Planning Authority not to allow a change of use of these premises within five years.'*

*'CD25 While the Planning Authority does not encourage the provision of childcare facilities in rural areas consideration may be given subject to the following strict criteria:*

- existing infrastructural services (water supply, wastewater disposal, entrance and car parking arrangements) are adequate or can be upgraded to a standard suitable to meet the needs of the facility; and*
- the scale of the facility (i.e. the number of children attending) shall be modest and appropriate to the rural location and will be required to be justified on the basis of the catchment of the facility, the proximity to other childcare facilities and the proximity to an existing towns or village, where land is zoned or available for childcare development.'*

### **3.7. Newtownmountkennedy Local Area Plan 2008-2014 (extended to 2018)**

The NMK Local Area Plan was adopted and came into effect on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2008. On 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013, a resolution was passed by the elected members deferring the review of the LAP until 2018, in accordance with provision of S. 19(1)(d) of the Planning & Development (Amendment) Act 2010.

Given that the current Development Plan covers the period 2016-2022, we consider that the CDP supersedes the NMK LAP that was adopted in 2008. Notwithstanding this, we will set out the relevant LAP context in terms of childcare assessment.

Of relevance to this report is the following LAP Policy / Objective in Section 7: Community Infrastructure:



- *New developments shall comply with the Childcare Planning Guidelines*

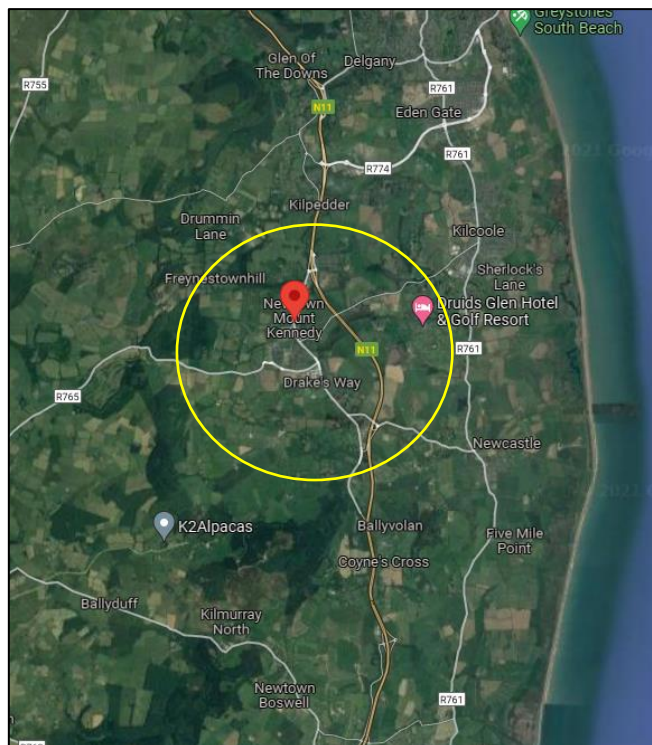
#### 4.0. Methodology

Having regard to the planning policy documents outlined in the previous section it is evident that an assessment of the existing childcare facilities is required as part of the proposed residential development at Season Park, NMK, Co. Wicklow.

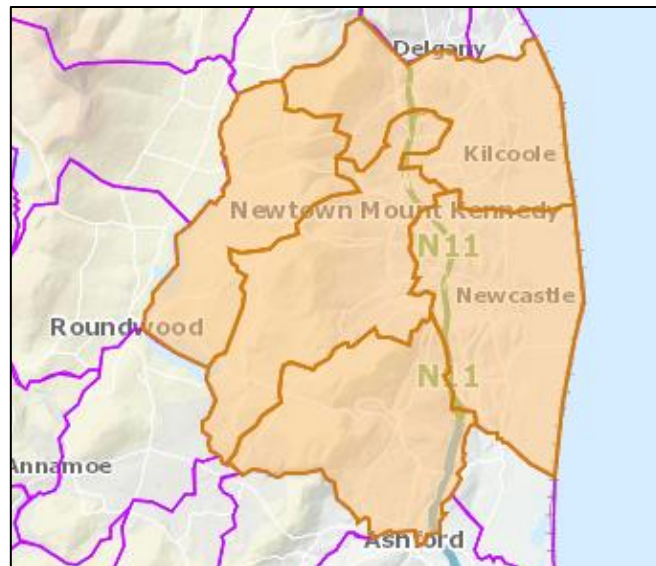
To assess same, it is necessary to establish a baseline which can then allow future demand estimations to be made based on demographic trends and the associated impact of the proposed development. Therefore, a methodology for the assessment of childcare facilities has been developed in accordance with the guidance provided in the aforementioned planning policy documents involving the following steps:

- Determining the extent and provision of existing childcare facilities in the vicinity of the development proposal;
- Undertaking a study of the current demographic trends and demand for existing childcare facilities in the vicinity of the development proposal;
- Estimating the level of demand for childcare facilities that may arise from the development proposal.

For the purposes of this Childcare Demand Assessment a study area has been defined by 5km radius created around the centre of the development site, as per Fig. 3 below. The defined study area largely consists of 5 no. District Electoral Divisions (DED's). As such Census data available for these DED's form the basis for this report.



**Fig. 3: Catchment Area around site (5km)** (Note: Subject Site identified with yellow star)



**Fig. 4: Electoral Divisions set within the Catchment Area**  
(Subject Site identified with yellow star)

## 5.0. Assessment of Childcare Provision

To establish a baseline of existing capacity it is necessary to first identify each of the existing childcare facility in the study area. This was undertaken through a comprehensive desktop research which used publicly available information and sources. These sources include for information available from:

- Pobal ([www.pobal.ie](http://www.pobal.ie))
- Wicklow County Childcare Committee (<http://www.wccc.ie/>) and;
- Tusla ([www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)).

While the various planning policy documents previously referenced in Section 3 make provisions for determining the requirements for childcare facilities in new residential development, there is no reference to the most appropriate distances families should travel, or indeed the quantum of facilities that are appropriate in a given area. Therefore, for the purpose of this report, it was deemed appropriate to audit all facilities within the town of NMK, as per Fig. 3 above.

### 5.1. Existing Childcare Facilities

To assess the provision of existing childcare facilities in the catchment area, Armstrong Fenton Associates Planning Consultants reviewed the local childcare services listed by Tusla and available on [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie). It is considered that Tusla offer the most definitive and accurate source of information on childcare facilities as it acts as the dedicated State agency for child protection and family support services in Ireland.

To ensure a detailed assessment of childcare facilities in the vicinity of the development, information was also sourced from [www.pobal.ie](http://www.pobal.ie). Pobal acts as an intermediary for programmes funded by the Irish Government and the EU and their website contains a number of resources with regard to existing childcare facilities. Existing facilities found through the above sources were crosschecked with the information available on the Wicklow County Childcare Committee website, <http://www.childcareonline.ie/>.

In total, 3 no. existing childcare facilities were identified within the defined catchment area. The location of those facilities is illustrated in Fig. 5 below and listed in Table 1 below.

It was possible to access information regarding the capacity of existing facilities registered with Tusla from the Tusla website however, there is no publicly available data listing the quantum of available childcare spaces within existing facilities. As such it was necessary to contact each facility individually and request such information.

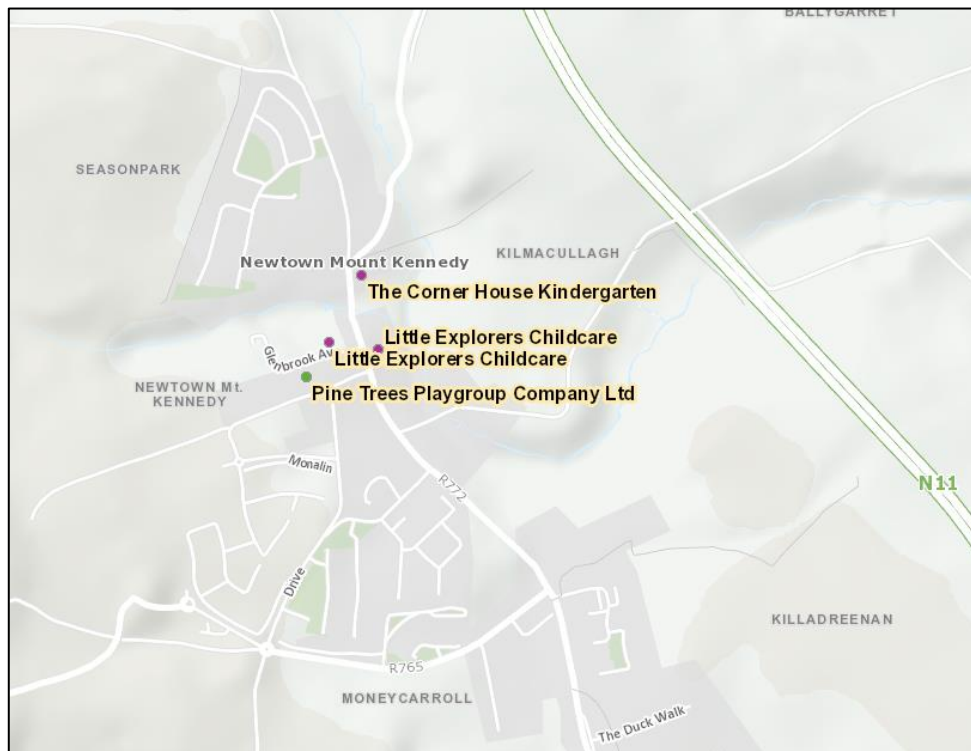
Each of the facilities contacted were asked to provide information on the total number of pupils they can facilitate and if they have further capacity to accommodate more. Due to the understandably cautious attitudes of childcare facility owners to release such information this proved to be a difficult task which was further exacerbated by the ongoing situation of the Covid-19 pandemic that has, in many cases, temporarily limited or cut the capacity of existing facilities.

Table 1, below, details those childcare facilities located in the closest proximity to the subject site, sourced from the Tusla website. Where information on capacity and vacancies was not available, individual facilities were contacted directly. The location of the facilities set out in Table 1 below, are set out in Fig. 5.

Number	Name	Capacity	Vacancies	Facility Type	Distance from Subject Site
1	The Corner Kindergarten	14	0	Full Day Care,	750m
2	Little Explorers Childcare	70	20	Full Time	710m
3	Pine Trees Playgroup Company Ltd.	40	8	Full Day Care, Part Time, Sessional	670m

**Table 1 - Existing Childcare Facilities**

*(Source: Tulsa and Phone Survey)*



**Fig. 5: Childcare Facilities, listed in Table 1, located in closest proximity to the subject site**

*(Source: Google Maps and Pabal.ie)*

In total, details of existing capacity and pupil numbers were found for each of the 3 no. childcare facilities in the town. From the 3 no. facilities, 1 no. of those facilities were operating at full capacity, with no vacancies. The



other 2 no. of those facilities stated that they had capacity to care for additional children. In total, the 3 no. childcare facilities who responded to the survey, stated that have a capacity, combined, to care for 28 no. children.

## 5.2. Annual Early Years Sector Profile 2019/2020

This report also takes into consideration the information available from the 2019 / 2020 Annual Early Years Sector Profile jointly prepared by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs & Pobal. This annual report presents a national overview of the Early Learning Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) sector.

The report provides details of existing enrolment and vacancies on a county-by-county basis. The 2019/2020 report does not state the number of children enrolled in existing childcare services yet in the 2018/2019 report, regarding County Wicklow, it was established that there were 4,551 children enrolled in the existing childcare services surveyed, with 298 no. vacant places. This equates to a vacancy rate of 7% in the county. Previous data available found that the vacancy rate in County Wicklow to be 12% in 2015/2016; 8% in 2016/2017 and 5% in 2017/2018. It is therefore considered reasonable to assess that there may a level of vacancy in existing childcare facilities of between 5% and 10%.

Based on the total surveyed capacity of c. 124 no. children in the 3 no. existing childcare facilities within the defined catchment area outlined in Fig. 3 this would suggest that the number of vacant places could range from 6 no. places (5%) to 12 no. places (10%). The primary research conducted as part of this report found there to be 38 no. vacant places based on feedback from individual facilities which were available to respond to the survey.

## 5.3. Proposed Childcare Facilities

Thus far, this report has demonstrated that there are 3 no. existing childcare facilities within walking distance of the subject site and that there are currently vacant places available. Notwithstanding the same, the Strategic Housing Development application subject to this Childcare Assessment, caters for 1 no. childcare facility which is put forward in compliance with the relevant planning policy documents previously discussed in this report.

The proposed development also provides for a childcare facility to be accommodated on the ground and first floor in the centre of the proposed site layout, 189.9m<sup>2</sup>. This facility has an associated outdoor play area of circa located on its eastern side, 102m<sup>2</sup>. By discounting the quantum of 1 bedroom units within the scheme i.e. 6 no., the resultant figure of 173 no. units could be deemed to require childcare services on the site. In line with the 2001 Childcare Facilities Guidelines which require 20 no. childcare places for every 75 units, that would result in the need for 46 no. childcare spaces to be catered for. It is considered that the childcare floorspace of 189.9m<sup>2</sup> is designed to serve the required needs of the proposed development.

## 5.4. Expected Childcare Demand

The Strategic Housing Development application subject to this Childcare Assessment caters for 179 no. residential dwellings comprised of a mix of apartment sizes. The overall mix for the development proposal is detailed in Table 2 below.

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 beds	Total
Units	6	50	92	31	179
Overall Mix	3.3%	28%	51.4%	17.3%	179 (100%)

Table 2 – Proposed unit mix



The 2001 Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities recommend the provision of one new childcare facility catering for 20 no. childcare spaces for every 75 new dwellings, however, it is noted the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas should form part of the analysis for the provision of new facilities. The 2020 Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities state with regard to the provision of new childcare facilities within developments:

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

The development proposal caters for 179 no. apartments however when 1-bedroom apartments are discounted, as per the above guidance, the development proposal caters for a total 173 no. dwellings.

Based on the provision of 20 no. childcare places for every 75 new dwellings the development proposal therefore has a requirement to provide for 46 no. childcare spaces. The development proposal caters for 1 no. childcare facility which has been designed to cater for a capacity of 46 no. children, please view enclosed accompanying drawings prepared by Davey + Smith Architects for full details of the proposed two storey childcare / creche facility.

The development proposal therefore exceeds its requirement for the provision of childcare places and complies with the planning guidance contained 2001 Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authority

## 5.5. Conclusions on Childcare Demand

Based on the recommendations of the 2001 Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities and the 2020 Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities the development proposal is expected to generate a demand for 46 no. childcare spaces.

The development proposal caters for 1 no. childcare facility which will have a capacity for circa. 46 no. children, which caters for expected demand to be generated by the development proposal as required by the guidelines.

Furthermore, this report has demonstrated are existing childcare facilities in walking distance of the development proposal which have childcare spaces available to cater for future demand also.

Additionally, it should also be noted that under the Child Care Act 1991, a person minding more than three preschool children (children under six years of age) from different families is obliged to notify the HSE of their childminding service. Childcare services minding three, or less than three, pre-school children within the catchment area are therefore not included in the Tusla data. Thus, there might be additional childcare capacity in the catchment area.

It is evident in all the foregoing that there the development proposal will be adequately served by existing and proposed childcare facilities.



## 6.0. Overall Conclusions

Based on the recommendations of the Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001) the proposed development is expected to generate a demand for c. 46 no. childcare places.

This childcare audit has confirmed that there are currently 38 no. childcare places available in the vicinity of the development. These vacancies are located in the Corner Kindergarten facility, Little Explorers Childcare facility and the Pine Trees Playgroup Company Ltd. facility which are all located to the centre of the town.

As part of the proposed development the Applicant seeks permission for the provision of a creche facility measuring c. 189.9m<sup>2</sup>, which caters for 46 no. children as required by the Childcare Guidelines. The assessment undertaken in relation to the existing facilities in the locality have demonstrated that in addition to the creche being provided by the Applicant there is an adequate number of existing childcare places available in NMK to serve the development.