

Ballyburke Neighborhood Centre and Social Housing Scheme Galway City

Landscape Design Report

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1. Introduction

Galway City Council Architects Department are applying for planning permission for a social housing development at lands located in Ballyburke a western suburb of Galway City. This development includes a crèche, terraced housing, mixed commercial and residential buildings. This statement with accompanying drawings is to be read together with all design team consultants, drawings, and reports.

The site of the proposed development is currently unused land of difficult terrain with a single dwelling and a builder's compound within it, under the ownership of Galway City Council. The land is zoned for residential in Galway City and County Councils Development Plan 2017- 2023 (Fig. 1).

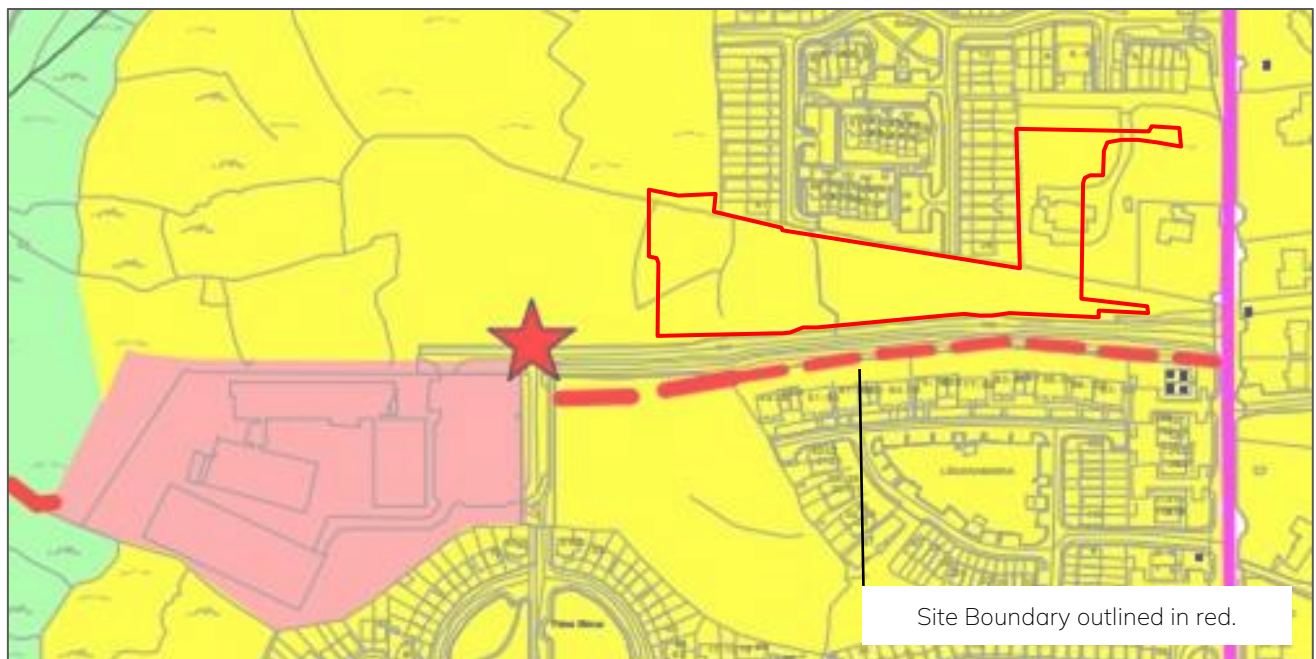


Figure 1 Amenity Map - Extracted from DRAFT Southern Areas Local Area Plan (2021-2027)



Figure 2 Site Boundary Line on Aerial Map

1.1 Featured Developments

This report considers the proposed landscape design for the scheme, as informed by analysis of the existing context, current plans and policies and best practice. The proposed design has responded to the capacity and constraints of the receiving environment.

The following elements have been incorporated into landscape proposals for the scheme:

- a) Introduction of a Large Plaza along Ballyburke Road
- b) Introduction of a Large Amphitheater
- c) Introduction of a Natural themed Play Area
- d) Introduction of Native Tree and Hedgerow planting
- e) The proposed planting of Pollinator Friendly Planting
- f) Proposed construction of Rain Gardens and Swales
- g) Proposed construction of an informal Basketball Area
- h) The indication of possible future access routes to adjacent housing estates and roads
- i) The design of Courtyards with biodiversity elements, such as Planting beds, hedges and climbing plants.

1.2 Document Register

The Following Drawings are to be read in conjunction with this report:

Drawing no.	Title	Scale	Print size
P518-101	Existing Situation and Tree Survey Plan	1:300	A1XL
P518-102	Landscape Plan	1:300	A1XL
P518-103	Courtyard 1 Landscape Plan	1:150	A1
P518-104	Open Space Landscape Plan	1:150	A1
P518-105	Open Space Section Detail	1:150	A1
P518-106	Planting Details	1:20	A1
P518-107	Planting Details	1:20	A1

2.Context and Receiving Environment

The existing site might be called a brown field site in planning terms, it is a site with a varied topography covered in a layer overgrowth including meadow, brambles, Gorse, Hawthorn and Willow, natural regeneration is in its early stages. The site is impenetrable in locations, there is surface water in locations which appears to be draining from a residential site to the North, and as with most sites in Galway there are remnants of dry-stone walling and ground rock in places. The site is somewhat overlooked by residential development to the North and West, primarily rear facades. These concrete block boundary walls and white rendered facades are prominent aspects of the current site boundary. Other elements of visual interest along the Ballyburke Road include limestone clad walls facing the public roads that have rounded clad capping incorporated into the wall. Some solid panel fencing is also included in neighboring developments and is also incorporated with the stone clad walling.



Figure 3 Photos of Existing Vegetation on Site

2.1 Existing Situation and Tree Survey

An Existing Situation Landscape and Tree Survey was carried out on the 12th of July 2022, see drawing number P518-101. Few trees were found on the site, three out of the four trees identified were located within the private garden of the house that is proposed for demolition.

2.2 Site Elevation

The Topography of the site provides some difficulties in terms of access and site layout; however, we feel that with the amphitheater style open space proposed we have turned this to our advantage. Smaller courtyards then to the rear of blocks will fill a more functional role. The public realm proposals have worked hard to maximize the use of all available space within the site and has taken advantage of the terrain where possible. A natural play Area for example is located beside the amphitheater and uses the slope to its advantage, some of the best play spaces around the world are located on sloped and undulating terrain.

2.3 Adjacent Development

In 2020/2021 a new residential development has been completed on the west of the current site, including in this new development is new Colaiste na Coiribe Gaeltacht School. With 550 students enrolled it is the largest all-Irish language institution in the world. In this adjacent development 78 new units were built along with a small playground and basketball/football court. The units built towards the school are three full levels high and will connect well with the proposed housing units within this new development.



Figure 4 New Residential Scheme completed to the West of the site, and the new Colaiste na Coiribe Gaeltacht School

2.4 Adjacent play facilities

In the area several formal playgrounds can be found, with fitness equipment for older age children and adults of all ages. Ranging to two small, enclosed playgrounds with play equipment for younger children. Clairin residential development to the West of this site is equipped with small basketball and football court. Together with the Maoilín Playground this brings perfect play opportunities for older children.



Figure 5 Maoilín Playground and Outside Fitness Area



Figure 6 Slí Burca Playground



Figure 7 Clairin Playground

2.5 Local Climate

The area is prone to prevailing winds from the seaside to the South and West. The site is located on a slightly graded slope sloping South, this gives rise to views to the sea from higher locations on the site. Taller building structures will have the privilege to look out on the sea.



Figure 8 Example Photo of possible views towards the sea

3. Design

3.1 The Plaza

Plaza will be the heart of this new development; it is giving place to a neighborhood center. The large open area will provide a public space for people to gather, socialize, and participate in community events. It can become a central meeting point for residents, visitors, and workers, fostering a sense of community and connection. It will be used for hosting various activities such as small fairs and markets. It can also attract visitors and create opportunities for local businesses to thrive. It can also encourage people to walk and use sustainable transportation methods instead of driving while also make it easier to navigate and explore the development, as the plaza can serve as a central hub with access to shops, restaurants, and other amenities.

Plaza will also serve as a visual centerpiece for the development, enhancing its overall aesthetic appeal. Proposed finish on surface is concrete with a mix of crushed seashell to relate to surrounding landscape. To reference to neighbouring development, we propose to use similar materials: include narrow bands of exposed aggregate paving and stone walled planters. Proposed perennial planting with larger feature shrubs/ small trees in walled planters will surround the plaza and give color and life to the center.



Figure 9 Birds eye view on Plaza



Figure 10 Birds eye view of steps towards Amphitheatre

3.2 The Amphitheatre



Figure 11 View on Amphitheatre

Located centrally on the site the predominant function of the amphitheatre is to provide a link between the two residential zones on the site. The concept of the amphitheatre public open space area is to provide all of the functionality of a community park. It serves the wider community with amenity space, with opportunity to socialise with neighbours in a variety of settings. The amphitheatre with the oval hard standing at the base can provide for more formal gatherings, like meetings, musical performances, plays, etc. It can also act as a comfortable spot for a picnic or for reading a book or for just getting away from the more urban setting and getting closer to nature.



Figure 12 Inspirational Images for Amphitheater

The designed surrounds to the amphitheatre have purposefully leaned towards biodiversity and a more natural landscape, with lots of native species and wildlife habitat. The swales which are to be planted up with perennial and pollinator friendly planting will take any water run-off from hard surfaces in the park and connect to a natural watercourse at the bottom. So we are taking nature's lead here in allowing for the natural flow of water within the area to be expressed openly and are purposefully staying away from culverts as an expression of this, embracing the natural processes in the creation of the park.

A small hedge will separate the parking area to the West from the park and a bridge like entrance is to be created again building on that idea of enhancing the natural processes of water and wetland planting and not hiding them away in a culvert, the bridge feature celebrates this and is a welcoming experiential gateway feature to the park. Low hedges also define the north and south boundaries, with trees sporadically positioned to build on that natural landscape feel, albeit with the more formal amphitheatre in the middle.



Figure 13 Example of bridge entrance to the park.

An informal play area also exists within the park, maximising the potential usage of the open space for all ages and users. Informal play is about creating a space for the children to lead their own play, and a place for the adults to learn how to support that. 'Child-led play' means each child is free to follow his/her own play urges. The general concept implies staying away from standard play equipment and using more natural landscape features to encourage a child to explore and enjoy the natural world around us. Proposed play area is incorporated into existing slope to make the most of available ground. A sloped ground can create a more dynamic and exciting play environment compared to a flat surface. Children can climb up and down hills, slide down slopes, and explore different levels of elevation, which can stimulate their imaginations and encourage creative play. Playing on a sloped ground requires more physical effort and can help children develop their balance, coordination, and agility.



Figure 14 View on Natural Playground

The Natural Playground will be created with timber logs, boulders, and feature timber play equipment. Safety surfacing is proposed to exist out of play bark chip specified for play surface applications. Play bark surface will ease maintenance around play equipment and reduces wearing of graded areas.



Figure 15 Inspirational Images for Usage of boulders within the Natural Playground



Figure 16 Inspirational Images for Natural Playground

3.3 Courtyards

The courtyards are a functional result of the building design and allow for through access to bike parking and Bin Stores. These small spaces attempt to maximise biodiversity with hedges and shaded planting beds, etc., but they are simple functional spaces with some paving or some small areas of lawn that are easy to maintain but still provide an outside space that is somewhat private to the developments, so there is opportunity to meeting and interact with neighbours at these locations.

They have also tried to provide some element of play facility, where toddlers might use a small lawn for a kick about or have a space for a paddle pool over summer months, or even a sand pit. A half basketball court is proposed in another which is an important amenity for a teenage cohort. Areas of paving in these spaces has flexibility to become areas for picnic benches and BBQ's or equally to have toddler play areas if there is young families in the buildings. They are flexible but simple spaces where we have tried to maximise biodiversity and pollinator planting as much as possible to create a sense of a private oasis space for the residents as well.

The proposed courtyards will give shelter from the prevailing winds that originate from the sea to the South. Within the courtyards a combination of perennial, shrub, small tree planting will enhance the setting with greenery. Where possible Rain Garden Swales are implemented to store and slowly release rainwater during light and heavy rain periods.



Figure 17 View on Eastern Courtyard



Figure 18 Central Courtyard



Figure 19 View on Western Courtyard

3.4 Connections to Adjacent Housing Estates

It is important to make it easy for all users to move throughout the site, link in with key facilities on the site and within the local community. This includes the provision of key desire line routes through, safe and easy to use bike routes and parking and shared surfaces to priorities pedestrians across the site.

Connection route is proposed to adjacent Maoilin housing estate with a clear separation made for cars and slow modes. Additional potential future connection points to Drisin estate were identified (shown in blue Fig. 20). A home zone is introduced in area where accessible parking spaces will be available. This is also an area where pedestrians are likely to cross through, the home zone will reduce the speed of ongoing traffic and highlight that this area is focused on pedestrians. Wide shared cycle and pedestrian path will allow access for cyclist and for pedestrians to North East corner of the site.

There are several different routes for pedestrians to cross through and experience the site, smaller accesses through courtyards give visitors and residents the opportunity to quickly move between different areas.



Figure 20 Connectivity Map



Figure 21 View on Parking and Shared Cycle and Pedestrian Access

4. Materials and Planting

4.1 Hard works materials

Paving Materials are for the most part cast in situ concrete on footpaths that are a minimum of 2m in width. On the path through amphitheater we have proposed Ballylusk fines, which is a beige coloured quartzite stone, 10mm down to dust (hoggin), which compacts very well and provides an ideal accessible path that is also permeable within green areas. Feature paving within Plaza areas includes is concrete with a mix of crushed sea shell with bands of exposed aggregate that will wear well over time.

Concrete paviors are proposed in courtyards. The idea being that the paving will provide a good non slip surface, but an upmarket finish to areas that we propose for community use.. We think the proposed concrete block paving will also tie in aesthetically with the contemporary building materials proposed. Steps where required will also use a paving flag, that is specifically designed to match the other paving products, they will be non-slip and have built in contrasting nosing. We have proposed a coloured hot rolled asphalt with stone chippings in home zone road areas, turning circles and other public areas. The buff coloured stone helps tie the colour theme together with the Ballylusk fines footpaths. It also helps to break up the monotony of the normal tarmac finish. To create interesting entrance to Open Space and discourage parking on proposed turning head we combined use of hot rolled asphalt and cobble paviors.



Figure 22 Pavement and Low Walling Inspirational Images

Proposed furniture include Sheffield type Cycle Stands for visitor bike parking, age friendly bench seats.



Figure 23 Inspirational Images for Street Furniture

Landscape was coordinated with proposed lighting layout. Trees are carefully positioned so to not interfere with public lighting. Where near lamp posts we are proposing smaller trees/ large feature shrubs that will be kept under 3m height to not obstruct light levels. Proposed design includes mix of fixtures like bollards, streetlamps, and park lights to help creating safe, functional, and aesthetically pleasing spaces. Plaza area was designed with the intention that lighting will be an integral part of the composition of the amenity space. For details see lighting consultants drawings.



Figure 24 Inspirational Images for Lighting

4.2 Planting and Biodiversity

We wish for the existing natural landscape to become the landscape feature as much as possible. Proposed design includes planting native hedges and climbers along existing boundary walls where possible to create green corridors for wildlife. Proposed boundary walls to private back gardens to Northeast of development are to include openings for Hedgehogs.



Figure 25 Inspirational Images for Native Shrub and Tree Planting

We have used the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan as a palette from which to choose our plants. On top of this we have gone with native species trees for the most part, to benefit birds and other wildlife foraging and nesting in these plants. To achieve a rich habitat for pollinators on the site at least 35% of planting is herbaceous and 75% of all planting to be pollinator friendly. The specification on the trees is advanced/semi mature rootballed stock. Specification for shrub planting will be supplied in 2-3litre pots. Perennials will be high density and supplied as P9's. Planting beds in public spaces will be finished with a 50mm layer of enriched bark mulch also gravel mulch finish is proposed to be used in small planting beds to courtyards. Species have been selected to enhance biodiversity and create habitat on the site. We are using a significant quantity of Whitethorn hedging, Snowy Mespilus, cultivated Hawthorn Street trees, Whitebeam, Wild Cherry, and Bird Cherry in our planting scheme, all classed as pollinator friendly plants. Shrub and perennial areas include pollinator species such as: Rudbeckia, Lavender, Sedum, and Rosemary and many more.



Figure 26 Inspirational Images for Shrub and Perennial Planting

Rain garden is proposed in the central open space to help manage storm water runoff by capturing and absorbing rainwater that would otherwise flow into storm drains. The garden's plants and soil will filter pollutants and contaminants from the water, improving its quality before it enters groundwater or nearby water bodies. This will help to retain existing wetland habitat and create a natural, tranquil environment. Also, wildflower meadow for wetland is proposed to central open space. Another meadow is proposed along part of the North boundary hedgerow. Seeds for wildflower areas will be of Irish provenance, specified for specific site conditions and supplied by Sandro Cafolla at www.wildflowers.ie.



Figure 27 Inspirational Images for Natural Swale and Rain Garden