

Assessment of Childcare Provision in Kill

1. Introduction

In order to assess the requirements for a new crèche facility on the subject lands a study has been undertaken which looks at the existing and proposed crèche facilities in the Kill area surrounding the subject site. Consistency of proposals with the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Childcare Facilities under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 and the Kildare County Development Plan 2017 – 2023 has been demonstrated in the analysis of childcare provision below.

2. Kildare County Development Plan

This study has been prepared in compliance policy C02 of the Kildare Development Plan 2017-2023 which reads as follows

CO2: Ensure that community facilities are provided in new communities on a phased basis in tandem with the provision of housing in accordance with approved Local Area Plans or Planning Schemes. In this regard, applicants will be required to submit a Social Infrastructure Assessment (SIA) for the following:

- Residential schemes on zoned land which are greater than 50 units.*
- Residential schemes on zoned lands in Town and Village Plans which are greater than 10 units,*
- Residential schemes on unzoned lands which are greater than 10 units*
- Other cases where deemed necessary by the Planning Authority.*

In certain large mixed use schemes the frontloading of such infrastructure may be required prior to the commencement of development.

3. Requirement for Childcare Facilities

In preparing the review of childcare facilities in the surrounding area, an appropriate starting point was a review of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government publication entitled 'Childcare Facilities – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)'. The Kildare County Development Plan 2017 – 2023 also provided for guidance on the provision of childcare facilities and notably Chapter 11 – Social, Community and Cultural Development and Chapter 17 – Development Standards. The latter states that:

"All childcare facilities shall be provided in accordance with the Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG). In particular the following should be noted:

- One childcare facility is generally required to cater for 20 places in development of 75 houses, including local authority and social housing schemes, in accordance with DEHLG Guidelines. This standard may be varied depending on local circumstances. The Council will consult with the Kildare county Childcare Committee in this regard.”

A review of the requirements for the provision of Childcare facilities within new housing development was examined and the relevant conclusions drawn. Kildare County Childcare committee were contacted for an updated list of childcare facilities in the area.

The existing facilities in the area are as follows:

1. Circle of Friends
2. Rose Cottage Playschool
3. The Garden Montessori
4. Scoil Bride Pre-School
5. Johnstown Childcare Centre (now called: Enquiring Minds)

The available capacity at these facilities was established to give an understanding for what capacity is available in the area at present

Proposed Additional Crèche Facilities

- In addition to the above a 155m crèche has been built at Newtown Manor (reg. ref. 04/1143). This crèche has never been occupied.
- A further crèche also 155m is approved under reg. ref. 120965 as part of a residential development but work on the crèche has not yet begun.

4. Childcare Facilities – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)

The Childcare 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. The guide lines are intended to ensure a consistent approach throughout the country to the treatment of applications for planning permission for childcare facilities.

The Guidelines identify a number of appropriate locations for childcare facilities, which include the following:

- New Communities/large housing developments
- The vicinity and concentrations of work places, 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

The recommendation for new housing developments is the provision of 1 facility for each 75 dwellings. This will generally provide for 20 childcare spaces based on a requirement of 35 such dwellings requiring childcare spaces. The guidelines state that 50% of units can be assumed to require childcare.

Based on this requirement the proposed development will require the following

- 50% of 130 units = 65 units
- 20 childcare spaces required per 35 units = 37 childcare spaces required

The guidelines require a minimum of 2.32 m² of floor space per child. This would equate to a childcare facility of 86m² which is a relatively small and difficult to make viable

5. Existing Childcare Facilities

The Capacity and current enrolment figures for key facilities were reviewed as part of this study as follows:

No.	Name	No. of children registered	Capacity
1	Circle of Friends	Circa. 40	Circa. 40
2	Rose Cottage Playschool	11	11
3	The Garden Montessori	16	16
4	Scoil Bride Pre-School	55	55
5	Johnstown Childcare Centre	40	40
Unoccupied or Planned Crèches			
6	New Town Manor - unoccupied	Vacant	45
7	Kildare Manor - under construction	Not Yet Built	45

Currently there are five childcare facilities proximate to the centre of Kill, catering for in excess of 160 children. A further crèche has been built at Newtown Manor that can cater for 45 children, but remains unoccupied. Planning Permission has also been granted under reg. ref. 12/0963 for a 155 m² crèche at Kilheale Manor but work has not yet commenced on this. This unit if built could cater for 45 children, bringing the total capacity of facilities up to 250 children.

There are also a significant number of unregistered child minding services in the Kill area that are not documented and which facilitate some of the latent demand. Further facilities in Nass and other local areas may also be utilized by the local population depending on the place of employment. In addition, many families will continue to choose informal family childcare arrangements such as grandparents, other relatives or friends.

6. Assessment of Requirement for Childcare Facilities

Section 17.5 of the County Development Plan states that the number of childcare facilities in the surrounding area is a key consideration in the assessment of applications for this type of

development. As can be seen from the attached graphic, there are such facilities already in place within a short distance of each other.

Of particular note and relevance to the development of the site is the location of the preschool, Scoile Bride immediately adjacent to the site. The pre-school opened in September 2011 and currently provides for 55 children. This facility combined with all the other facilities identified would undoubtedly have a serious impact on the commercial viability of a creche facility in the current proposal.

Recent trends have shown that the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme introduced in 2010 has had a negative effect on Irish creches as minimum education requirements have been enhanced for creche workers with the resultant effect of childcare customers showing a preference for Montessori schools. This reduces the likelihood of obtaining a suitable tenant for a childcare facility within the subject development and could result in the early obsolescence of the development due to vacancy. It would seem that the facility already provided at Newtown Manor may be already impacted by the forgoing and ensuing early obsolescence.

We understand that the Kildare County Childcare Committee (KCC) conducted a county wide local needs analysis in 2016 following the announcement of the second ECCE 'Free Pre-School Year' for children aged 3 and over by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This analysis noted a undersupply of approximately 60 early years pre-school places in Kill for 2016/2017. However, there is no evidence that this 'undersupply' has evolved into a commercial demand for more accommodation as there is an 'as built' facility but it remains idle.

7. Conclusion

Having regard to the five existing crèche facilities in the area, the potential use of approved facilities in the area, and to the close proximity of the Scoil Bride Pre-School beside the subject site, it is deemed that a new facility on the subject site would not be an economically viable proposition, or environmentally sustainable in terms of land use.