

Childcare Provision Assessment

For Development at Courtstown (Townland), Little Island,
County Cork

on behalf of Ruden Homes Ltd.

July 2024



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1. Introduction

Ruden Homes Ltd. are applying for a Large-scale Residential Development (LRD) comprising the construction of 172 residential units including a crèche and all associated ancillary site development works within the townland of Courtstown, Little Island, County Cork.

The purpose of this report is to examine the existing childcare facilities located in the vicinity of the development site, their capacity and the resulting need to incorporate on-site crèche facilities as part of the development proposal, with specific focus on the relevant planning policy and demographic statistics.

The report is set out as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Planning Policy Context
3. Assessment
4. Future Demand Generated by the Proposed Development
5. Conclusion

1.1 Sources of Information

This report has been prepared having regard to the following policies and guidelines:

- Tusla Reports.
- Central Statistics Office Census 2016 and 2022 SAPMAP data.
- The Cork County Development Plan 2022.
- Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040.
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region 2030.
- The Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001.



Figure 1: Location of Little Island and Proposed Site (Marked with X) in Context of Wider Area

2. Planning Policy Context

Both the 'Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2001) published by the Department of Environment, and the Cork County Development Plan 2022 require the provision of a crèche where in excess of 75 dwellings is proposed.

2.1 Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028

County Development Plan Objective SC 6-4: Childcare Facilities of the Draft Cork County Development Plan 2022 relates to the provision of childcare facilities. It States that the Council will:

“Support and facilitate the sustainable provision of childcare facilities in appropriate locations and seek their provision concurrent with development, having regard to population targets for the area and in accordance with the Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Local Authorities 2001 and regard to the Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Centres 2019”.

2.2 Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001

Appendix 2 of the 'Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities' establishes an indicative standard of one childcare facility per 75 dwellings in new housing areas (Paragraphs 2.4 and 3.3.1 also refer to this standard). One facility providing a minimum of 20 childcare places is considered to be a reasonable starting point in this regard. The Guidance acknowledges that other case-specific assumptions may lead to an increase or decrease in this requirement.

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

Appendix 2 also States that the threshold for provision should be established having regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas.

2.3 Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, July 2023

With regard to Childcare Facilities and apartment developments, Section 4.7 of the 2023 Apartment Guidelines notes the following:

“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. Assessment

The local need for a new crèche facility at the subject site at Courtstown, Little Island was examined in detail in accordance with current guidelines. In the first instance, the TUSLA Pre-School Inspection Reports for different facilities in the locality were examined. However, it was found that these are often outdated and not an accurate reflection of current provision in the area. Therefore, in order to gain more detailed information, a survey of the different childcare facilities in the area was carried out, seeking numbers of Pre-School children registered for the academic 2020/2021 school year, as well as the available capacity of each facility. Where proprietors could not be contacted, figures from the most recent TUSLA reports are referenced.

In accordance with the childcare guidelines, the assessment is set out as follows:

- The emerging demographic profile of the area;
- The existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities in the area.

3.1 Demographic Profile of the Area

3.1.1 Population

The demographic profile of Little Island was examined using the CSO (Census of Population Statistics 2022). The settlement of Little Island, as defined within the Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028, is located within the electoral division (ED) of Caherlag (See Figure 2). Part of the settlements of Glounthaune, Glanmire and Riverstown, and a large rural hinterland are also captured in the Caherlag ED. The assessment of the ED includes a comparative analysis with National and County averages across a number of datasets.

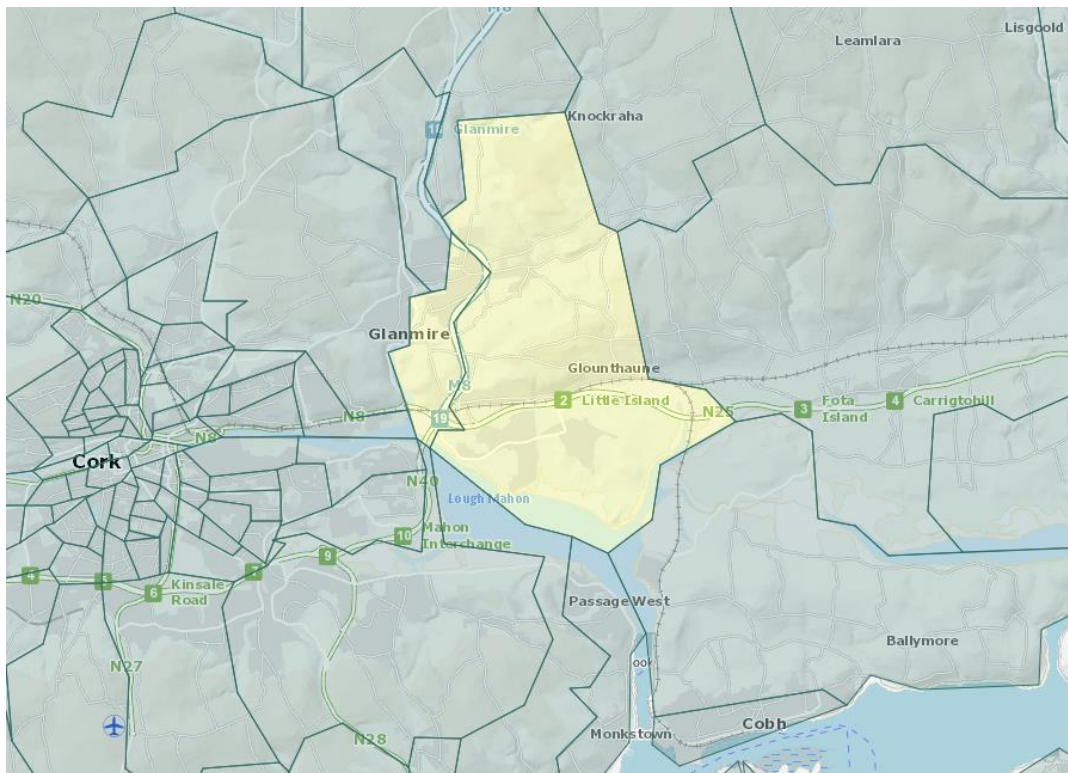


Figure 2: Geographical Extent of Caherlag Electoral Division (Base Map CSO 2022).

The population of the Caherlag ED increased from 7,481 in 2016 to 8,080 in 2022, which represents an increase of 8% (599 persons).

This increase is in line with the State rate, which recorded a population growth of 8.1% in the intercensal period (see Table 3.1). The census data demonstrates that the population in the ED, including Little Island, is increasing in line with the State population rate. It should be noted that there is a decline in the County population from 2016 to 2022 due to the administrative boundary change in 2019 to expand Cork City.

Table 3.1: Population Change
Source: **Census 2016 & 2022**

Area	Census 2016 Population	Census 2022 Population	% Population Change
Caherlag ED	7,481	8,080	8%
County Cork	417,211	360,152	-13.6%*
State	4,761,865	5,149,139	8.1 %
*Population decrease due to administrative boundary change between Cork City and County Council in 2019.			

3.1.2 Population Profile

The population of the Caherlag ED increased from 7,481 in 2016 to 8,080 in 2022 which represents an increase of 8%. In 2016, 7.6% of the total population of the Caherlag ED were of pre-school going age (i.e. 0-4 years). However, this percentile had decreased by 1.3% in 2022, where 6.3% of the total population of the Caherlag ED were of pre-school going age (i.e. 0-4 years). It should be noted that in 2011, the CSO indicates that 10.3% of the total population of the Caherlag ED were of pre-school age (i.e. 0-4 years). This suggests that there may have been an increase in households with younger children in the mid 2000's, which would have had a corresponding higher demand for childcare. The reduction of the population of pre-school going age since 2011 suggests that households are now maturing, which brings the 2022 figure for the 0-4 age category for Caherlag ED broadly in line with those identified at County (6%) and State level (5.7%).

By way of comparison, 12% of the population of the Caherlag ED were over the age of 65 in 2022. Approximately 16.4% of the population were aged between 20-34, while a significant number were between 35-64 (42.3%). 5% (404 persons) of the population make up 'One Person' households and 'Married Couples without Children' was 14.1% (1,138 persons).

Table 3.2: Population Profile
Source: **Census 2016**

Area	Age 0-4	Age 5-9	Age 10-14	Age 15-19	Age 20-34	Age 35-64	Aged 65+	Total Population
State	331,515	355,561	319,476	302,816	933,046	1,881,884	637,567	4,761,865
As percentage of total population	7%	7.5%	6.7%	6.4%	19.6%	39.5%	13.4%	N/A

Area	Age 0-4	Age 5-9	Age 10-14	Age 15-19	Age 20-34	Age 35-64	Aged 65+	Total Population
County Cork	31,337	34,415	29,839	26,920	70,042	170,542	54,116	417,211
As percentage of total population	7.5%	8.3%	7.2%	6.5%	16.8%	40.9%	13%	N/A
Caherlag ED	569	737	570	535	1,197	3,138	735	7,481
As percentage of total population	7.6%	9.9%	7.6%	7.2%	16%	41.9%	9.8%	N/A

Table 3.3: Population Profile
Source: Census 2022

Area	Age 0-4	Age 5-9	Age 10-14	Age 15-19	Age 20-34	Age 35-64	Aged 65+	Total Population
State	295,415	342,670	374,202	337,628	935,174	2,087,735	776,315	5,149,139
As percentage of total population	5.7%	6.7%	7.3%	6.6%	18.2%	40.5%	15.1%	N/A
County Cork	21,652	26,078	28,872	24,716	52,348	150,297	56,189	360,152
As percentage of total population	6%	7.3%	8%	6.9%	14.5%	41.7%	15.6%	N/A
Caherlag ED	508	571	705	593	1,323	3,414	966	8,080
As percentage of total population	6.3%	7.1%	8.7%	7.3%	16.4%	42.3%	12%	N/A

3.1.3 Household Size

The average household size is slightly higher in the Caherlag ED at 3 persons in 2022, in comparison with the State average of 2.7 and the County average of 2.8. Since 2016, the average household size for Caherlag has remained relatively static.

Table 3.4: Household Sizes 2016 and 2022

Area	Households 2016	Persons 2016	Average Household Size 2016	Households 2022	Persons 2022	Average Household Size 2022
Caherlag ED	2,423	7,462	3.1	2,696	8,087	3
County Cork	146,442	414,062	2.8	127,971	356,714	2.8
State	1,702,289	4,676,648	2.7	1,841,152	5,046,681	2.7

3.1.4 Commuting Trends

Demographic commuting trends indicate that considerable numbers of people aged 5 years and over from the Caherlag ED commute daily to school or work (see Table 3.5). Demographic travel trends indicate that considerable numbers of people commute between 0 minutes and 30 minutes each day, to work, school or college and are travelling to Cork City and surrounding employment centres such as Mahon, Little Island, Carrigtwohill and Ringaskiddy.

This equates to 32% of the total population making a journey time under 15 minutes and 67% of the total persons within the Caherlag ED undertaking a journey time of 0-30 minutes. A total of 1,515 persons commute daily for more than half an hour. This represents 28.2% of the total population of the Caherlag ED. This therefore suggests that some of the persons who commute avail of childcare facilities near their place of work, in the area outside of the Caherlag ED.

Table 3.5: Travel Trends 2022

Source: Census 2022

Caherlag ED		
Journey Time taken to travel to work, school or college	Total Population aged 5 years and over	Percentage of Total
Under 15 mins	1,716	32.0%
1/4 hour - under 1/2 hour	1,877	35.0%
1/2 hour - under 3/4 hour	1,090	20.3%
3/4 hour - under 1 hour	221	4.1%
1 hour - under 1 1/2 hours	137	2.6%
1 1/2 hours and over	67	1.2%
Not Stated	261	4.9%
Total	5,369	100%

3.2 Distribution of Childcare Facilities in the Area

3.2.1 Study Methodology

In assessing the current and likely childcare demand for the surrounding area within the vicinity of the application site, a catchment area has been defined. For the purposes of this study, a catchment area can be identified as the area surrounding the application site that the local population will travel for essential services including childcare.

An analysis of CSO data for the Caherlag ED area outlines that 32% of the population aged over 5 travel between 0 to 15 minutes each day for work, school or college and a further 35% of the same age category between 15 to 30 minutes. Based on this CSO data, a drive time of 20 minutes was initially applied as the average travel time to access essential services such as childcare. However, a total of 35 number creches were identified within this catchment. The study area was therefore reduced to a 10 min drive time, which is regarded as a reasonable travel time to access essential services, considering the number of childcare facilities within a 10-minute drive of the application site.

In addition, a catchment which aligns with sustainable travel (walking distance), was established in recognition of the strategic employment function that Little Island provides. This aligns the proposed development with the objectives in respect of national guidelines and RSES, which provide *'for compact growth, sustainable travel and place-making to reduce travel demand between residential areas and centres of employment, education and commerce'* (RSES p. 22).

An analysis was undertaken to identify the number of existing childcare facilities within the study area. The following sources were consulted to inform this study:

- Tusla Pre School Inspection Reports;
- Census 2016 and 2022 SAPMAP data; and
- Direct contact was made, via email and phone, with each of the childcare facilities identified within the study area.

In total, 13 childcare facilities have been identified in the study area. The location of these facilities is outlined in Figure 3 below, with the list of the crèches outlined in Table 3.6, including the distance of each crèche facility from the site and the relevant recorded drive times. Table 3.6 also identifies the capacities of the creches within the 10 min drive time.

Two crèches are also within walking distance of the application site; Time of Wonder Montessori School is closest at a distance of 1.3 km (estimated walking time of 15 min) and Gate Childcare Ltd is 1.9 km (estimated walking time of 23 min).

The nearest bus stop is at Island Cross, Fairways on the R623 in Little Island (1.3 km distance). Little Island Train Station and Park and Ride facility is approx. 2.1 km distance from the site (drivetime of approximately 4 min).

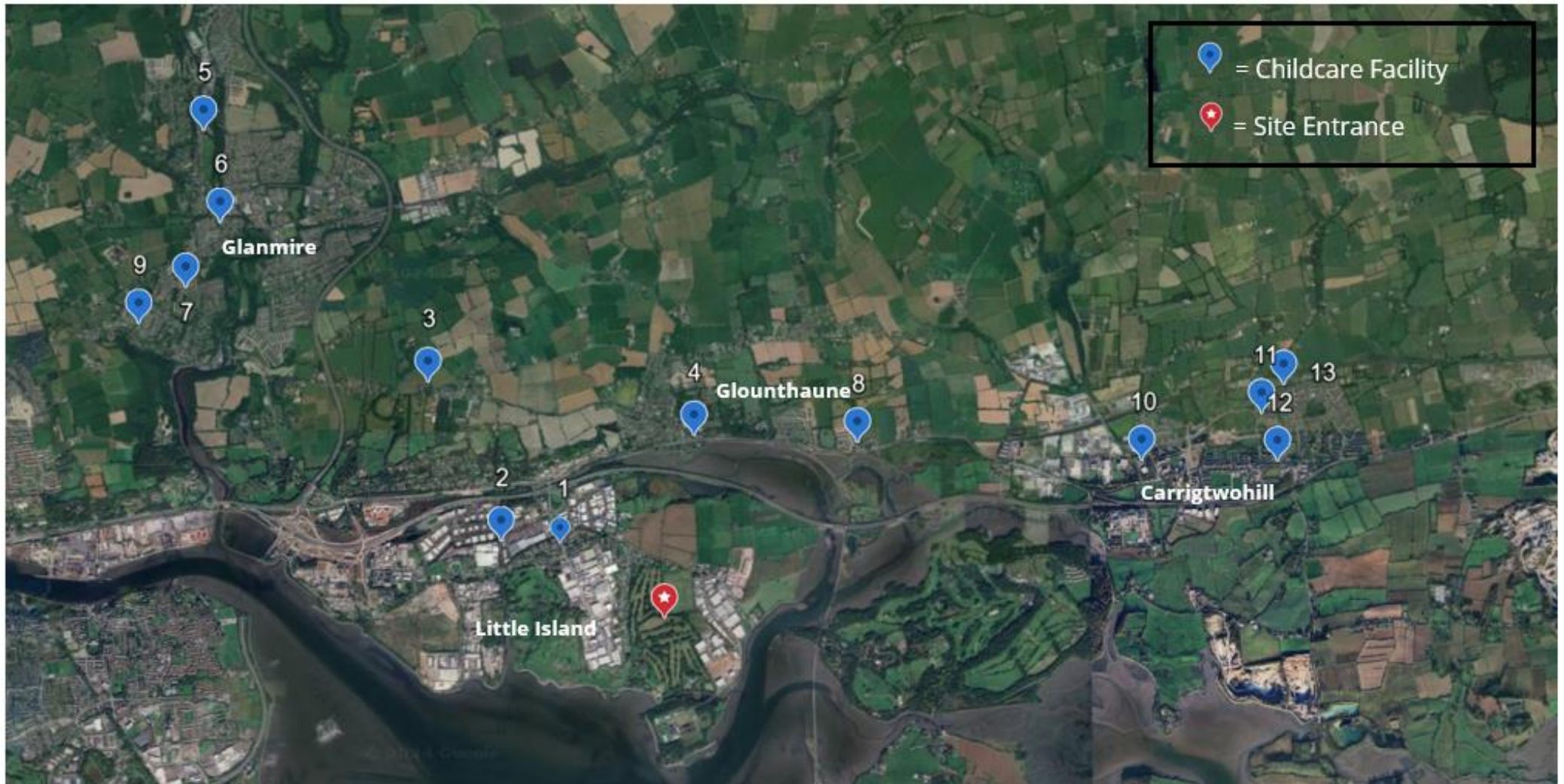


Figure 3: Location of Childcare Facilities within 10 minute drive time.

Table 3.6: Capacity of Childcare Facilities within 10 minute drive time

ID No.	Childcare Facility	Approx. Distance from Site	Drive Time	Walk Time	Current Capacity of Facility	Available Places in (2021/22)	% Available Places
1	Time of Wonder Montessori School	1.3 km	2 min	15min	22*	0*	0%
2	Gate Childcare Ltd	2.1 km	4 min	23min	105	0	0%
3	The Early Years Centre	6.2 km	10 min	n/a	44*	0*	0%
4	New Generation (Generation Education)	3.1 km	5 min	n/a	44*	0*	0%
5	Réaltaí Naíonra	6.7 km	10 min	n/a	85	10	11.8%
6	Martina's Playschool	6.8 km	10 min	n/a	40*	0*	0%
7	Toddle Inn Montessori	7.4 km	9 min	n/a	47	5	10.9%
8	Toddle in Childcare	4.5 km	9 min	n/a	73*	0	0%
9	Crawford Childcare	7.4 km	9 min	n/a	60	1	1.8%
10	Mary Geary Childcare	7.8 km	8 min	n/a	238	12	4.1%
11	All Aboard Carrigtwohill Childcare Centre	9.4 km	10 min	n/a	76	15	19.7%
12	Carrigtwohill Pre-School	8.7 km	8 min	n/a	51	0	0%
13	The Wendy House Montessori	9.9 km	10 min	n/a	16	0	0%
TOTAL					901	43	4.7%
*Representation taken from most recent TUSLA Reports (February 2024) as Service Provider was uncontactable.							

Preschool inspection reports from TUSLA are available for all the identified facilities. However, only some of these reports are up to date for the previous academic year, thus, not all the relevant data necessary to carry out the assessment was available within these reports. In the absence of this information, information in relation to the facilities was gathered by speaking directly with their proprietors in 2022 who advised on the total capacity of the relevant facility and the corresponding number of available places. The services were first contacted by email enquiring as to the enrolment numbers and current capacity. Services that did not respond via email were subsequently contacted by phone. Of the 13 services identified, no response was received from 3 services, with all other services responding via email and or over the phone. If the provider was unreachable after several attempts by email and phone, the TUSLA figures from February 2024 were used to identify the capacity of the respective facilities and to ensure accuracy, it was assumed that these crèches were working at full capacity.

The response levels from the childcare facilities were relatively high with only 3 facilities not responding. This has allowed the report to reach definitive conclusions regarding available childcare capacity in the study area.

This study indicated that of the 13 childcare providers assessed, 8 are operating at full capacity for the current academic year. A total of 43 childcare spaces are available in the remaining 5 childcare facilities. The number of available spaces represents a total of 4.7% availability of places within the identified study area of a 10-minute drive time.

4. Future Demand Generated by the Proposed Development

The total number of units within the proposed development is 172 units. There are 12 no 1-bed apartment units, therefore the total number of units within this proposed development requiring creche provision equates to 160 units. Assuming an average household size in the range of 2.8 (County Cork average household size) to 3 (Caherlag ED average household size), it is envisaged that the proposed development will accommodate a projected population of between 448 and 480 people.

The number of pre-school age children within the age cohort of 0-4 years accounts for 6.3% of the population in Caherlag ED, the State and County averages compare with 5.7% and 6% respectively. The application site is situated in the Caherlag ED, which is in line with the State and County averages. Therefore, based on the assumption that 6.3% of the population in Caherlag ED are of pre-school going age (i.e. 0-4 years), the number of pre-school children that will live in the completed development is likely to be in the range of 28 to 30. This range is a worse-case scenario as it is unlikely that all children will require childcare and commuting trends indicate that it is likely that some children will be cared for in childcare facilities which are located outside the 10 min drive catchment area while some children may be cared for at home¹. However, a conservative approach has been taken in this assessment under the assumption that the maximum number of childcare spaces that may be required.

The site is situated within Metropolitan Cork where the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040 places a focus on promoting compact growth which effectively aligns infrastructure services with land use planning. The proximity of the site to the strategic employment location of Little Island and rail corridor offers the opportunity to create a more sustainable travel led development that reduces the need to travel by car and optimises walking, in line with national policy and the CMATS.

The assessment has determined that there are no childcare spaces available within walking distance of the application site. It is therefore proposed to provide a creche for 49 spaces (256 m²), which will sustainably cater for demand created by the proposed development and potential future residential lands within the surrounding area.

¹ The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Childcare, Q3 2016 States that the percentage of pre-school children minded by their parents is 62%, meaning that 38% of children attend some sort of childcare facility. The most common non-parental childcare type identified in the survey is creche/Montessori/playgroup/after-school facility. This type of facility is used by 19% of the State's pre-school age children. In light of the foregoing, figures from the QNHS were applied to the proposed scheme resulting in the generation of a potential 6-7 childcare places being required.

5. Conclusion

This Childcare Provision Assessment has been carried out to determine the existing childcare provision with a 10-minute drive of the site, having regard to the existing demographic commuting patterns and national and local childcare guidelines.

Appendix 2 of the 'Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities' establishes an indicative standard of one childcare facility per 75 dwellings in new housing areas (Paragraphs 2.4 and 3.3.1 refer). One facility providing a minimum of 20 childcare places is considered to be a reasonable starting point in this regard. The Guidance notes that the threshold for provision should be established having regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas; however, acknowledges that other case-specific assumptions may lead to an increase or decrease in this requirement.

The subject site is strategically located within close proximity to local amenities and employment opportunities including East Gate, Harbour Point and Courtstown Business Parks, is situated within 10km of Cork City centre, is well served by the national N25 road and is situated within proximity to the Little Island train station.

Having regard to the predicted population growth for Metropolitan Cork, and policy to promote more consolidated and compact growth, the proposal will create a more sustainable travel led development that will prioritise housing in an area that can be served by enhanced public transport, walking and cycling. The capacity of Little Island's employment base to grow will also attract more people and create a greater demand for employees to live close to work. Furthermore, the provision of the distributor road through the application site will provide the opportunity to unlock residential zoned lands to the south and south-west and meet the targeted population growth for metropolitan Cork.

This report has identified that the development of 172 units on the Courtstown site would likely result in 28-30 children of pre-school age living in the completed development. Taking into account the existing provision within the 10-minute catchment area of 43 available childcare spaces, it is considered that there are enough places available to meet the short to medium term childcare requirements of the area.

Notwithstanding this, there are only two creches within walking distance of the site in Little Island, that are currently at maximum capacity (i.e. no childcare spaces are available at present). The growing capacity of Little Island's employment base will also attract more people and create a greater demand for employees to live close to work. Having regard to policy provision to promote more consolidated growth, the predicted growth for Metropolitan Cork, and the long-term development of residential lands to the south / south-west, the proposed development makes provision for a crèche providing for 49 no. childcare places. This provision is deemed appropriate given:

- The expected demand created by the development.
- The number of childcare facilities identified within walking distance of the area.
- The availability of childcare places for the year 2021/22 and Tusla Report (February 2024).
- Policy provision to promote more compact and consolidated growth and optimise the opportunity for more efficient journeys.

The proposed creche, coupled with existing capacity both within Little Island and the wider catchment, will comfortably accommodate future childcare demand.