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BLACKBERRY LANE – PART 8 PLANNING REPORT

FILE NAME/LOCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide a narrative for the attached PART 8 Planning application presented to Westmeath Co. Council. It sets out the context, design approach, scheme density and typologies and gives some indicative information for the proposed materials and finishes for the proposed redevelopment at Blackberry Lane, Athlone.

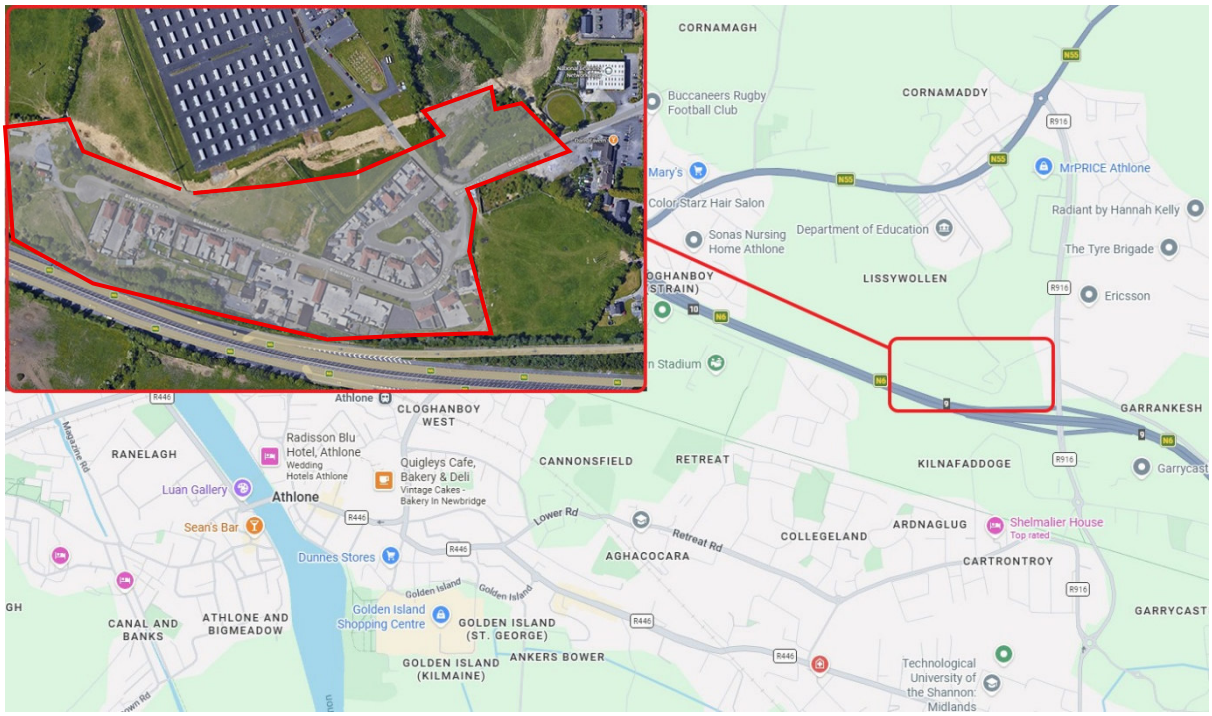

Figure 1: Development Locality Plan

PROJECT BRIEF & CONTEXT

The Design Team were appointed by Westmeath County Council in 2020 for the redevelopment of a traveller accommodation site at Blackberry Lane, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

The existing development was initially developed between 2000 and 2003 by the National Building Agency as 20 permanent day units, 4 houses, two transient sites and a community centre. Over an extended period of time a number of semi-permanent structures including dwellings, sheds and outhouses for animals were constructed. The development further encroached onto Council owned land towards the M6 with plots enlarged with the erection of additional living quarters and animal sheds.

Figure 2: Blackberry Lane: 1996 Satellite Image

The Traveller Site quickly became a permanent residence for the number of traveller families which had gathered there prior to 2000. The nomadic tradition was recognized in the original concept but it is generally found that traveller families now seek to live in houses.

Figure 3: Blackberry Lane: 2001 Satellite Image

There are essentially four family groupings at the current development. Through a series of consultations held with family representatives it was accepted that the need for the transient area had dissipated over time and acknowledged that residents on the transient area were effectively permanent residents as they have been residing there for a considerable period of time. The proposal to construct permanent housing in the transient areas of the site is supported provided all families currently on site can be accommodated.

The initial design brief was to deliver 12 new residential units and 18 extensions to existing dwellings. Over the course of the design and reviews with both Westmeath County Council and the resident representatives the development scope has adjusted to delivery 41 new dwellings over 2,3 and 4 bedroom houses with site strategy modified to align closer to general housing standards.

SITE CONTEXT

The application site consists of existing traveller residences with mixed accommodation types and day room/yard environments.

Figure 4: Blackberry Lane: Current

SITE LOCATION

To the south, the site abuts the N6 national dual carriage way with a planted buffer between the development edge and the roadway. The site is generally on grade with this level. To the North the site is bounded to the Midlands accommodation centre in Athlone, buffered by a green zone which in part now houses an undergrounded electrical infrastructure. This is a recent development with the site previously having been traversed by overhead high voltage cabling.

The site is accessed from the East via the Blackberry Lane off the R916 – Marked ‘A ‘above. There is no other access to the site, with lands to the west and northwest being in private ownership and with no road or pathway infrastructure. The site is on the outskirts of Athlone town and is approximately 4.0 kilometres on the road network to the Town Centre. It

therefore has excellent access to all retail, civic, medical and institutional and transport needs. It is less than 4.0 kilometre walk to the national rail and bus network which has excellent services to Dublin and Western routes. There is an also established Retail Park, Primary Health Care Centre and a National School within walking distance of the subject site.

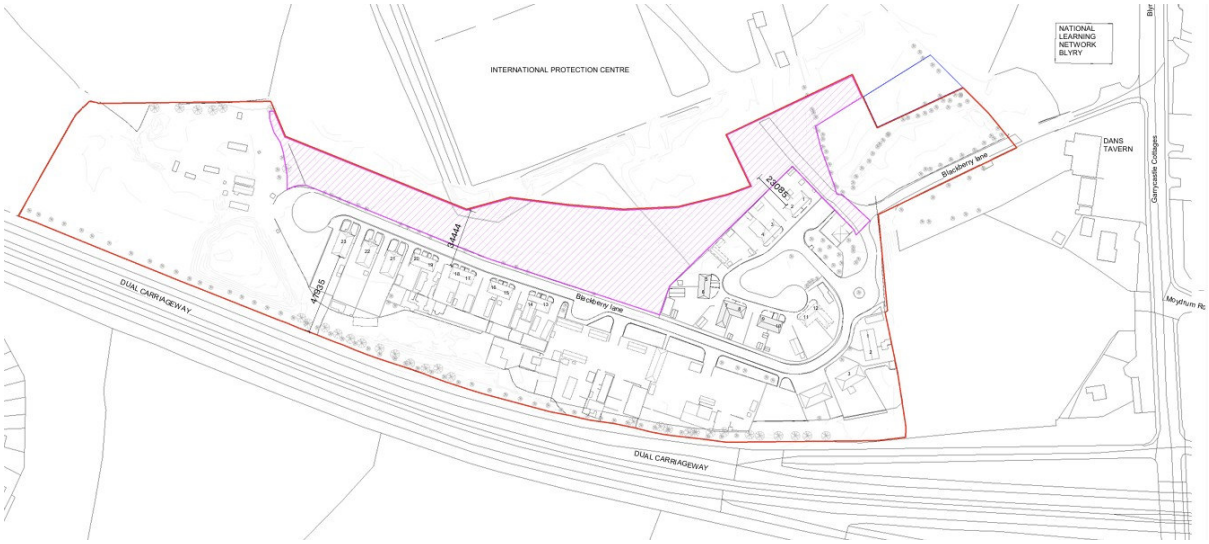

Figure 5: Existing Site Plan

TOPOGRAPHY/EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Site is largely flat. There are formed berms to the northern boundary to the Midlands Accommodation Centre which will largely remain in place. There is a further raised berm to the south-west corner of the development formed with construction spoil. This will be excavated as required to complete the development on grade with the excavation redistributed on site.

There is an existing tarmacadam access road across the site. This road is extremely long in nature and falls well short of the current standards set out be the Department of Transports under DMURS (Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets) for a residential housing estate.

In addition to the 23 permanent dwellings constructed on the site, multiple micro developments with sheds and boundaries propagated over time. This has extended to construction works extending to partial completion of sub -structure works.19 of the current 23 dwellings are to be demolished. This demolition along with the existing installations will be completed in a phased approach.

LAND USE ZONING

The Development Plan context against which this application is being made is the current Athlone Town Plan 2014 – 2020. We refer to the Book of Maps which set out the particular land zoning applicable. The extracts are noted below. The Subject Site is enclosed in Red.

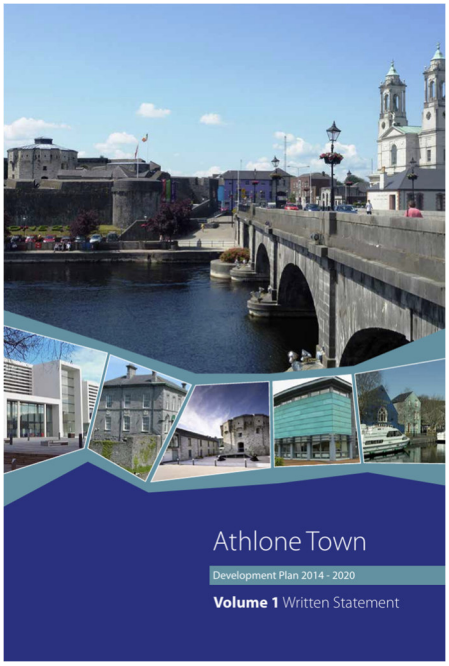

Figure 6: Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020.

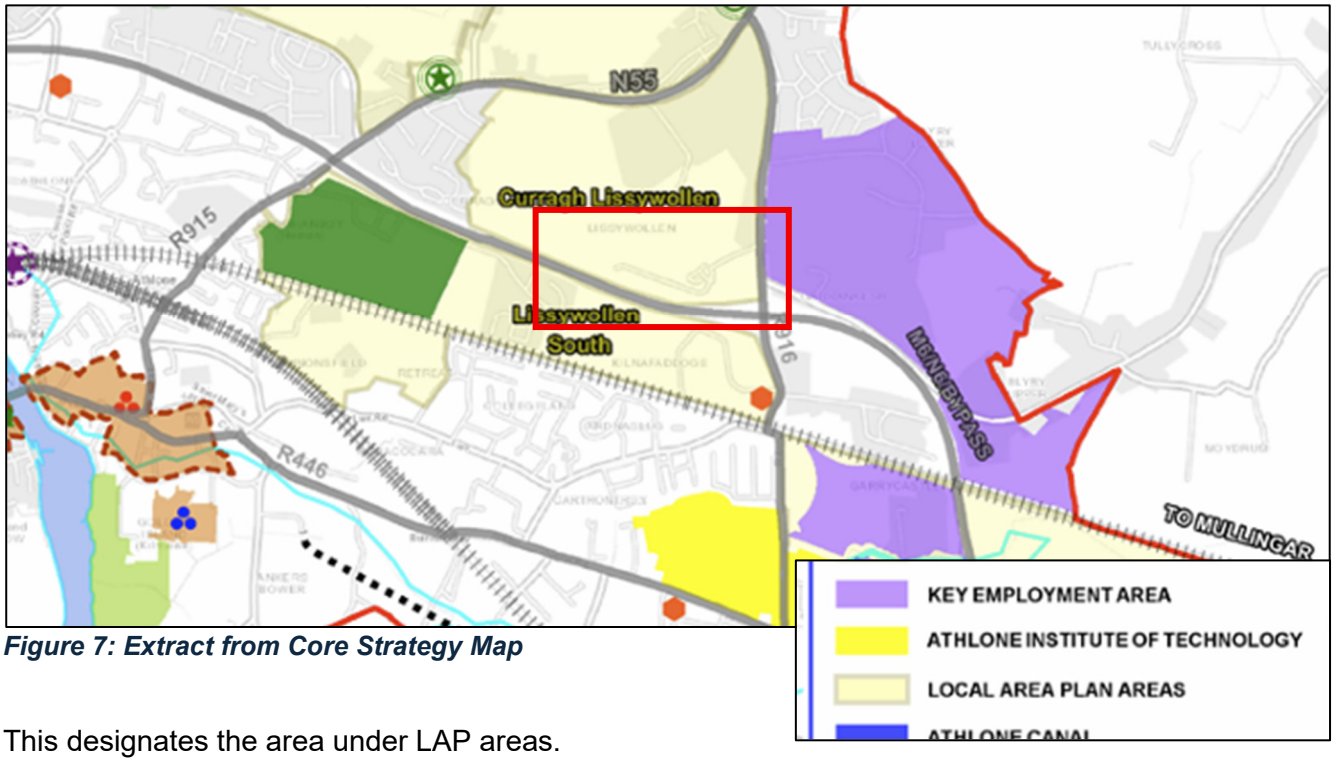

Figure 7: Extract from Core Strategy Map

This designates the area under LAP areas.

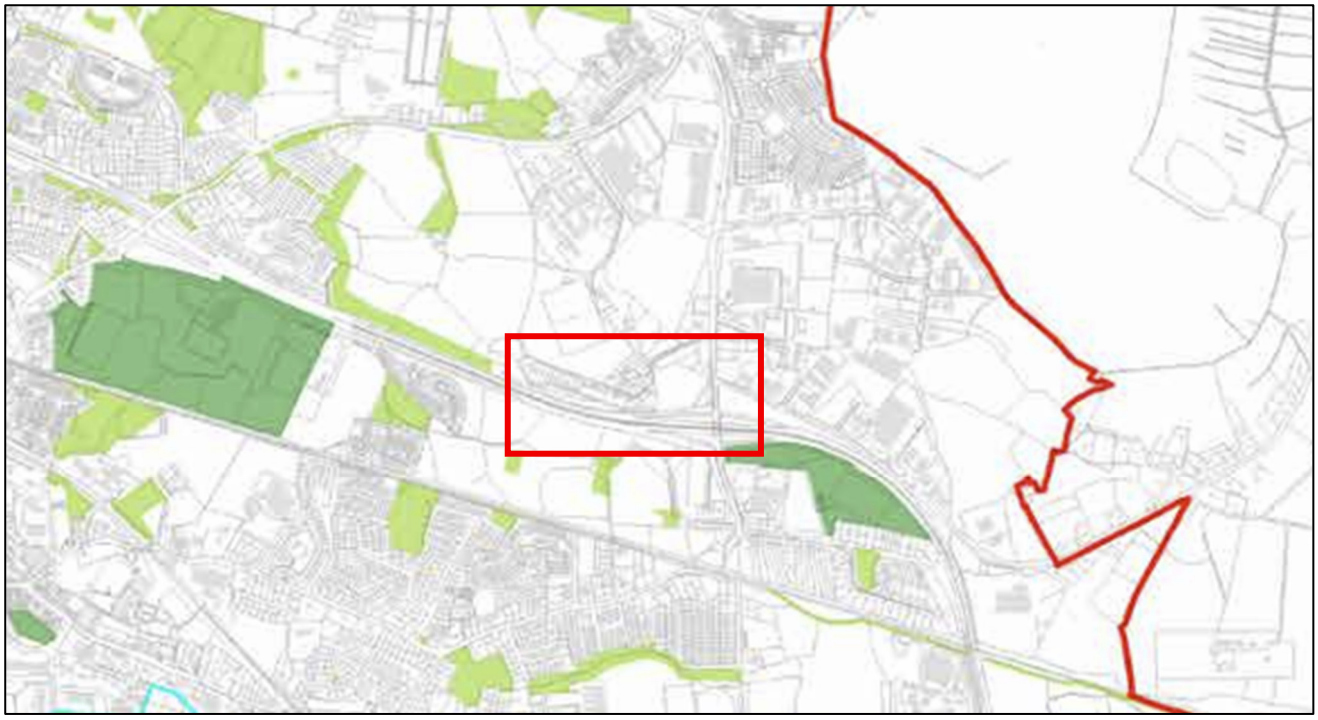

Figure 8: Extract from Open Space Map

No Impacting Characteristics

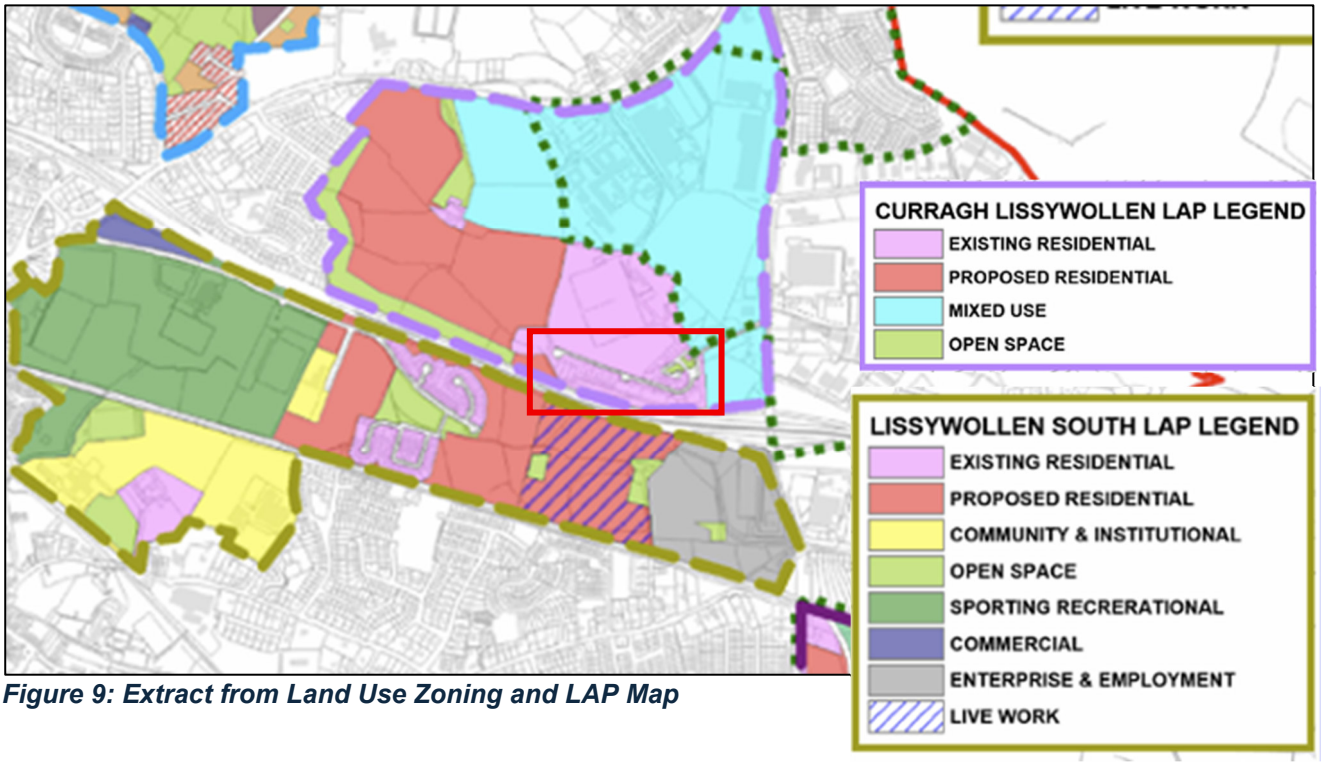

Figure 9: Extract from Land Use Zoning and LAP Map

It is noted that the existing site area is designated existing and proposed residential with a small section of the site to the east designated for mixed use. As the active land use zoning documentation indicates, the proposed development falls within the permitted in principle use class for the area, reinforced by an active established residential use for the last 25 years. A legal opinion has been enclosed providing a statement demonstrating the development complies with the Athlone Town Development Plan and zoning for the lands.

UTILITIES

All existing main services such as water, sewage, gas, Eircom and electricity run alongside the main access road. Proposed connections can be made and therefore service provision does not pose a constraint to the development of this site. There are no capacity issues in respect of water supply or wastewater.

FLOODING ASSESSMENT

There is no history of flooding, either fluvial or pluvial, in this area of the town. The nearest point where 100 fluvial flooding has been recorded is at the River Shannon 2km from the subject site.

STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNATIONS.

The subject site does not impact on statutory environmental designations such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) or Special Area of Conservation (SACs). In addition, the subject site does not contain any protected structure or recorded monuments. The site is outside the Architectural Conservation Area and the Zone of Archaeological Potential.

FUNDING

The scheme will be funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage through the Social Housing Investment Programme. The development is included under Westmeath County Council's 2025-2029 Traveller Accommodation Programme. The funding is subject to the DHLGH 4 Stage Approvals process.

SITE STRATEGY

The site strategy is informed by a series of conditions specific to this development typology and the necessity to undertake multiple decant and phased construction works within the existing defined site. Multiple Constraints have been identified and resolved through comprehensive and direct engagement with the current residents. These are summarised in principle as –

• Necessity for overt separation and distinction of family groupings.

• Nature, placement and adjacency of specific occupancy (individual and groupings)

• Perceived/Real risk to safety and screening between family groupings.

• Removal of section of land to the west of the site from housing footprint due to past tragedy and social constraints.

• The retention of existing dwellings no. 1-3.

• Equal allocation of area and space to all dwellings.

• Units primarily to face onto main landscaped spaces. No back-to-back arrangement.

• Limitation and treatment of residual spaces.

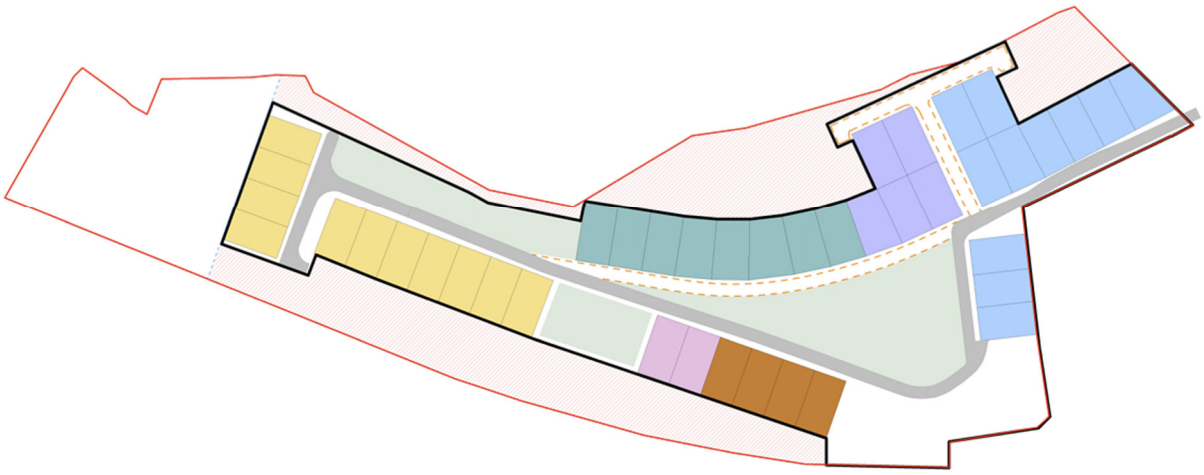

Figure 10: Spatial Planning informed by Family Groupings

These explicit principles and context greatly informed the design strategy. Also factored into the arrangement of the individual plots was the necessity for the completed development to resemble general needs housing creating a more cohesive and collective environment.

Through a series of design iterations and reviews with the family representatives and Local Authority a number of layouts were explored. The proposed layout addresses the challenges outlined above and through considered alignment of units, arrangement of roads and open spaces achieves a routine contemporary estate layout.

BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

The boundaries to the east of the site are established hard boundaries with adjacent privately owned properties. The Boundary to the north is with the Midlands Accommodation Centre under the ownership of the OPW. A land transfer is underway and consent for the planning application has been provided. Please refer to enclosed Letter of Consent. The boundary line has been manipulated to form a clean tight boundary to the rear of the proposed units.

The boundary to the south runs along the N6 Dual Carriage Way. This area has been designated a Noise hot spot by the EPA. As with the existing dwellings the proposed units are proposed to be pulled away from the site boundary – primarily to mitigate against noise impact. Please refer to enclosed Noise Impact Assessment for further detail. The residual space has some semi-mature trees along the boundary with the dual carriage way. These are to be retained. With concerns raised over security and anti-social behaviour it is proposed to retain the existing fence line and complement where required to create an enclosed bio-diversity corridor with maintenance access only.

Generally a 2m high H-Post and panel fence will provide robust delineation between the dwellings with the panelled fencing to be mounted on a 1m high concrete wall to the rear of the properties to further mitigate the concerns outlined above.

Figure 11: Proposed Site Plan

PHASED CONSTRUCTION

The works will need to be undertaken on a live site where a significant number of the residents will not be in a position to relocate over the building works. There are also multiple additional occupancies that will be impacted by the process of the development. The works have been therefore structured to be undertaken in 4 phases – with approximately 25% of the decant / demolition / construction works being undertaken in each phase. Refer to Figure 6 below.

It is expected this will require:

- An offsite Contractors compound – adjacent to the site boundary but outside the construction footprint.
- An offsite staging area to the west allowing temporary bulk storage of materials.
- **Temporary** hardstanding Bays to allow full segregation of residential and construction traffic.

Please refer to the Preliminary Construction and Environmental Management Plan for further details relating to the proposed demolition and construction methodology.

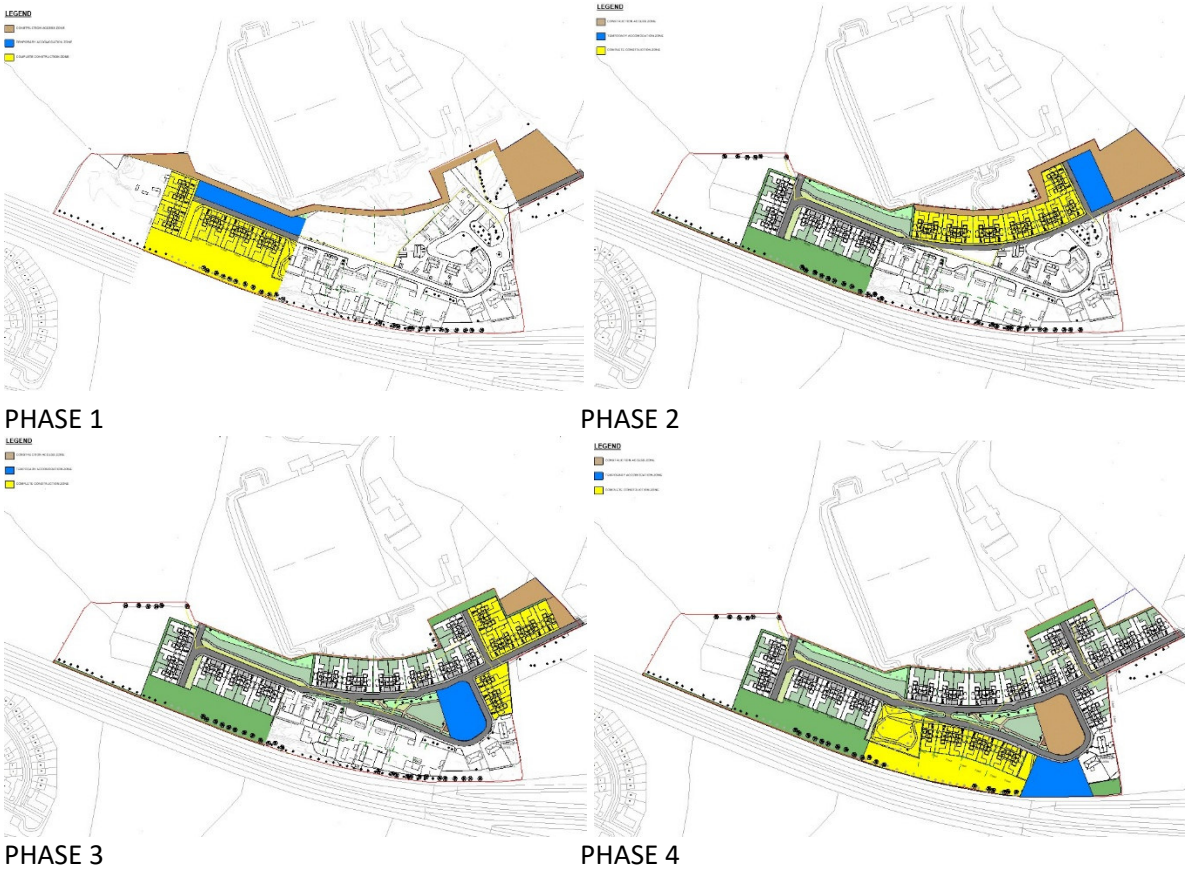

Figure 12: Preliminary Phased Construction Plan

DWELLING TYPOLOGIES

The development is to be completed in a phased approach to facilitate residents remaining on site during the construction period. To mitigate disruption the construction programme needs to be expediated where possible with Modern Methods of Construction preferred over traditional labour-intensive construction. Off- site volumetric construction is intended for the delivery of the dwellings. This has the benefit of greatly expediating the on-site construction programme and will significantly reduce the quantity of trades and personal on-site with the added benefit of also reducing construction waste. The construction methodology has informed the design approach for the houses but the units will resemble a traditionally constructed dwelling in appearance.

CORE CHARACTERISTICS

• The unit layout is a simple split bungalow typology with the living area to one section and sleeping areas to other side. Separate Living and Kitchen spaces have been provided to the preference of the residents.
• The simple plan affords flexibility to adjust internally for specific familial and OT requirements. Services are aggregated to the centre of the plan, allowing adjustment to accommodation in numbers of bedrooms without impacting location of site connections.
• The units will be consistent in form throughout the scheme to foster cohesive environment across the development.
• Sufficient space has been provided to each dwelling to accommodate a shed to rear and for vehicle placement to the side if required.
• Traditional roof truss with simple structure with short spans and limited dead store space in attics.
• Within the curtilage of each property provision for designated parking spaces to the front of each dwelling is accommodated with external plant and enclosed bin storage area screened by raised planting.

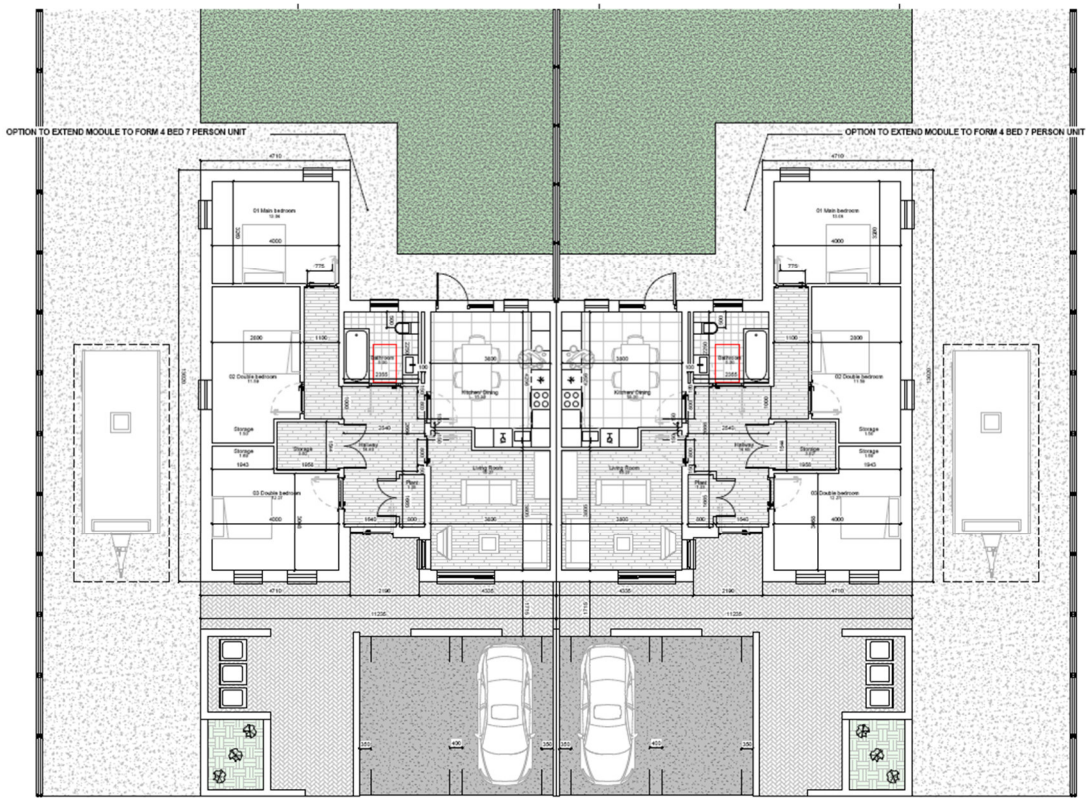

Figure 13: 3 Bed Residential Unit & Curtilage

There is a proposed mix of 2,3 and 4 Bedroom units across the development. The living room quarter to each unit typology will be consistent with the footprint of the sleeping quarter modified accordingly to suit the number of required bedrooms. Refer to Figure 9 below for allocation of each unit types across the development.

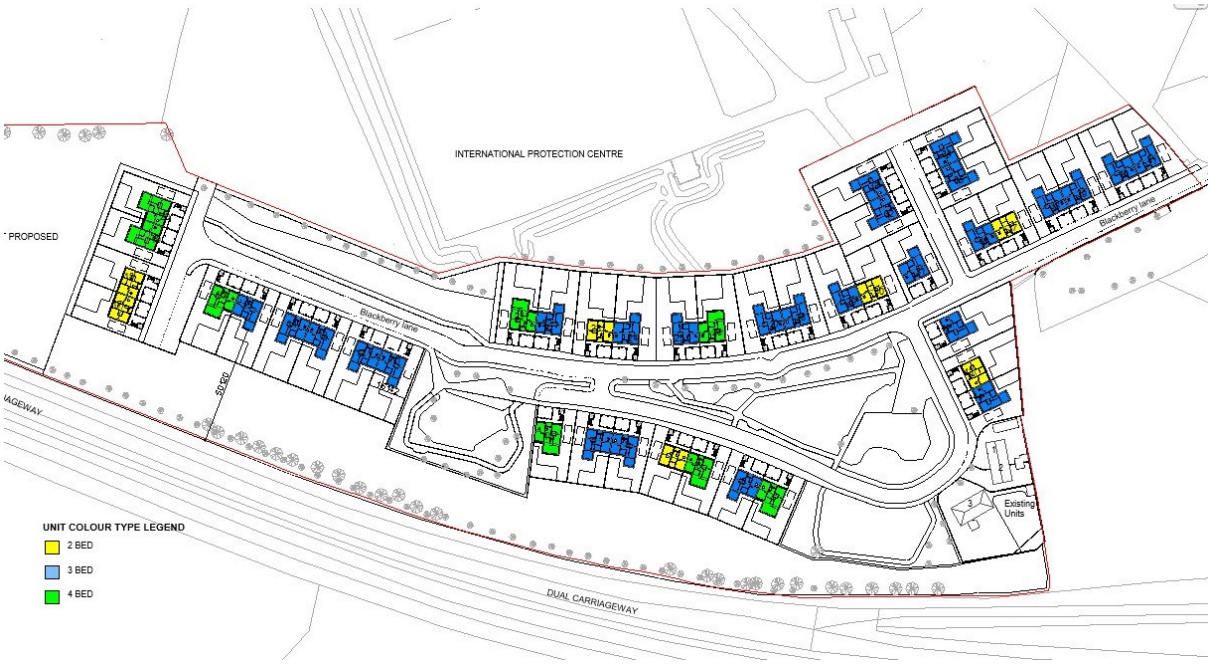

Figure 14: Unit Typology provision across the development

MATERIAL STRATEGY

The units will have a clear contemporary but domestic aesthetic. A limited palette of traditional materials is proposed with brick across the primary elevations and sand cement render applied across the rear elevations.

The proposed facing brick will introduce consistency and promote a scheme identity over the entire development. In addition to the aesthetic qualities the brick will bring to the scheme, brick is a robust material and generally weathers well over the building lifecycle with reduced maintenance costs and likelihood of algae staining compared to a render finish.

Traditional pitched roofs will be consistent across the development finished with a robust and contemporary standing seam metal proposed.

Masonry walls will subdivide the Semi-detached dwellings with each property enclosed with H-Post and gravel board fencing. Fenestration will be aluminium clad, with timber internal sections. In general larger section frames will be used, with good rigidity and stability.

Figure 15: Proposed finishes to Semi-Detached Dwellings.

Figure 16: Proposed Materials – Warm Buff Facing Brick with sand cement render finish,Standing Seam Roof, Decoratice Paving, and masonry bin enclosures.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

The proposed landscape strategy comprises two play areas, a series of open amenity lawn spaces designed to function as informal “kick-about” areas, enhanced tree and planting schemes, and the creation of a protected biodiversity corridor to the south boundary.

The principal open space is situated on the eastern side of the site. At its core, a central lawn, intended for informal recreation, will be framed by proposed tree planting along its edges and enclosed by a network of hard compacting gravel pathways, providing clear and accessible circulation routes throughout the space. A second play area is proposed further to the west of the site providing a natural break to the linear nature of the development. Dedicated seating and social spaces are also proposed creating a comfortable and inviting environment for informal gatherings.

Across the wider open space, paths will be finished in buff-coloured hard compacting gravel, ensuring a cohesive and accessible surface treatment. Additional benches are strategically positioned along these routes, offering regular opportunities for rest and passive surveillance of the surrounding areas. The landscape design incorporates a diverse mix of grass seeding, ornamental planting, and wildflower meadow areas, which together enhance the visual quality of the site while supporting ecological value and contributing to overall biodiversity. Please refer to Landscaping report for further details.

Figure 17: Proposed Landscaping Plan

ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY

An AA Screening has been undertaken and has demonstrated that an EIA not required. The site has low ecological value. Please refer to enclosed AA Screening report for further detail.

A CFRAM map assessment has been undertaken. The site is deemed not to be a food risk. Please refer to Civil Engineer's details for further information.

A Preliminary Construction & Environmental Management Plan has been completed. Please refer to enclosed document for further details.

An Operational Waste Management Plan has been prepared. Please refer to enclosed document for further details.

The site is adjacent to the N6 Dual Carraige way and has been classified an EPA hot spot. A Noise Impact Assessment has been completed. Please refer to enclosed document for further details.

VERIFICATION

Prepared by: PC	**27.05.2026**
Checked By: COB	**10.06.2026**