

Childcare Needs Assessment

Proposed Large-scale Residential Development at Phase 1 'The Farm', Bessborough, Ballinure, Blackrock, Cork

Client: Estuary View Enterprises 2020 Limited

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Connecting people.

Connecting places.

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Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Document

This Childcare Needs Assessment has been prepared by HW Planning to accompany a planning application for the development of a Large-scale Residential Development (LRD) of 140 no. apartment units at Phase 1 'The Farm', Bessborough, Ballinure, Blackrock, Cork. Specifically, it examines the demand for childcare places to be generated by the proposal and the extent to which this can or will be catered for on or off-site.

1.2 Proposed Development

The proposed development consists of the construction of a residential development of 140 no. apartment units with ancillary crèche, landscaping and associated site development works.

The proposed development site is 5.08 ha in area, located to the north of Bessborough House, on lands that were historically part of the parkland within the demesne and the farmyard and farm lands at Bessborough House, Ballinure, Blackrock, previously in institutional use. The site is adjacent to the Mahon District Centre and the Passage West Greenway to the east, the Cork Heritage Park Greenway to the west and bound to the north by the Bessboro Road and the Sacred Heart Covent with a local access road running along the eastern boundary and the Alzheimer Society of Ireland's Daycare Centre and a HSE support unit located to the north east. It is approximately 5km from Cork City.

The proposed development will provide for the demolition of 10 no. existing agricultural buildings /sheds and log cabin residential structure and the construction of a residential development of 140 no. residential apartment units over 2 no. retained and repurposed farmyard buildings (A & B) with single storey extension and 3 no. new blocks of 3-5 storeys in height, with supporting resident amenity facilities, crèche, and all ancillary site development works. The proposed development includes 140 no. apartments to be provided as follows: 70 no. 1-bedroom, 12 no. 2-bedroom (3 person), 57 no. 2-bedroom (4 person) and 1 no. 3-bedroom. Block A and Block B will be retained for resident amenities.

The proposal includes a new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the adjoining Passage West Greenway to the east, connecting into the existing down ramp from Mahon providing direct access to the greenway and wider areas, as well as new pedestrian access to Bessborough Estate to the north including upgrades to an existing pedestrian crossing on Bessboro Road. The proposed development provides for outdoor amenity areas including publicly accessible parkland, landscaping, surface car parking, bicycle parking, bin stores, substation, public lighting, roof mounted solar panels, wastewater infrastructure including new inlet sewer to the Bessborough Wastewater Pumping Station to the west, surface water attenuation, water utility services and all ancillary site development works. Vehicular access to the proposed development will be provided via the existing access road off the Bessboro Road.

Part of the proposed development is situated within the curtilage of Bessborough House which is a Protected Structure (Reference: RPS 490).

An Environmental Impact Assessment Report and a Natura Impact Statement has been prepared in respect of the proposed development.

1.3 Proposed Childcare Facility

As detailed in the accompanying Site Layout Plan and Proposed Ground Floor Plan (Drawing No. SB-2020-107-201) prepared by ShipseyBarry Architecture, the proposed development includes a single-storey creche facility with a gross floor area of 240.8sq.m in Building D. The proposed creche facility will have a capacity for 25 no. children.

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Planning Policy Context

2.1 Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001

The 2001 Guidelines provide a framework to guide both local authorities in preparing development plans and assessing applications for planning permission, and developers and childcare providers in formulating development proposals. Appendix 2 of the Guidelines states that.

> *'In new communities/ new housing areas, planning authorities should require the provision of at least one childcare facility for new housing areas and other areas of residential development unless there are significant reasons to the contrary.*
>
> *An indicative standard of one childcare facility per 75 dwellings is recommended. One facility providing a minimum of 20 childcare facilities is considered to be a reasonable starting point.*
>
> *The threshold for provision should be established having had regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas.'*

2.2 Circular PL 3/2016

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

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

2.3 Universal Design Guidelines 2019

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

- The Universal Design ELC setting comprises four quality features.

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

2.4 Design Standards for Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2025)

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

> *'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.'*

2.5 Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028

Objective 3.21 of the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 (CDP) sets out to support the provision and expansion of high-quality childcare facilities throughout the city. The Council will:

> *'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.*
>
> *Consult with the Cork City Childcare Company and the HSE on planning applications where childcare facilities are proposed.*
>
> *Require employers with more than 500 members of staff to provide childcare facilities as part of planning applications for significant new and extended development.'*

We also note Section 11.163 of the CDP which states.

> *'Purpose-built childcare facilities will generally be required 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.'*

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Proposed Childcare Provision

3.1 Proposed Development

The proposed scheme will consist of the construction of 140 no. apartment units comprising the following house types/accommodation mix.

Table 1. Proposed Accommodation/Unit Mix

No. Bedrooms	Unit Type	No. Units	Percentage
1	1-bed Apartment	70	50%
2	2-bed Apartment	69	49.3%
3	3-bed Apartment	1	0.7%
Total	140	140	100%

As outlined above the 140 no. proposed units are 1-bed, 2-bed, or 3-bed apartments. As detailed in the accompanying Statement of Consistency prepared by HW Planning, the proposed housing mix is consistent with planning policies relating to housing mix in residential developments. It is envisaged that the primary market for these smaller proposed units will be first-time buyers, couples, or downsizers seeking to settle in the Mahon area.

The proposed childcare unit has been designed in accordance with standards outlined in the CDP, National Childcare Guidelines 2001 and the 2025 Apartment Guidelines which states.

> *'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'.*

A conservative approach has been taken and while the 70 no. 1 bedroom units have been excluded from childcare consideration in line with the Apartment Guidelines, notwithstanding the Guidelines statement regarding the exclusion of 2 bedroom units 'in whole or part', all 2 bedroom units have been included for consideration. Based on this approach 69 no. 2 bedroom units (100%) have been included alongside the 1 no. 3-bed unit resulting in a total of 70 no. units being considered to reasonable generate a childcare demand. In accordance with the indicative standard set out in Appendix 2 of the Childcare Guidelines 2001 which establishes the need for one childcare facility (with a minimum of 20 childcare places) per 75 dwelling threshold in new housing areas, it is calculated that this 75 unit threshold is not reached by the 70 no. units that it is considered reasonable to include. Regardless, the applicant is proposing to make provision for a 25 no. child

place facility. The proposed childcare facility of 25 no. places exceeds the childcare provision requirement.

3.2 Demographic Profile

The demography of study area, for the purposes of this Childcare Needs Assessment principally comprises the following Census 2022 Small Areas:

- 048043004/01
- 048043007
- 048043008
- 048043010
- 048043018

The population of the census study area in the 2022 Census was 1,353 persons. The Small Area with the highest number of residents was in Jacobs Island, where the overall population was recorded as 768 persons in 2022.

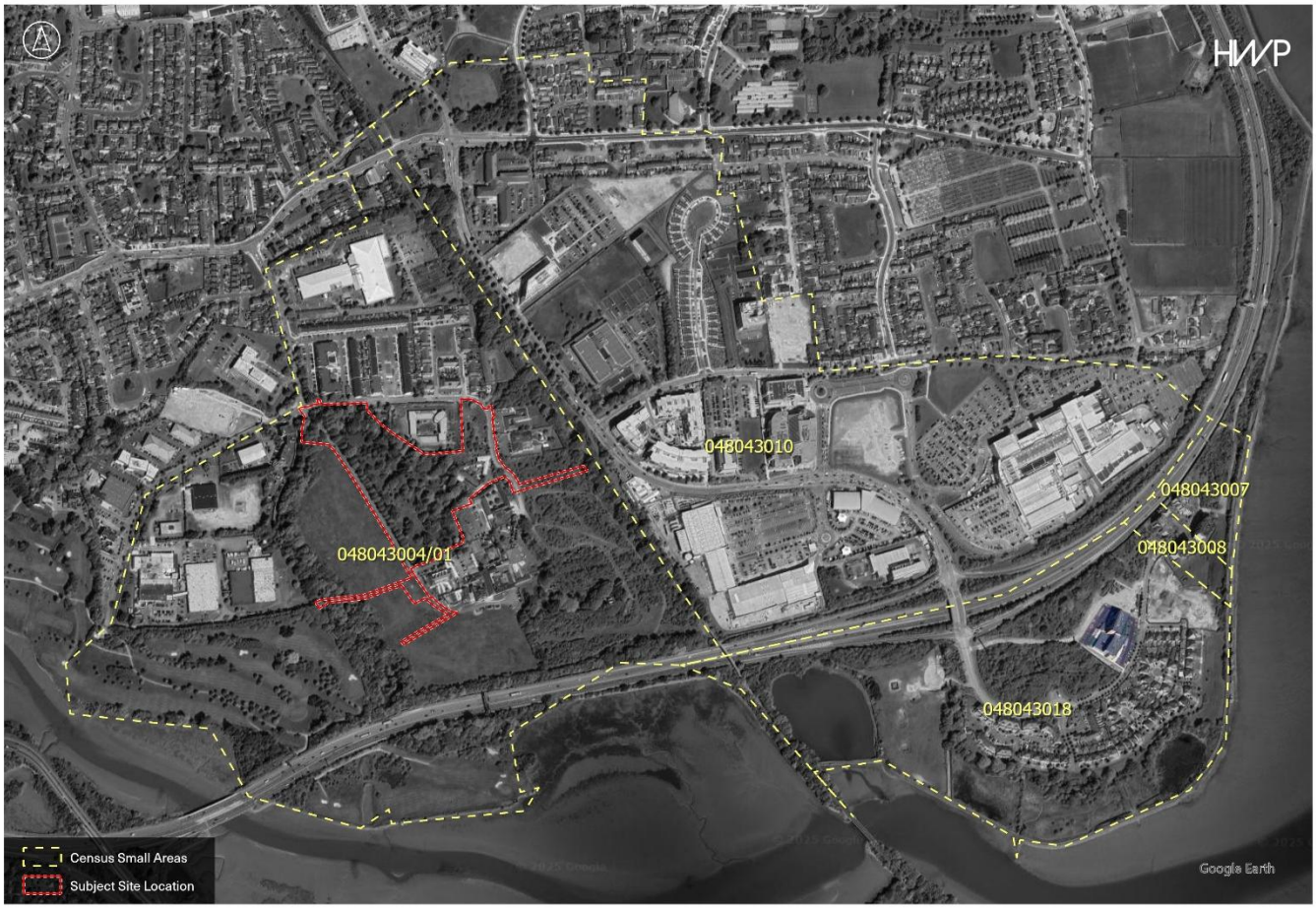


Figure 02: Childcare Needs Assessment Census Study Area.

As outlined below the study area demographic indicates that these are largely new communities with higher numbers of young children (0-9 years) and adults in the 30 – 40 year old cohort. Conversely, the proportion of older adults over the age of 50 years is less than in Cork City and Cork County Council and the national trend.

Table 4. Census 2022: Population age group within study area, Cork City and Cork County and State

	Study Area	Cork City Council Area	Cork County Council Area	State
0 to 9 years	15%	11%	13%	12%
10 to 19 years	12%	12%	15%	14%
20 to 29 years	15%	16%	9%	12%
30 to 39 years	26%	16%	12%	14%
40 to 49 years	15%	14%	16%	15%
50 to 59 years	7%	12%	13%	13%
60 to 69 years	5%	10%	10%	10%
70 to 79 years	3%	7%	7%	7%
80 + years	2%	4%	4%	4%

These differences between the study area population and the wider Cork City Council area are evident in the population pyramid in Figure 04, with 10% more of the study area population being aged between 30 and 40 years and 4% more children aged 0-9 years. If we examine the breakdown of the under 9 years population, 8% of the study area population are of pre-school age (0-4 years) compared to 5.1% of the Cork City population.

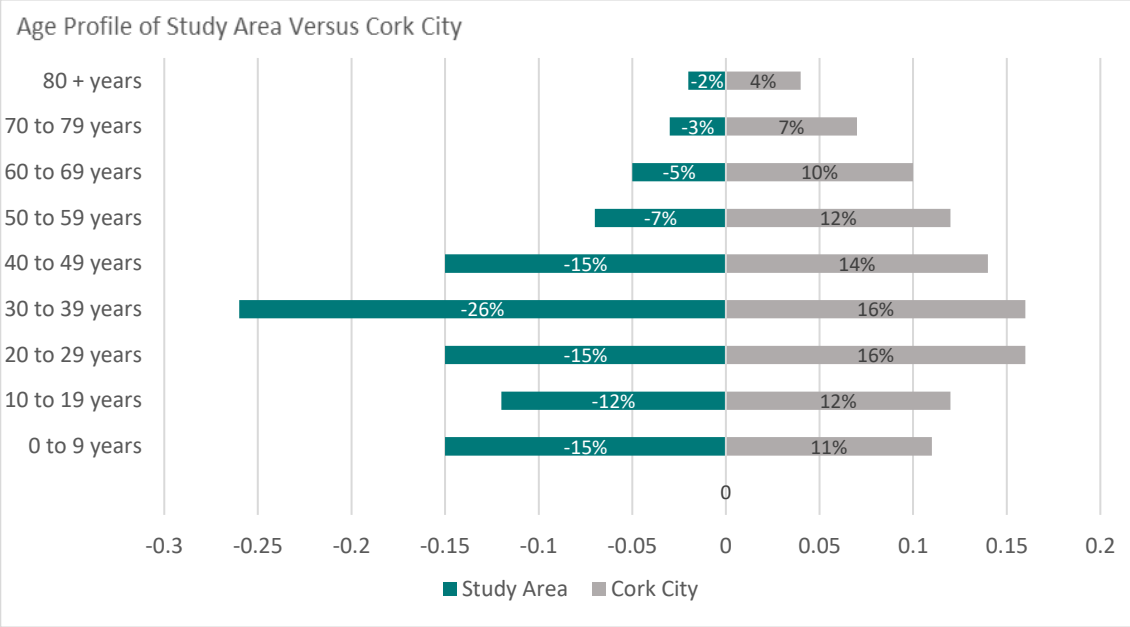


Figure 04. Census Study Area Versus Cork City Population Pyramid (Census 2022).

3.3 Existing & Future Childcare Services in the Area

In addition to the proposed 25 no. child place creche facility in this application, there are also several other existing, permitted and proposed childcare facilities in the study area. The Tusla Childcare Register of Early Years Services by County (July 2025), has been used as the basis for this assessment. In addition, a review of the Tusla Inspection Reports was carried out to ensure the assessment was up-to-date. Based on this information it is noted that there are approximately 432 no. existing childcare places across 7 no. childcare facilities in the study area (ref. Figure 03), with an estimate of 151 no. places theoretically available.

Map Reference	Tusla Reference no.	Name	Capacity	Theoretical Additional Capacity
1	TU2015CC289	Naíonra Cró na nÓg	22 (17 in attendance)	5
2	TU2015CC357 TU2015CC358	Scoil Ursula Creche & Preschool	10 (7) 44 (28)	3 16
3	TU2015CC056	Beginnings Creche Mahon	31 (14 in attendance)	17
4	TU2015CC253	Mahon CDP	22 (15 in attendance)	7

5	TU2015CC406	Bessborough Centre Creche	124 (95 in attendance)	29
6	TU2015CC308	Nurture Childcare Blackrock	135 (82 in attendance)	53
7	TU2016CC008	The Village Montessori AMI	88 (67 in attendance)	21
	TOTAL	**7 No. Facilities**	**432 places**	**151 vacancies**

Typically, attendances at childcare facilities can fluctuate significantly given the time of year with lower attendances likely during summer holidays and school mid-term breaks etc. The actual number of available spaces may therefore differ from these estimates, depending on when the Tusla Inspection was undertaken. However, it gives a general indication of availability.

It should be noted that, excluding the creche that is the subject of this application, an additional 2 no. other creches have been granted planning permission since 2021 in the study area. These are:

- Ref 21/40196 – permission for a creche at a site adjacent to Telus International Loughmahon Link Road (R852) Mahon.
- Ref 21/40453 – alter and extend existing permission for a creche (183782/ABP-302784-18) at Bessboro, Mahon.

Proposed Creche applications in the vicinity include:

- Ref 25/44008 for a mixed use development at Mahon Point to include a 64 no. space creche. Further Information has been requested by the Council.

The delivery of the 2 more recent permissions alone would significantly increase the childcare spaces within the study area. Based on the above it is concluded that there is existing and permitted childcare capacity in the Mahon area. The proposed development of the subject creche to accommodate 25 child places will more than address the demand generated by the proposed LRD which as a result will not cause any undue pressure on the existing and planned childcare facilities.



Figure 03. Existing, Permitted and Proposed Childcare Facilities in the Vicinity

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Conclusion

This Childcare Needs Assessment accompanies an application for a Large-scale Residential Development at 'The Farm', Bessborough, Ballinure, Blackrock, Cork. Having regard to Section 4.7 of the 2025 Apartment Guidelines and Appendix 2 of the Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001, it has been established that it can reasonably be assumed that the proposed LRD at Bessboro would include 70 no. units with 2 and 3 bedrooms that could potentially generate a need for childcare places. Even adopting a conservative approach that includes all the 2 bedroom units in the assessment, this falls short of the 75 no. unit threshold that would trigger a requirement for a childcare facility. However, the applicant proposes to deliver a 25 no. child creche in excess of the projected demand.

Census 2022 indicates a younger population profile in the study area, with higher proportions of children aged 0–9 years and adults in their 30s compared to city and national averages. Seven childcare providers currently operate locally, offering 432 places with some surplus capacity. Two additional creches have been granted permission since 2021 and two further creches are currently proposed. Overall, the proposed creche facility designed by ShipseyBarry Architecture is in accordance with all relevant policies and objectives of the Cork County Development Plan 2022, Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001 and Universal Design Guidelines 2019

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Accreditations
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