SDCC Rathcoole Housing Development

Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR)
Chapter 03: Need for Development

South Dublin County Council (SDCC)

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Quality information

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3 Need for Development

3.1 Introduction

This section of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) has been prepared by MacCabe Durney Barnes on behalf of South Dublin County Council. The section outlines the need for the proposed development having regard to national, regional and local planning policy and the strategic role of the subject lands within the planned growth of Rathcoole.

The proposed development comprises the delivery of 130 residential units together with associated infrastructure, public open space, active travel connections, community facilities and recreational infrastructure, including two full-sized GAA pitches, a junior pitch and associated pavilion. The development has been designed as a landscape-led residential neighbourhood which integrates new housing with the existing ecological, recreational and community assets of the area.

The need for the development arises not only from the requirement to deliver additional housing but also from the need to implement the planning framework established for the lands, provide supporting community infrastructure and facilitate the planned expansion of Rathcoole in a sustainable manner.

3.1.1 Need for Housing

The provision of housing remains one of the most significant planning and infrastructural challenges facing Ireland. Continued population growth, changing household composition a significant under-supply of housing has resulted in a high demand for additional housing.

National planning policy seeks to address this challenge through the delivery of compact growth, the efficient use of serviced and serviceable lands and the provision of housing within existing settlements. In this regard, local authorities are expected to play a key role in delivering social and affordable housing and in bringing forward strategically located lands capable of accommodating residential development.

The proposed development will contribute directly to these objectives through the provision of 130 residential units comprising a mix of social and affordable housing, together with age-friendly accommodation and Traveller Accommodation Units. The proposal therefore responds not only to the need for increased housing supply but also to the need for a more diverse range of housing options capable of accommodating different household types and tenure requirements.

The proposed development represents the coordinated development of lands specifically identified for future growth and will contribute to the achievement of national housing delivery objectives while supporting the creation of both a sustainable and inclusive community.

3.1.1.1 National Development Plan (2025 Review)

The National Development Plan (NDP) Review 2025 provides the capital investment framework for the delivery of strategic infrastructure across Ireland to 2035. The review identifies housing delivery, water infrastructure, energy infrastructure and transport infrastructure as the principal national investment priorities required to support future population growth, economic competitiveness and sustainable development.

The Review provides for total public investment of €275.4 billion to 2035 and identifies the delivery of 300,000 additional homes by 2030 as a core national objective. An additional 5.5 billion in equity funding is being provided to ESB, Eirgrid and Uisce Éireann to enable housing delivery. In this regard, the NDP recognises that the provision of housing must be supported by the delivery of enabling infrastructure including water services, transport infrastructure, community facilities and social infrastructure.

The Review highlights that Ireland continues to experience significant population growth and demographic change, with the population projected to increase to approximately 6.1 million people by 2040 and continued rise in working and retirement age population along with decrease in younger population. The NDP acknowledges that this growth will generate continued demand for housing, community facilities, recreational infrastructure and supporting services across existing settlements.

A key objective of the NDP is to facilitate compact growth through the efficient use of serviced and serviceable lands located within or adjoining existing settlements. The NDP also emphasises the importance of delivering balanced communities through investment in social infrastructure, educational facilities, recreational amenities, active travel infrastructure and a high quality public realm. The greater levels of population growth in the Eastern and Midlands region has precipitated and aim for 50:50 distribution of future growth between the Eastern and Midland region, and the Southern and Northern and Western regions combined.

The proposed development directly supports the objectives of the NDP through the delivery of 130 residential units, including social housing, affordable housing, age-friendly accommodation and Traveller Accommodation Units, together with associated infrastructure, active travel connections, public open space and significant community and recreational facilities. The proposal will contribute towards national housing delivery objectives while supporting the delivery of the wider infrastructure and community benefits promoted by the NDP.

3.1.1.2 National Planning Framework (First Revision April 2025)

The National Planning Framework (NPF) First Revision 2025 is the Government's high-level spatial strategy for the future growth and development of Ireland to 2040. The revised Framework provides the national planning strategy to accommodate significant population growth while promoting compact growth, sustainable communities and the efficient use of existing and planned infrastructure.

The NPF also identifies that Ireland's population is projected to increase to approximately 6.1 million people by 2040, representing an increase of approximately one million people above 2022 levels. The NPF further identifies a requirement for approximately 50,000 additional households per annum to 2040 in order to accommodate projected population growth and changing household formation patterns.

A central objective of the NPF is to ensure that future growth is accommodated in a planned and sustainable manner. The Framework seeks to avoid the continuation of dispersed and inefficient development patterns and instead promotes compact growth through the consolidation of existing settlements and the efficient use of serviced and serviceable lands. In this regard, the NPF establishes a target that at least 40% of all new housing should be delivered within the existing built-up footprints of cities, towns and villages through regeneration, infill and brownfield development.

The NPF identifies compact growth as a National Strategic Outcome (NSO) and recognises that many settlements contain strategically located lands capable of delivering housing, employment, amenities and supporting services where investment in enabling infrastructure is provided. The NPF emphasises that activating such lands and achieving effective density and consolidation is a national priority.

The proposed development directly supports the objectives of the NPF through the delivery of 130 residential units on lands identified for future growth within Rathcoole, a designated Self-Sustaining Growth Town within the Dublin Metropolitan Area. The proposal represents the efficient use of strategically located lands adjoining the existing settlement and will contribute towards meeting identified housing needs while supporting compact growth principles. The development will also provide significant supporting infrastructure, including social and affordable housing, age-friendly accommodation, Traveller Accommodation Units, recreational facilities, active travel infrastructure and extensive public open space, thereby contributing to the creation of a sustainable and inclusive community consistent with the NSOs of the NPF.

3.1.2 Climate Action Plans 2024 and 2025

The Climate Action Plan 2025 is the roadmap to deliver on Ireland’s climate ambition. It takes account of the legally binding economy-wide carbon budgets and sectoral ceilings that were agreed in 2022. The plan reiterates the targets set out under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 which seeks a reduction of 51% on GHG emissions by 2030 compared to 2018 levels and to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. The Plan should be read in conjunction with the Climate Action Plan 2024.

In relation to the decarbonisation of housing, the plan identifies Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and abatements, the former serving as a key metric. The following themes and associated KPIs are relevant:

Table 3-1: Themes and Key Performance Indicators

	Theme	2025 KPI	2025 abatement (vs 2018 $MtCO_2eq$)	2030 KPI	2030 abatement (vs 2018 MtCO2eq)	2031-2035
Residential Sector	Standards and Regulations	All new dwellings designed and constructed to NZEB standard.	0.3	All new dwellings designed and constructed to NZEB standard. 280,000 new dwellings using a heat pump.	0.4	Minimum Energy Performance Standards for all dwellings

Source: Climate Action Plan 2025

In addition, the plan considers the recommendations of the Climate Change Advisory Council which particularly note the need to shift away from car dependency through the consideration of land use and housing policy. It also considers the need to colocation or proximity with transport.

The proposed residential units will need to meet the applicable requirements in relation to energy efficiency. In addition, it is noted that the proposed development should include the infrastructure required to enable connection to the district heating system.

The application site is within walking and cycling distance to bus services. The provision of more housing and mixed uses in this location will support the existing public transport serving the area and will make the provision of further public transport options (such as increased frequency of services) viable. The scheme prioritises pedestrian and cyclist movements which will encourage cycling and walking as a mode of transport.

Bicycle parking storage will be provided. Car parking throughout the development can accommodate electrical charge points to ensure the transition to an electrical car is a viable option for all residents. In addition, charging points are to be provided in accordance with the requirements (20% of spaces) of the SDCDP 2022-2028. The proposed development accords with the Climate Action Plans 2024 and 2025.

3.1.3 National Sustainable Mobility Policy

The National Sustainable Mobility Policy aims to support a modal shift towards sustainable modes of travel through infrastructure and service improvements, as well as demand management and behavioural change measures. To deliver the aim of the strategy the following measures will be supported:

- Expand walking and cycling options across the country, including greenways.
- Expand bus capacity and services through improved town bus services.
- Identifying housing delivery areas within a 1km distance of public transport stops with the best potential to grow.
- Continuing to make existing and new walking, cycling and public transport networks more accessible for all users.

The scheme aligns with the national shift towards sustainable travel by prioritising high quality active travel networks and access to a range of public transport options. It provides pedestrian and cycle links to the approved school to the north of the site, Coolamber Drive, Coolamber Road, Mullally's Lane and Greenogue Drive. Further pedestrian footpaths have been incorporated into the design, providing access between the residential element of the proposed development and Rathcoole Park to the north. Public bus stops at Fitzmaurice Road can be accessed by foot via Rathcoole Park, allowing for safe and sustainable travel routes to Dublin. High quality cycle parking and infrastructure is proposed at the site.

Based on the aims, purpose and proposed interventions and measures to support the realisation of promoting active travel and public transport and to achieve a reduction of 51% reduction in carbon

emissions by the end of the decade it is considered that the proposed development accords and supports the aims of the policy.

3.1.4 Ministerial Guidelines

3.1.4.1 Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2022

Section 4.4.1 of the Development Plan Guidelines 2022 states:

> *"Should it be the case that there is a surplus of well-located zoned and fully serviced land to meet population and housing supply targets already zoned for development in any local authority area when reviewing a development plan, it is recommended best practice that a phased approach be taken to prioritise the preferred sequence of development of such sites. However, phasing should be applied where there is a sound planning rationale for doing so, based on factors such as site location, the availability or proximity of, or capacity to provide, off-site services, facilities or infrastructure.*
>
> *This should also be viewed in the context of the urgent need to increase housing supply. Phasing may not be necessary where the planning judgement is that unconstrained zoned and serviced housing sites are of broadly equivalent merit for development purposes in a particular settlement or area at the plan-making stage. In all cases, whether phasing is applied or not, development plans must build in sufficient flexibility to ensure that housing development not progressing on one or more sites cannot operate to prevent other suitable sites that may be developed within the life of the development plan, from coming forward."*

The Development Plan Guidelines also provide guidance on the application of the sequential approach to lands zoning and management. It considers that planning authorities should adopt a sequential approach when zoning lands for development, which would extend outward from the centrally located sites.

Under the SDCC Development Plan 2022-2028 the subject is zoned RES-N, OS and RU. The proposed residential element of the development is situated on lands zoned RES-N. The age friendly housing is situated on lands zoned OS.

3.1.4.2 Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2024

The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2024) establish a framework for the delivery of compact growth through the efficient use of land within existing settlements and on appropriately located urban extension lands. The Guidelines place a particular emphasis on balancing residential density, housing quality, placemaking and environmental protection in order to create sustainable communities.

Rathcoole is identified as a Self-Sustaining Growth Town within the South Dublin County Development Plan 2022–2028 and is located within the Dublin Metropolitan Area as defined by the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). The settlement is targeted for significant population and housing growth and plays an important role in accommodating future development within the metropolitan area.

The subject lands comprise a strategic urban extension site adjoining the existing built-up area of Rathcoole and are specifically identified for future residential development. The Guidelines recognise that urban extension lands at the edge of metropolitan towns provide an important opportunity to accommodate population growth in a planned and sustainable manner, supported by appropriate infrastructure, community facilities and open space provision.

The proposed development will contribute towards the planned growth of Rathcoole through the delivery of 130 residential units, including social and affordable housing, together with supporting recreational, community and green infrastructure. In doing so, the proposal will facilitate the efficient use of lands identified for development within the settlement and support the achievement of compact growth objectives at both local and national level.

The Guidelines also emphasise the importance of ensuring that development responds appropriately to its receiving environment and protects environmental assets. The proposed development has been designed having regard to the site's ecological, landscape and recreational characteristics, with environmental considerations informing the overall layout and design. An Environmental Impact Assessment Report (this

report) and Natura Impact Statement have been prepared to assess potential environmental effects and ensure that the development can be accommodated in a sustainable manner.

3.1.5 Regional and Local Context

3.1.5.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region

The site is located within the Dublin Metropolitan Area and forms part of the settlement structure identified within the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region.

Regional policy supports the consolidation of existing settlements through the delivery of housing and supporting infrastructure on appropriately located lands. A key objective is to ensure that future growth occurs in locations capable of benefiting from existing services, community facilities, employment opportunities and transport infrastructure.

The subject lands are situated immediately adjacent to Rathcoole Village and represent one of the principal strategic growth areas identified within the settlement. The development of these lands provides an opportunity to accommodate future growth in a manner that supports the existing settlement structure and avoids the need for less sustainable forms of development elsewhere.

The proposed development is therefore consistent with the regional strategy of directing growth towards existing settlements and making efficient use of available land and infrastructure resources.

3.1.5.2 South Dublin County Development Plan 2022–2028

Rathcoole is identified as a Self-Sustaining Growth Town within the South Dublin County Development Plan (SDCCDP) 2022–2028. The settlement has experienced significant growth in recent years and continues to perform an important residential, community and employment function within the county.

The subject lands occupy a strategic location immediately adjoining Rathcoole Village and have long been identified as a key component of the future growth of the settlement. The development of these lands provides an opportunity to deliver a significant amount of housing in tandem with supporting infrastructure, recreational facilities and open space.

The proposed development will provide 64 social housing units and 66 affordable purchase units. This represents a substantial contribution towards the delivery of housing within the County and responds directly to the need for both social and affordable accommodation. Importantly, the development will also provide a range of housing types designed to meet the needs of different sectors of the population. In addition to family housing, the proposal includes age-friendly accommodation and Traveller Accommodation Units. The delivery of these housing types supports broader objectives relating to social inclusion and the creation of balanced communities.

The subject lands are subject to a number of Specific Local Objectives relating to housing delivery, open space provision, recreational infrastructure and ecological protection. Collectively, these objectives establish a clear framework for the future development of the area.

The proposed development has been designed in response to these objectives. The layout incorporates significant woodland retention and enhancement measures, protects and reinforces existing ecological corridors, provides extensive housing and public open space and delivers recreational facilities inclusive of GAA pitches identified within the SDCCDP 2022-2028

It is considered that the development represents an appropriate response to identified housing needs within the Dublin Metropolitan Area and policies and objectives of the development plan while ensuring that future growth occurs in a coordinated and sustainable manner.

3.2 References

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2022) ‘Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities’. Dublin: Rialtas na hÉireann.

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2024) ‘Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities’. Dublin: Rialtas na hÉireann.

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Government of Ireland (2024) ‘Climate Action Plan 2024: Securing Our Future’. Dublin: Rialtas na hÉireann.

Government of Ireland (2025) ‘Climate Action Plan 2025: Securing Our Future’. Dublin: Rialtas na hÉireann.

Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (2025) ‘National Development Plan Review 2025’. Dublin: Rialtas na hÉireann.

South Dublin County Council (2022) ‘South Dublin County Development Plan 2022–2028’. Dublin: South Dublin County Council.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym/Abbreviation	Full Text
ACP	An Coimisiún Pleanála
CO_2	Carbon Dioxide
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
EIAR	Environmental Impact Assessment Report
EMRA	Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MASP	Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan
NDP	National Development Plan
NSO	National Strategic Outcome
NPF	National Planning Framework
NZEB	Nearly Zero Energy Building
RES-N	New Residential Zoning Objective
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
SDCC	South Dublin County Council
SDCCDP	South Dublin County Development Plan
SLO	Specific Local Objective
TAU	Traveller Accommodation Unit
Uisce Éireann	Irish Water