COAKLEY O'NEILL
town planning

Childcare Needs Assessment

Large-Scale Residential Development at Ringwood, Blarney

Prepared in December 2025 on behalf of

Clockstrike Ltd.

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Document Control Sheet

Client	**Clockstrike Ltd**
Project Title	**Ringwood Phase 2**
Job No.	**CON24031**
Document Title	**BLR-2-02-SW-XXX-RP-CON-TP-09 - Childcare Needs Assessment**
Number of Pages	**12**

Revision	Status	Date of Issue	Authored	Checked	Signed
1	Draft	19th November 2025	AOC	DC	
2	Draft for Comment	10th December 2025	AOC/RH	DC	
3	Final	11th December 2025	AOC/RH	DC	

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 We, Coakley O'Neill Town Planning Ltd, NSC Campus, Mahon, Co. Cork, have been instructed by Clockstrike Ltd., to prepare this Childcare Needs Assessment to accompany a planning application for a Large-scale Residential Development (LRD), on a site in their ownership at Ringwood, Shean Upper, Blarney, Cork.

1.2 The proposed development represents Phase 2 of development in the Blarney East / Ringwood Expansion Area, and comprises of the construction of (i) 323no. residential dwellings comprising of 157no. terraced, end-of-terrace, and semi-detached houses; 52no. duplexes provided in 5no. 3-storey buildings; and 114no. apartments provided in 2no. 5-storey buildings

1.3 Childcare Needs Assessments generally examine the need to incorporate any onsite childcare facilities as part of a development proposal, with a specific focus on the relevant planning policy, demographic statistics, and an assessment of existing childcare facilities in the area.

1.4 We note that a crèche facility providing 137no. spaces is permitted in Phase 1, granted permission under Application Register Reference 24/43031 (ABP 321688-25) which is to commence in Q1 2026. This is conditioned to be delivered and ready for occupation as part of Phase 1A of the proposed development.

1.5 The granted childcare facility under Phase 1 has the capacity to meet the childcare needs of both phases of development. Consequently, it is not proposed to provide an additional crèche facility within the development.

1.6 The rationale for same is discussed further below.

2.0 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

2.1 The subject site is located immediately east of Blarney town centre inside the town's settlement boundary and is approximately 7km north-west of Cork city centre.

2.2 The site is approximately 19.35ha. in area, forms part of larger landbank in agricultural use, and is located on sloping, undulating lands that comprise a series of agricultural fields immediately south of the residential developments of Aisling Geal and Ard na Gréine and running though the eastern side of Ringwood to the R617 to the south.

2.3 The "Ringwood", a locally prominent circular woodland area lies to the south and west of the site. An area known as the 'Wet Wood' is included within the site at its northern side.

2.4 The subject site is bound to the west by housing fronting onto Station Road. To the east, the site is bound by the N20 roadway and to the north the site is bound by Aisling Geal and Ard na Gréine. To the south the site is bound by the R617 road and Castleview house.

3.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001

3.1 The *Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2001* provide a framework to guide both developers in formulating development proposals, and local authorities in assessing proposals.

3.2 The Guidelines list the following as being appropriate locations for childcare facilities:

- New communities/Larger new housing developments
- The vicinity of concentrations of workplaces, such as industrial estates, business parks and any other locations where there are significant numbers working.
- In the vicinity of schools.
- Neighbourhood, District and Town Centres.
- Adjacent to public transport corridors, park-and-ride facilities, pedestrian routes and dedicated cycle ways.

3.3 Appendix 2 of the Guidelines states an indicative standard of 1 childcare facility per 75 dwellings in new housing areas. It further states that the threshold for provision should be established having regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profiles.

3.4 It must be noted that the Guidelines' indicative standard that 1 childcare facility be provided per 75 dwellings in new housing areas is no longer considered to be a practical benchmark and childcare provision is, instead, routinely addressed on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration existing facilities and capacity.

Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2022

3.5 The *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022)* requires that childcare facilities be provided in accordance with the demographic profile of the area, the existing capacity of childcare centres, and the scale and unit mix of the proposed development. These guidelines also specifically state:

> *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.*

Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025

3.6 The Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines which were published in 2025 note the following in relation to the provision of Childcare Facilities:

> *'Notwithstanding the Planning Guidelines for Childcare Facilities (2001), which are subject to*

review, 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, 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 on-site childcare provision and subject to the factors above, this may also apply in part or whole, to units with two or more bedrooms'.

Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028

3.7 **Objective 3.21 Childcare Facilities** of the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 relates to the provision of childcare facilities and is outlined as follows:

> ***Childcare Facilities***
> *To support the provision and expansion of high-quality childcare facilities throughout the city. The Council will:*
> *a) Require purpose built childcare facilities as part of proposals for new residential developments of more than 75 dwelling units. However, where it can be clearly established that existing facilities are sufficient, alternative arrangements will be considered;*
> *b) Consult with the Cork City Childcare Company and the HSE on planning applications where childcare facilities are proposed;*
> *c) Require employers with more than 500 members of staff to provide childcare facilities as part of planning applications for significant new and extended development.*

3.8 **Section 3.63** of the Development Plan outlines Cork City Council's consideration of the needs of children and young people and states that the provision of more childcare is necessary for the successful delivery of compact growth and the creation of a more liveable city.

3.9 **Section 3.67** of the Development Plan provides guidance on the provision of childcare facilities within Cork City as follows:

> *The provision of childcare should be addressed where, or within walking distance to where the need arises. In accordance with the Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001), new residential developments of more than 75 homes will be expected to provide purpose-built as part of the development unless it can be demonstrated there is sufficient capacity in existing facilities. Large employment development, either new developments or expansion of existing developments, will be required to provide childcare facilities. In large scale retail, leisure or tourism developments, the provision of a drop-in childcare facilities will also be encouraged. Chapter 11 Placemaking and Managing Development lists development management considerations and references the Government Guidelines: "We Like This Place - Guidelines for Best Practice in the Design of Childcare Facilities" (2005).*

4.0 POTENTIAL FUTURE DEMAND CREATED BY THE DEVELOPMENT

4.1 This report assesses the likely demand for childcare facilities created by the proposed development of 323no. residential units comprising of 157no. houses, 114no. apartments and 52no. duplexes. The mix of dwellings is broken down as follows:

- 54no. 1-bed dwellings;
- 86no. 2-bed dwellings;
- 155no. 3-bed dwellings; and
- 28no. 4-bed dwellings

4.2 In calculating the likely demand generated for childcare spaces, regard must be had to the planning policies in place pertaining to the provision of childcare facilities as part of apartment developments.

4.3 As noted in Section 3 above, both the *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2022* and *Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025,* state that 1-bed units should not generally be considered when considering the provision and need for childcare facilities arising from development.

4.4 The proposed development includes 54no. 1-bed dwellings, in line with the 2022 and 2025 Guidelines, these units shall be disregarded when considering the childcare needs arising from the development.

4.5 Accordingly, an assessment of this nature would be restricted to considering the likely demand arising from the proposed development in respect of the 2-bed, 3-bed, and 4-bed proposed units, which comprises a total of 269no. units.

4.6 *The Guidelines for Planning Authorities for the development of Childcare Facilities, 2001,* outline in Appendix 2 the standard to generally be applied to ensure that there is sufficient capacity in a proposed childcare facility to meet the demand created as a result of the development of residential dwellings. The Guidelines state:

> *'The make-up of the proposed residential area, i.e. an estimate of the mix of community the housing area seeks to accommodate. (If an assumption is made that 50% approximately of the housing area will require childcare then in a new housing area of 75 dwellings, approximately 35 will need childcare. One facility providing a minimum of 20 childcare places is therefore considered to be a reasonable starting point on this assumption. Other assumptions may lead to an increase or decrease in this requirement.)'.*

4.7 Having regard to the metric for assessing the childcare need set out in the Childcare Planning Guidelines, the propped 269no. units create a childcare need of 71no. of children (269/75 x 20).

4.8 It is also prudent to consider clear demographics emerging from the 2022 Census which relate to family sizes and trends relating to attendance of childcare facilities.

4.9 Using the most up to date CSO figures, based on the average national household size of 2.7 people per

household[1], it can be estimated that the proposed development of 269no. units will result in a population equivalent of 726.3no. people residing in them.

4.10 According to the 2022 Census, the average family in the state contains 1.34 children (0-18 age bracket). Therefore, the relevant proposed 269no. units could theoretically accommodate c. 360no. children. However, the demographic composition particular to the local population must also be analysed to determine the number of children the proposed development may give rise to.

4.11 The 2022 Census also notes that on average children under the age of 9 represent 10.6% of the population of Cork City. Using this rationale, it is estimated that the proposed development will potentially result in approximately 38no. children of the age where childcare facilities could be required for children aged 0-9.

4.12 In addition, it is of note that nationally, 19.5% of children aged 0-9 avail of Creche/Montessori/Playgroup facilities. The Census indicates that in Cork City, 18% of children aged 0-9 avail of Crèche/Montessori/Playgroup facilities.

4.13 Applying the Cork City percentage of pre-school children who are cared for in a Crèche/Montessori/ Playgroup/After-school facility, only 7no. childcare spaces would potentially be required to be accommodated at the proposed development for children aged 0-9.

4.14 It is clear from these emerging population patterns that there is a decrease in the number of children per families and as such this gives rise to a decrease in the childcare needs arising. Further to this, is clear that 82% of children aged 0-9 in Cork City do not attend Crèche/Montessori/Playgroup facilities.

4.15 Given the above, it is considered that the potential childcare need arising from the proposed development may be significantly below the 71no. children calculated under the metrics set out in the *The Guidelines for Planning Authorities for the development of Childcare Facilities, 2001*.

[1] Census 2022 statistics which is a small decrease with the 2016 average of 2.75 per household. https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/householdsizeandmaritalstatus/

5.0 ASSESSMENT

5.1 In order to establish the local need for a new childcare facility as part of the proposed development, a thorough examination was undertaken in line with current guidelines. In the first instance, a review of all available and registered facilities was carried out using the TUSLA website. In addition, each childcare provider operating within the defined catchment area of the proposed development was also contacted to enquire about the capacity they currently have to care for additional children.

5.2 An indicative 2km radius from the subject site was utilized in order to represent a reasonable commuting distance from the site. The full list of facilities is outlined in Table 2 below.

5.3 In accordance with the childcare guidelines, we subsequently established the following:

- The emerging demographic profile of the area.
- The existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities in the area.
- The capacity of 7no. childcare providers as captured in the defined catchment area.

Demographic Trends

5.4 Initially, the demographic profile of Cork City and Suburbs is examined, as the subject site is within the defined settlement area, as per the 2022 Census. It is noted that the population of Cork City and Suburbs increased from 208,669 people in 2016 to 224,004 in 2022. This represents an increase of 15,335 people, or a 6.8% increase in population over the same period.

5.5 However, it is noted that over the same period, the number of children in the 0-4 age bracket decreased from 12,652 in 2016 to 11,410 in 2022, representing a decrease of 1,242 children over the same period. Therefore, in contrast to the overall population which has increased by over 6% in the six-year intercensal period, the number of children in the 0-4 age bracket decreased. This indicates that the number of pre-school aged children (i.e. 0-4 age bracket) is declining within the settlement as a whole.

5.6 Having regard to the fact that the total population of the settlement grew by over 5% in the six-year period from 2016-2022, while the total number of children in the 0-4 age bracket actually decreased, this is a strong indicator that there is an aging population or a reduction in the number of people choosing to start a family demographic in the settlement.

Catchment Area Settlement Capacity

5.7 The demographics of the northwestern suburbs of the City were examined using the CSO Census of Population Statistics for 2022. The population of the study area is defined for the purposes of this assessment by all Electoral Divisions located within a notional 2km radius of the subject site. In total, 3no. electoral divisions have been included for the purposes of this study area, as outlined in Table 1 below.

Electoral Division	Total Population 2016	Total Population 2022	% Change	0-4 age bracket 2016	0-4 age bracket 2022	Total Change
Blarney	5607	5894	+287 (+5.11%)	398	345	-53 (-13.3%)
Whitechurch	3000	3238	-238 (-7.35%)	248	212	-36 (-14.5%)
St. Mary's	5538	6307	-769 (-12.1%)	381	402	+21 (-5.5%)
Total	**14145**	**15439**	**+1294 (+9.14%)**	**1027**	**959**	**-68 (-6.62%)**

Table 1 - Electoral Divisions included within study area.

5.8 The population of the catchment area increased from 14,145no. people in 2016 to 15,439no. people in 2022, representing an increase of over 9% over the 6-year period. Of note is that over the same period, the number of children in the 0-4 age bracket decreased by 68no. people, representing a decrease of 6.6% over the intervening period.

5.9 This indicates that while the overall population is increasing, the number of pre-school children aged 0-4 in the area is decreasing. This indicates an aging population or a reduction in the number of people choosing to start a family demographic in the settlement.

5.10 In terms of commuting times within the study area, in 2022, for the first time in the census, questions on travel to school and college were expanded to include childcare. This allowed the analysis of commuting patterns for children aged 0 to 4 years.

5.11 For Cork City and County, 81% of children aged 0-4 travelled to a childcare facility by means of car.

5.12 This pattern of commuting suggests that owing to the proximity of the site to larger employments areas in the city, such as Blarney Business Park, Tivoli, Mahon, and Little Island, it is considered likely that a sizeable portion of the existing and future population of the catchment area will avail of childcare outside the immediate area.

5.13 Further to this, we note that the catchment of the area does not extend towards the city centre to the southeast where further childcare facilities are provided. Given the employment available in these locations, it is also considered likely that a sizeable portion of the existing and future population of the catchment area will also avail of childcare facilities in, or close to, these areas, both comprising of existing and future proposed facilities.

Distribution of Childcare Facilities in the Catchment Area

5.14 In addition to the above analysis, it was deemed appropriate to audit existing childcare provision within the defined catchment area of the proposed development.

5.15 Data from TUSLA's website was used to ascertain the number of existing registered childcare facilities in the local area. The latest information (September 2025) available on the TUSLA website indicates that there are 7no. existing early years childcare services in the area for children in the age range of 2-6 years.

5.16 In carrying out this assessment, each of these 7no. facilities were audited by phone in order to determine whether they are currently operating at full capacity and, if not, how many additional children they can currently accommodate. Details of these childcare facilities, including maximum capacity, are presented in Table 2 below. On this basis, the assessment was progressed based on available information.

Childcare Facility	Capacity of Facility	Available Spaces	%
1. McShortall Childcare Ltd., Woodfield Station Road, Cork	65	Not Known	0%
2. Shournagh Childcare, Elmgrove, Shournagh Road, Blarney, Co. Cork	77	0	0%
3. Shournagh Childcare (Ballyneety), Ballyneety, Shournagh, Blarney, Co. Cork	55	0	0%
4. Árd na Laoí Montessori School, Clogheen, Blarney Road, Cork	11	Not Known	0%
5. Blarney Community Playschool CLG, Scoil an Chroí Íosa, St. Anne's Road, Blarney, Cork	48	<2	<1%
6. Ar Aghaidh Linn, Wood Field, Station Road, Blarney, Cork	22	Not Known	0%
7. Blarney Montessori School, Cluain Ard, Monacnappa, Blarney, Coro	33	0	0%
Total	**309**	**<2**	**<1%**

Table 2 - Existing TUSLA Registered Early Years Childcare Facilities within catchment, November 2025. (Source: TUSLA, 2025).

5.17 It is noted that information was not available in relation to 3no. local childcare facilities. Given that this information was not available, a worst-case scenario has been adopted, and it is assumed that these facilities are at full capacity.

5.18 Cork City Childcare were also previously contacted to confirm the operational status of each of these childcare facilities and their current capacity. It is noted that in response LRD Opinion, the Cork City Childcare Committee noted that there is a shortage of childcare facilities within Cork City.

Permissions for Childcare Facilities in Cork City and Suburbs

5.19 It is also considered prudent to consider the childcare facilities which have been granted planning permission in the surrounding areas of the Cork City suburbs in close proximity to Blarney. These childcare

facilities, subject to their timely delivery, would have the capacity to cater towards any future demand which is derived from the proposed development. These include standalone facilities and facilities that form part of larger residential developments, of which include the following:

- **Application Reg. Ref. 21/40732:** Permission for the construction of 46no. residential units (comprising 17 no. dwelling houses and 29 no. apartments/duplexes), a community centre/creche and all ancillary site development works, including access, car and bicycle parking, bin storage, landscaping and amenity areas at Fairfield Meadows, Upper Fairhill, Commons, Gurranabraher, Cork (to replace 40 no. residential units and child care facility/community centre permitted under Cork County Council Ref. No. 19/5010) granted on the 7th April 2022.

- **An Bord Pleanala Ref: 313994-22:** Strategic Housing Development permission granted at Kilbarry for demolition of disused hurley manufacturing factory and associated outbuildings, construction of 319no. residential units (203no. houses and 116no. apartments), creche and associated site works – **Currently subject to Judicial Review** but potential for additional capacity in the nearby area should permission be forthcoming.

- **Application Reg. Ref. 24/42796:** Permission granted to the Land Development Agency for Large-Scale Residential Development comprising amendments to a permitted Strategic Housing Development of 265 no. units (An Bord Pleanála Ref: 308923- 20) on the site of the Former St Kevin's Hospital and Grounds, Shanakiel, Cork. A 630sqm creche forms part of the permission granted on the 20th May 2024.

- **Application Reg. Ref. 22/40976 (ABP 314905-22):** Permission granted for development of 94 no. residential housing units comprising 7 no. 4-bed detached dwellings, 5 no. 3-bed detached dwellings, 19 no. 4-bed semi-detached dwellings, 41 no. 3-bed semi-detached dwellings, 12 no. 3-bed terraced dwellings and 10 no. 2-bed terraced dwellings with associated residential car parking at Coolymurraghue, Upper Leemount, Kerry Pike, Co. Cork. The permitted development also comprised of a creche (476sqm.).

- **Application Reg. Ref 92/291:** Permission granted at Coolymurraghue, Kerry Pike, known as Clonlara, for a residential Development - 64 no. Dwellinghouses & creche.

5.20 Further to the above, Planning Application Ref. 25/44173 for the development of a Large-Scale Residential Development of 100 no. residential units comprising 63 no. dwelling houses, 23 no. apartment units and 14 no. apartment/duplex units, a creche facility and all ancillary site development works at lands associated with the Former St. Ann's Hydropathic Establishment, St. Ann's Hill, Kilnamucky, Tower, Blarney, Cork. This application is currently subject to a Request for Further Information.

5.21 As noted above in section 5.12, the majority of children availing of creche/childcare/Montessori's commute to these facilities by car, putting an even greater emphasis on the ability to avail of childcare facilities outside the immediate catchment area.

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 The proposed development represents Phase 2 of the wider development of the Ringwood lands at Blarney. Under Phase 1 granted permission under Application Register Reference 24/43031 (ABP 321688-25), a childcare facility with capacity to accommodate 137no. children is included in this development. As part of the grant of permission of Phase 1 the childcare facility is to be delivered and ready for occupation as part of Phase 1A of the development. Construction on Phase 1A is to commence in Q1 2026.

6.2 Phase 1 of the development comprises of 246no. dwellings (56no. 1-bed, 94no. 2-bed, 64no. 3-bed, 32no. 4-bed). Using the standard accepted method of calculating the childcare need arising as set out in the Childcare Planning Guidelines, the granted 190no. units, when disregarding 1-bed units, create a childcare need of 50no. of children (190/75 x 20).

6.3 Phase 2, as proposed under this planning application has the potential to create a childcare need of 71no. of children (269/75 x 20).

6.4 The cumulative childcare need arising from the development of Phase 1 and 2 result in a potential childcare need of 121no. children. This need, as set out in Section 4 of this assessment, is considered to likely be significantly less owing to demographic trends.

6.5 Nevertheless, it is clear that the granted childcare facility under Phase 1 has the capacity to meet the childcare needs of both phases of development. Consequently, it is not proposed to provide an additional crèche facility within the development.

6.6 This is considered to be in line with the assessment of the Phase 1 application undertaken by the Planning Authority. Under the Phase 1 application, Cork City Council issued a Request for Further Information, seeking that the creche which was initially proposed to accommodate 61no. children be increased to accommodate 137no. children if the creche is to serve both Phase 1 and 2. The capacity of the facility was increased, and as outlined previously, subsequently granted permission. The applicants intend to deliver the childcare facility in accordance with their permission in full.

6.7 We note the report from Cork City Childcare Commite to the S32B submission in respect of the proposed development which was received on the 30th May 2025, seeking that an additional childcare facility which catered for children up to 15 years of age be provided with a capacity of 60no. spaces at a minimum be provided.

6.8 However, as set out above, the granted facility in Phase 1 was revised to account for the need arising from both Phase 1 and 2, and it has been clearly demonstrated that the capacity of 137no. children is in excess of the demand arising from the development of Phase 1 and 2 when calculating the need arising from the development in line with the accepted standards set out in the Childcare Planning Guidelines.

6.9 It is therefore considered that the granted facility under Phase 1 has sufficient capacity to cater for the needs arising as a result of the proposed development.