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CHILDCARE PROVISION ASSESSMENT REPORT



Proposed Large-scale Residential Development Lands at Forest Road, Swords, Co. Dublin

Applicant: Golden Port Homes Limited

June 2025

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

DOWNEY, Chartered Town Planners, 29 Merrion Square, D02RW64, have prepared this Childcare Provision Assessment Report, on behalf of the applicant, Golden Port Homes Limited, to accompany the planning application for a proposed Large-Scale Residential Development on lands at Forest Road, Swords, Co. Dublin.

The proposed development subject to this LRD application provides for the following:

Golden Port Homes Limited intend to apply for planning permission for a Large-Scale Residential Development (LRD) on lands at Forest Road, Swords, Co. Dublin. The proposed development will consist of a total of 109 no. residential units (42 no. duplex units; 41 no. apartments; 26 no. houses) as follows:

- (i) 42 no. duplex units within 3-storey buildings comprising 21 no. 1 bed units at ground level and 21 no. 3 bed units over first and second floor levels with balconies/terraces, private and communal open space;*
- (ii) 41 no. apartments within 2 blocks. Block A will be a 4 storey building with 14 no. apartments (4 no. 1 bed units and 10 no. 2 bed units) with balconies/terraces to the north, south and west elevations, and bin, bicycle parking and plant at ground floor level and pv panels at roof level; Block B will be a 5 storey building with 27 no. apartments (13 no. 1 bed and 14 no. 2 bed units) with balconies/terraces to the east and west elevations and bin, bicycle parking and plant at ground floor level and pv panels at roof level;*
- (iii) 26 no. houses (comprising 5 no. 2 bed, 2 storey terrace houses; 6 no. 3 bed, 2 storey terrace houses; 4 no. 3 bed, 2 storey semi-detached houses; and 11 no. 4 bed, 3 storey houses);*
- (iv) 96 no. surface level car parking spaces and 4 no. surface level motorcycle parking spaces as well as bike parking stores and spaces; and bin stores;*
- (v) 1 no. ESB substation;*
- (vi) Landscaping, including the provision of new public open spaces with play areas and a MUGA; footpaths and cycle paths, new vehicular access/egress from Forest Road; public lighting; boundary treatment and all associated site, drainage and development works necessary to facilitate the proposed development.*

At this juncture, it is important to note that the proposed development is anticipated to generate a conservative requirement of approximately 8 no. pre-school age childcare spaces when utilising the demographic trending of the area over 2016-2022.

This report provides a detailed assessment of the maximum and the available capacities of existing childcare facilities catering the subject lands, as well as their catchment area, defined as the walkable distances to these facilities. This is further supported by a demographic analysis of the area to illustrate if there is sufficient capacity in the pre-school level to cater for the future population and proposed development. An overview of the pertaining planning policy and guidance is also provided.

The following planning policy and guidance documents have been reviewed in the preparation of this report:

- *Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Department of Environment (2001),*
- *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments (December 2023), and*
- *Fingal Development Plan 2023-2029.*

It is noted that the assessment of current and future childcare facilities for the area includes the analysis of CSO data and childcare facilities located within the catchment area of the proposed scheme and the current trends and details provided by the TUSLA and Pobal websites, as well as information provided by the Fingal County Childcare Committee.

2.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DEHLG (2001)

Government policy on childcare is to increase the number of childcare places and facilities available and to improve the quality of childcare services for the community. These ‘*Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Childcare Facilities*’ 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 following definition of Childcare is included in the Guidelines:

“In these Guidelines, “childcare” is taken to mean 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.”

For housing schemes, the Guidelines provide a benchmark provision of 1 no. 20 space childcare facility per 75 dwellings. The threshold for provision should be established having regard to existing location of facilities and the emerging demography of the area where new housing is proposed. The recommendations provided within the Guidelines must be considered in the context of the ‘*Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments*’ (2023), which state that:

“Notwithstanding the Department’s Planning Guidelines for Childcare Facilities, which are currently subject to review and recommend the provision of one childcare facility (equivalent to a minimum of 20 child places) for every 75 dwelling units, the threshold for provision in apartment scheme 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 for the area.”

It is important to note that the apartment guidelines also state that, “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 total mix of the proposed 109 units is proposed at:

- 1 bed – 38 units
- 2 bed – 29 units
- 3 bed – 31 units
- 4 bed – 11 units

Excluding the 1-bedroom apartment/duplex units from the overall provision for 109 no. residential units, this leaves a total of 71 no. units of the overall provision that can be deemed to accommodate families and therefore may generate demand for childcare places. With respect to the foregoing and as per the following calculations, the proposed scheme would require c. 18 childcare places.

$$(71 \div 75) \times 20 = 18.93 \text{ childcare places}$$

As noted, in line with the *Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2001), residential developments should provide one childcare facility (approximately 20 places) per 75 dwellings. However, this benchmark is not rigid and must be considered in light of more recent planning policy, particularly the *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments* (2020), which emphasise the importance of factoring in the scale, unit mix, existing local childcare provision, and demographic profile when assessing the need for on-site childcare. In addition, the Fingal Development Plan 2023–2029 supports a strategic and location-specific approach to childcare provision, advocating for integration with existing infrastructure where appropriate.

As noted, the proposed development includes 109 units, of which 38 are 1-bedroom units not typically considered to generate demand for childcare places. This leaves 71 units that could, in theory, contribute to such demand. Of these, the development includes 29 two-bedroom units which typically tend to be occupied by smaller households, such as young professional couples or individuals, and are therefore less likely to generate demand for full-time childcare. This nuanced unit mix significantly reduces the likelihood that the overall demand from this development would warrant a new on-site childcare facility.

Notably, the subject site is located in a well-connected urban area with access to established community services, including a range of childcare providers. A preliminary review of the surrounding area confirms the presence of sufficient existing childcare capacity within a reasonable catchment. This supports the position advocated by both the Apartment Guidelines and the Fingal Development Plan—that new childcare facilities should not be automatically required where existing infrastructure can meet anticipated demand.

It is also important to consider that a facility providing approximately 18 childcare places, as calculated using the 2001 Guidelines, would be below the optimal size for economic viability. Most commercial childcare providers require a larger facility to operate sustainably due to staffing, compliance, and administrative costs. Incorporating a facility of this scale within the subject site layout would not be a prudent use of land or floorspace, particularly when demand can be met elsewhere in the community. This in turn would allow for maximisation of housing and ensuring suitable densities are met in the area, notwithstanding helping to meet not only Fingal County housing targets but that of the country as a whole, for which is currently within the grips of a housing crisis, resulting in best use of land being of upmost import.

In conclusion and having regard to the *Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2001), the *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments* (2023) and the *Fingal Development Plan 2023-2029*, the provision of an on-site childcare facility within the proposed development is not considered necessary. Taking into account the specific unit mix, the likely modest childcare demand, and the availability of existing facilities in the area, it is submitted that any need arising can be more sustainably and efficiently accommodated within the established local childcare network. This approach aligns with current national and local policy, which supports a flexible, context-driven assessment of childcare provision based on demographic demand and existing service capacity.

2.2 Fingal Development Plan 2023-2029

As stated within the Development Plan, *“the provision of high-quality accessible childcare and early learning facilities in existing and new communities is an important factor for economic and social wellbeing. Fingal County Childcare Committee (FCCC) currently has 320 no. registered childcare services in the Fingal area. The Council will seek to facilitate the provision of childcare facilities in appropriate locations throughout the County. In line with the DEHLG Childcare Facilities – Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001, the Council will encourage the provision of such facilities in new and existing residential developments, within employment zones, town and neighbourhood centres, within educational buildings and close to public transport nodes.”*

By acknowledging the vitality of childcare services as local support facilities, Fingal County Council seeks to enhance childcare provision as to assist people to return to work and to facilitate training for persons in long term unemployment.

The Development Plan reinforces the views taken within the *Childcare Facilities Guidelines* in which the Council aims to:

Objective CIOSO27: *Encourage the provision of childcare facilities in appropriate locations, including residential areas, town and local centres, areas of employment and areas close to public transport nodes. Encourage the co-location of childcare facilities and community facilities where appropriate, such as community centres and schools, with an emphasis on community and not for profit childcare facilities where appropriate.*

Objective CIOSO28: *Require the provision of appropriate childcare facilities as an essential part of new residential and mixed-use developments in accordance with the provisions of the Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001 or any superseding Guidelines, or as required by the Planning Authority. Such facilities should be provided in a timely manner and be an integral part of the development proposal.*

Objective DMSO79: *Any application for childcare facilities shall have regard to the following:*

- *Suitability of the site for the type and size of facility proposed.*
- *Adequate sleeping/rest facilities.*
- *Adequate availability of indoor and outdoor play space.*

- *Convenience to public transport nodes.*
- *Safe access and convenient off-street car parking and/or suitable drop-off and collection points for customers and staff.*
- *Local traffic conditions.*
- *Intended hours of operation.*

The decision not to provide an on-site childcare facility as part of the proposed 109-unit residential development is consistent with the Fingal Development Plan 2023–2029, which promotes a context-driven approach to childcare provision. While the Plan encourages such facilities in new residential schemes (Objective CIO5028), it also recognises that provision must be appropriate to the scale, location, and likely demand of the development. In this instance, the unit mix—comprising a significant proportion of smaller units not typically associated with childcare demand—and the availability of existing childcare infrastructure in the area, as reflected in the 320 registered services referenced in the Plan, collectively support a conclusion that additional provision is not warranted in specific need to that of this proposed scheme. The site’s accessible urban location, with strong links to public transport and proximity to community services, further aligns with Objectives CIO5027 and DMSO79. It is submitted that given the nature, scale, and proposed mix of units of the proposed development, as well as proposed and available childcare facilities within the area, there is sufficient capacity to cater for the proposed development, and therefore, the inclusion of an on-site childcare facility is not necessary or justified in this instance.

3.0 CHILDCARE PROVISION ASSESSMENT

In accordance with current guidelines, the following provides a detailed examination of the local need for a new childcare facility at the subject lands in Broomfield. Accordingly, TUSLA Pre-school Inspection Reports for different facilities in the locality were examined in detail. However, it was found that these are often outdated and/or not necessarily an accurate reflection of current provision in the area.

Thus, in order to provide for a more accurate information, a survey of different childcare facilities in the area was carried out by contacting these facilities, seeking numbers of current pre-school goers registered for the academic 2023/24 school year, as well as the available capacity of each facility. Notably, this survey conducted during the 2023/24 academic year, remains a robust and relevant indicator of local childcare capacity, as it captures the most recent full-year enrolment trends and provides a clearer, real-time picture of operational availability than publicly available inspection reports, which are often outdated or incomplete.

It is also important to note that not all the childcare facilities decided to participate in the assessment. Therefore, where proprietors did not participate or 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 existing childcare facilities in the vicinity of the subject lands, and their spatial distribution in the area,

- Catchment area of the existing childcare facilities, and
- The emerging demand for childcare facilities including the future demand in the town and the generated demand from the proposed development.

3.1 Existing Early Childcare Facilities

3.1.1 Existing Childcare Capacities

As part of this Audit, DOWNEY carried out an analysis of the provision and capacity of childcare facilities in the area. The TUSLA database, as shown within Table 1, indicates that there is a total of 16 registered childcare providers within this catchment area.

DOWNEY have assessed the Early Years Inspectorate inspection reports in relation to details pertaining to these facilities and contacted these childcare providers to update the existing and available capacities. The relevant details on these facilities are summarised in Table 1 on the next page. As illustrated in Table 1, the existing childcare facilities within the area provide for a total maximum potential capacity of 489 no. children.

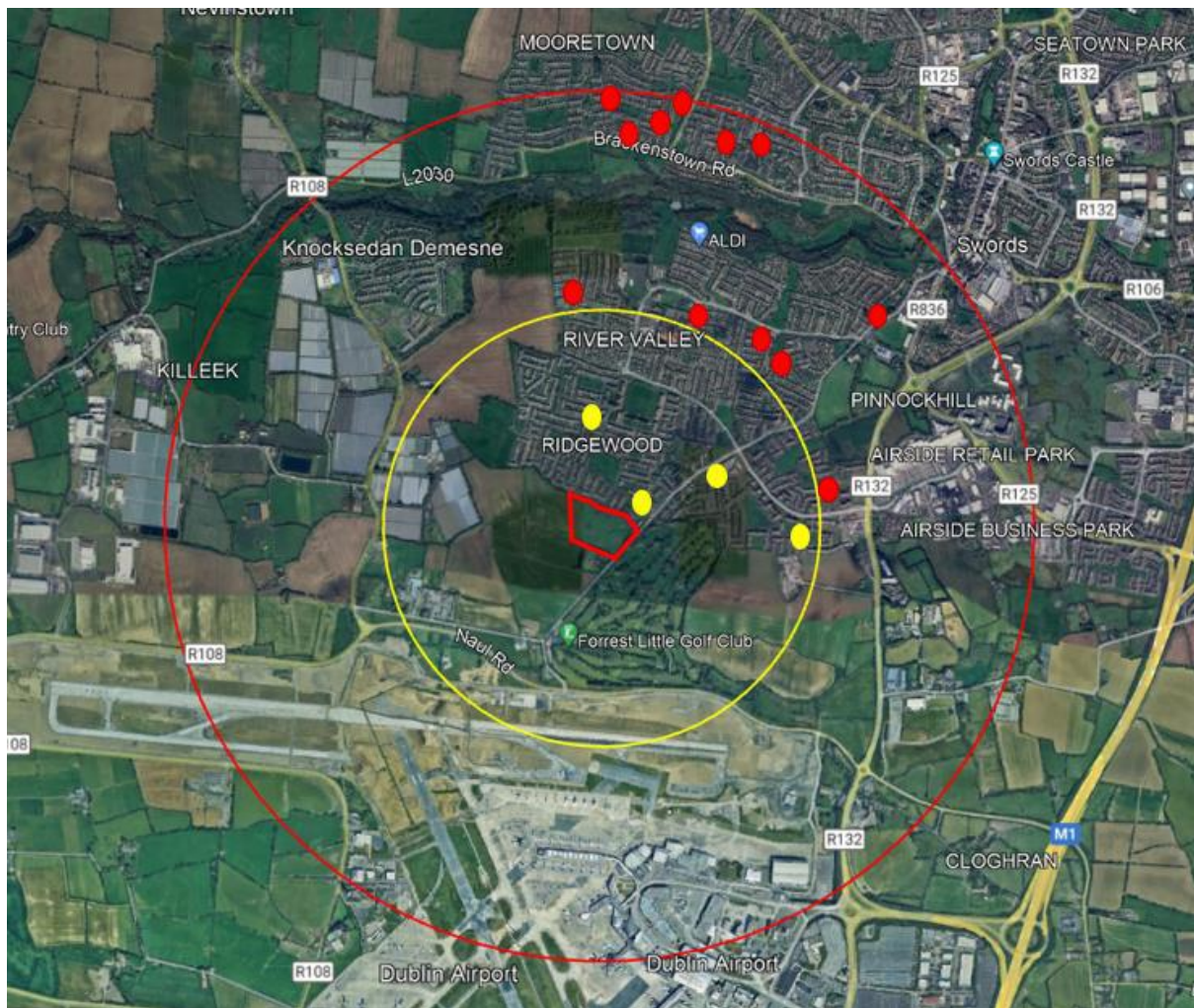


Figure 1. Location of existing Childcare Facilities within 1-2km of the Subject Lands (approximate boundaries of the lands outlined in red (Source: pobal.ie).

As shown on the Table below, of the overall registered childcare providers within the area, 4 no. childcare facilities are within 1km radius of the subject lands and surrounding area.

Table 1. Childcare Facilities within 1-2km Radius of the Subject Lands (source: TUSLA.ie updated by DOWNEY)

	Name	Address	Max Capacity	Type of Service Age Profile
Within 1 Km Radius of the Subject Lands	Marbles Crèche and Montessori	Boroimhe Shopping Centre, Boroimhe, Swords, Co. Dublin	80 children	Full Day (1-6 years)
	Tigers Childcare Ridgewood	Ridgewood Grove, Forest Great, Swords, Co. Dublin	68 children	Full Day / Part Time / Sessional (0-6 years)
	Smiles Preschool	Rathingle, Swords, Co. Dublin	5 children	Sessional (2-6 years)
	Lamha Beag Ltd	11 Boroimhe Hazel, Fosterstown South, Swords, Co. Dublin	22 children	Full Day (0-6 years)
Within 2 Km Radius of the Subject Lands	Helping Hands PreSchool	16 8 Boroimhe Poplars, Fosterstown North, Swords, Co. Dublin	16 children	Sessional (2-6 years)
	Tiggers Playhouse	51 Hawthorn Park, Forestfields, Swords, Co. Dublin	19 children	Sessional (2-6 years)
	River Valley Creche	4 River Valley Rise, Forestfields, Swords, Co. Dublin	21 children	Part Time / Sessional (3-6 years)
	New Horizons	13 Forest Park, Hilltown, Swords, Co. Dublin, K67 PD29	22 children	Sessional (3-6 years)
	Little Footsteps	Hilltown, Swords, Co. Dublin.	22 children	Part Time / Sessional (2-6 years)
	Kids Care	B.A.S.E. St Cronans School Grounds, Brackenstown Road, Swords, Co. Dublin	41 children	Part Time / Sessional (2-6 years)
	Sunshine Preschool	The Scouts Den, Brackenstown Road, Windmill Lands, Swords, Co. Dublin	33 children	Full Day / Part Time / Sessional (2-6 years)
	Bright Stars Childcare	1 St Cronan's View, Windmill Lands, Swords, Co. Dublin, K67 Y021	41 children	Part Time / Sessional (2-6 years)
	The Little Learners Corner	Manor Mall Shopping Centre, Swords Manor Ave, Brackenstown Rd, Mooretown, Swords, Co. Dublin	40 children	Full Day / Part Time / Sessional (2-6 years)
	Little Friends Playschool	23 Swords Manor Way, Mooretown, Swords, Co. Dublin	15 children	Sessional (2-6 years)
	Little Valley Pre School	Windmill Lands, Swords, Co. Dublin	11 children	Sessional (2 - 6 Years)

Name	Address	Max Capacity	Type of Service Age Profile
Apple Seeds Afterschool	Mooretown, Swords, Co. Dublin	33 children	Sessional (2 - 6 Years)
Overall Existing Capacity		489 Childcare Spaces	

With reference to the table above, there is a total maximum capacity of 175 childcare places within a 1km radius of the subject site, with a further 314 places available within a 2km radius, resulting in a combined potential provision of 489 places, all located within the Swords-Forest Electoral Division.

3.1.2 Catchment Area of the Existing Childcare Facilities

As part of assessing the threshold for childcare provision, a spatial analysis of the catchment area for existing childcare providers within the study area was undertaken. The analysis focused on identifying walkable access, defined as a 10-minute or less walking distance along the street network. As illustrated in Figure 2 below; notably existing childcare facilities are well-distributed throughout Swords, offering a strong level of accessibility for local residents. Due to the location of the subject site, the identified catchment area extends to its boundaries, demonstrating a high degree of walkability to multiple existing facilities within the assessment area.

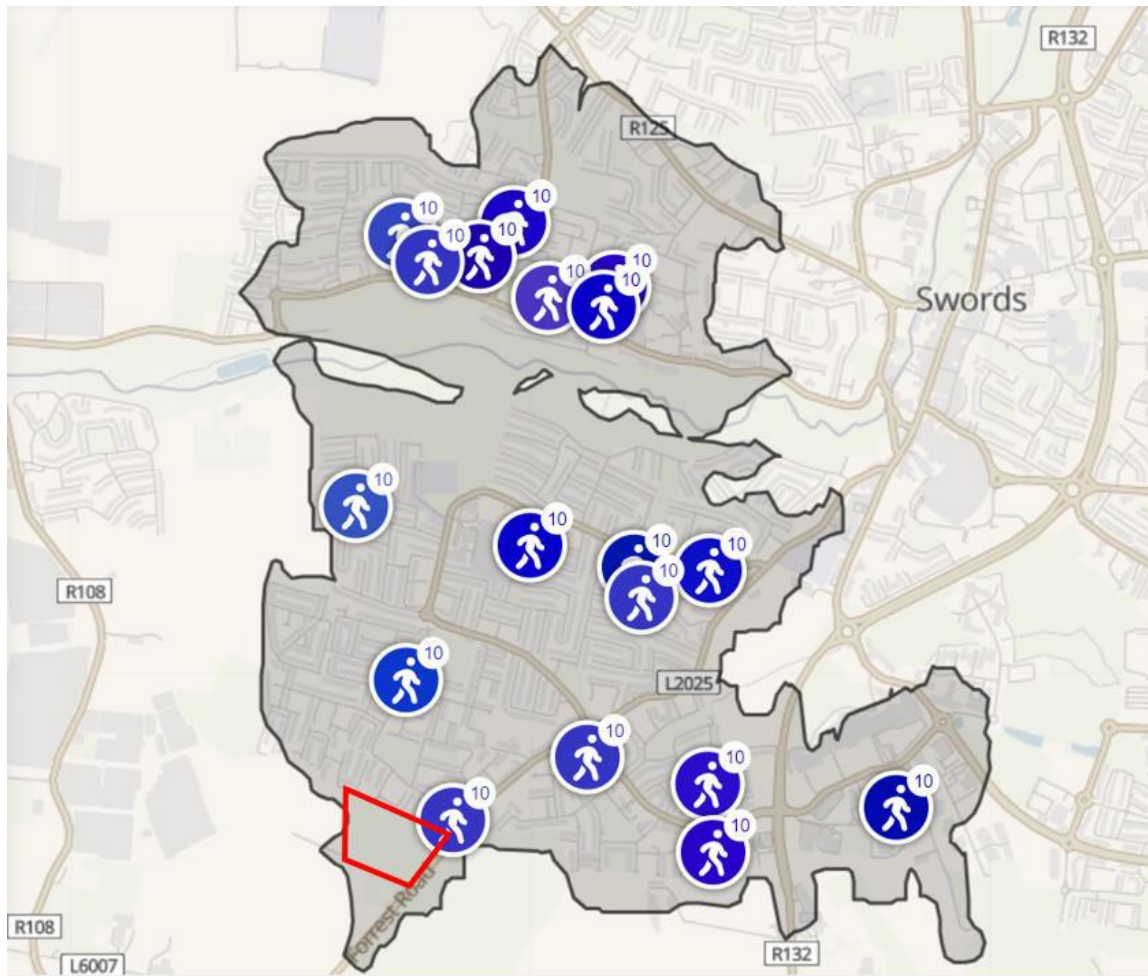


Figure 2. Walkable Buffer Zone from Existing Childcare Facilities with approximate boundaries of the subject site outlined in red (Source: <https://commutetimemap.com/map>).

It is submitted that the existing childcare capacity within the locality is sufficient to accommodate the modest projected demand arising from the proposed development, as well as serving the wider residential context. As noted, a total of 489 childcare places have been identified within a 2km radius of the subject site, with a significant proportion of these located within a 1km walkable catchment, ensuring a high level of accessibility for future residents. The spatial distribution and service variety—ranging from full-day care to part-time and sessional offerings—further enhance the flexibility and suitability of existing provision. In this context, and having regard to national and local planning policy, there is no demonstrable need for a new on-site childcare facility as part of the proposed scheme.

3.2 Future Demand

3.2.1 Demographic Profile of the Area

The demographic profile of the subject lands was examined using the Census 2022 result, as the latest census available on the CSO website. With respect to the site location falling within the Swords-Forest Electoral Division (ED), the aforesaid ED was utilised as the catchment area of this assessment.



Figure 3. Subject Site Location within the Assessment Area

Census 2022 results show that Assessment Area's population stood at 15,296 in April 2022, which indicates an increase of 773 (+5.1%) since the last Census in 2016.

Table 2. Population Change in Assessment Area against the overall Stats for the County, 2016-2022

	Co. Fingal (Administrative Area)	Swords- Forest ED
Census 2022	330,506	15,926
Census 2016	296,020	15,153
Actual Change	34,486	+773
Percentage Change	+10%	+5.1%

(Source: CSO StatBank)

As of April 2022, the Assessment Area contained approximately 15,062 private households, with an average household size of 2.96 persons. Notably, around 42.3% of these households consist of 1-2-person families, indicating that a proportion of 2-bedroom dwellings in the proposed development are likely to be occupied by small families, rather than exclusively by young professionals.

Table 3. Households Composition in the Assessment Area, 2022

	Private households	Persons in private households	% of Total Households
1 person households	788	788	14.7%
2 person households	1,384	2,676	25.9%
3 person households	1,176	3,528	22%
4 person households	1,246	4,984	23.3%
5+ person households	750	4,080	14%
Total	5,344	16,056	

(Source: CSO StatBank)

3.2.2 Childcare Demand

According to Census 2022, a total of 1,082 children were residing in the Assessment Area as of April 2022. This reflects a 21% decrease in the number of pre-school-aged children living in the area compared to the previous Census, which recorded 290 children in this age cohort.

Table 4. Pre-school-age Going Population in the Assessment Area (0-4-year-old age cohort), 2016-2022

Assessment Area	CSO 2022 0-4 y/o	% Town Population	CSO 2016 0-4 y/o	% Town Population	% Change 2016-2022
Swords-Forest	1,082	6.8%	1,372	9%	-3.2%

(Source: CSO StatBank)

As illustrated in the table below, and assuming a continuation of the population growth trends observed between 2016 and 2022 across the relevant Electoral Divisions, the pre-school age population within the Assessment Area is projected to decline to approximately 835 children by 2030—representing a reduction of 247 children compared to 2022 levels. This projection aligns with

the anticipated delivery timeline of the proposed development, based on a planning permission secured in 2024 and completion within the following six years. *(Please note that the calculation to ascertain decline with the result being noted as 835 children by 2030, was calculated through application of annual growth rate for which was noted at -3.2% with the Swords-Forest Electoral Division).*

Table 5. Estimation of Population aged 0-4 years old within the Assessment Area over 2023-2030

	2016	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Swords-Forest	1,372	1,082	1,047	1,013	981	950	920	891	863	835

3.2.3 Demand Generated by the Proposed Development

The proposed development comprises 109 no. residential dwellings, comprising of a mix of houses, apartments and duplex units. The below table (Table 6) provides the breakdown of total proposed units:

Table 6. Lands at Forest Road, Proposed Residential Breakdown

Dwelling Type	Bedroom Provision	Number of Units
Apartments	1-bed	17
	2-bed 3 person	3
	3-bed 4 person	21
Houses	(Type A) Terrace Units, 2-bed	5
	(Type B) End of Terrace Units, 3 bed	3
	(Type C) Semi Detached Units, 3 bed	4
	(Type D) Semi Detached Units, 4 bed	11
	(Type E) Long Terrace Units, 3 bed	4
Duplex	1 bed	21
	3 bed	21
Total		109

As aforementioned, the proposed development represents a total mix of the proposed 109 units as follows:

- 1 bed – 38 units
- 2 bed – 29 units
- 3 bed – 31 units
- 4 bed – 11 units

According to the apartment guidelines, *“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”*. As outlined in the demographic

profile of the area with regard to the household size in 2022, 41% of households are single- to two-person households in the Swords Forest area.

Excluding the 1-bed units, this leaves a total of 71 units that could be deemed likely to accommodate families and therefore may generate demand for childcare spaces.

As mentioned earlier, Census 2022 recorded an average household size of 2.96 for the Assessment Area. Applying the average household size to 71 no. houses and apartment/duplex units capable of accommodating families would generate 210 no. total residents within these units. According to Census 2022, 6.8% of the population residing in the Assessment Area were in the 0-4 age cohort. When this proportion of pre-school-attending population is applied to the total number of potential residents of the scheme, it is estimated that up to 14 no. children will be within this age cohort.

Further to this, Census 2022 identifies that 54% of pre-school children within Swords-Forest attended some sort of a childcare facility.

Table 7. Pre-school-age Going Population in Fingal (0-4-year-old age cohort) by Type of Childcare, 2022

Childcare Attendance	No.	%
Not in childcare	523	46.5%
Attending a form of childcare	579	53.5%
All children aged 0-4	1,082	-

Applying this uptake ratio of to the generated demand by the proposed development, **the overall number of childcare facilities required to meet the generated demand is expected to be 8 no. childcare spaces.**

4.0 CONCLUSION

DOWNEY have prepared this Childcare Provision Assessment on behalf of Golden Port Homes Limited, in support of this planning application for a proposed Large-Scale Residential Development on lands at Forest Road, Swords, Co. Dublin. Planning permission is sought for the proposed construction of 109 no. residential units in total.

In accordance with the Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001), residential developments are typically expected to provide one childcare facility per 75 dwellings. However, following a detailed analysis of unit mix, household composition, and demographic trends within the Assessment Area, it is conservatively estimated that only 71 of the 109 proposed units would likely accommodate children. As such, the proposed scheme falls below the threshold where a standalone on-site childcare facility would be warranted.

A comprehensive review of local childcare capacity has identified 16 existing providers within a 1–2 km radius of the subject site, collectively offering 489 childcare places. This existing network provides a strong level of service coverage and accessibility. Furthermore, an analysis of demographic trends

based on Census 2016–2022 data for the Swords-Forest Electoral Division indicates a declining population in the 0–4 age cohort, with projections suggesting a continued reduction by 2030—coinciding with the anticipated occupancy timeline of the development.

When considered in the context of unit mix, average household size, and the overall demographic profile, the proposed development is estimated to generate demand for only 8 additional childcare places, a level easily absorbed by the existing childcare infrastructure.

In conclusion, the assessment demonstrates that there is ample existing capacity within the area to accommodate future childcare demand associated with this development. Therefore, the provision of an on-site childcare facility is not required as part of this planning application, and the proposal is fully consistent with national guidelines and the policies of the Fingal Development Plan 2023–2029.