

**Firhouse School Site Identification
and
Acquisition Process Report**

South Dublin Land Use Planning & Transportation

October 2014

Firhouse School Site Identification and Acquisition Process Report

Background

The education system is a fundamental foundation stone of Ireland's social and economic development. Pro-active planning in the identification and delivery of sites for new schools is vital in securing long-term sustainable development objectives together with good value for money in terms of site acquisition costs.

The Provision of Schools and the Planning System, A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities, (Department of Education and Science, and Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2008) established a practice of planning authorities reserving sites for new schools in areas where new communities are planned. This partnership between the Department of Education and Skills and Local Authorities was extended under a nationally agreed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), where since 2012, local authorities have been tasked with the identification and acquisition of sites for new primary schools, given the increase in children of school going age (45,000 to 2016) and the growing demand for new schools. The advantage to the Department of Education and Skills of involving the local authority in this process is that the local authority's expertise in the areas of planning, environmental services and traffic management for example, together with local knowledge of site availability should ensure that urgently required schools will be delivered in the most expedient manner

There is a requirement for a large number of new primary schools in South Dublin County. Amongst the key areas of deficiency that the Department communicated to the Council in 2012 is Firhouse, where two new schools were to be established to accommodate existing demand. Since then, and prior to the commencement of operation of the two Firhouse schools that are now housed in temporary accommodation, the Council has been actively seeking a site or sites for these schools. The establishment of these two schools, Gaelscoil na Giúise and Firhouse Educate Together NS, in temporary accommodation now makes the acquisition of these sites an utmost priority for the Department of Education and Skills.

Firhouse School Site Options

Step 1: Identifying a Demographic Need for Schools in Firhouse

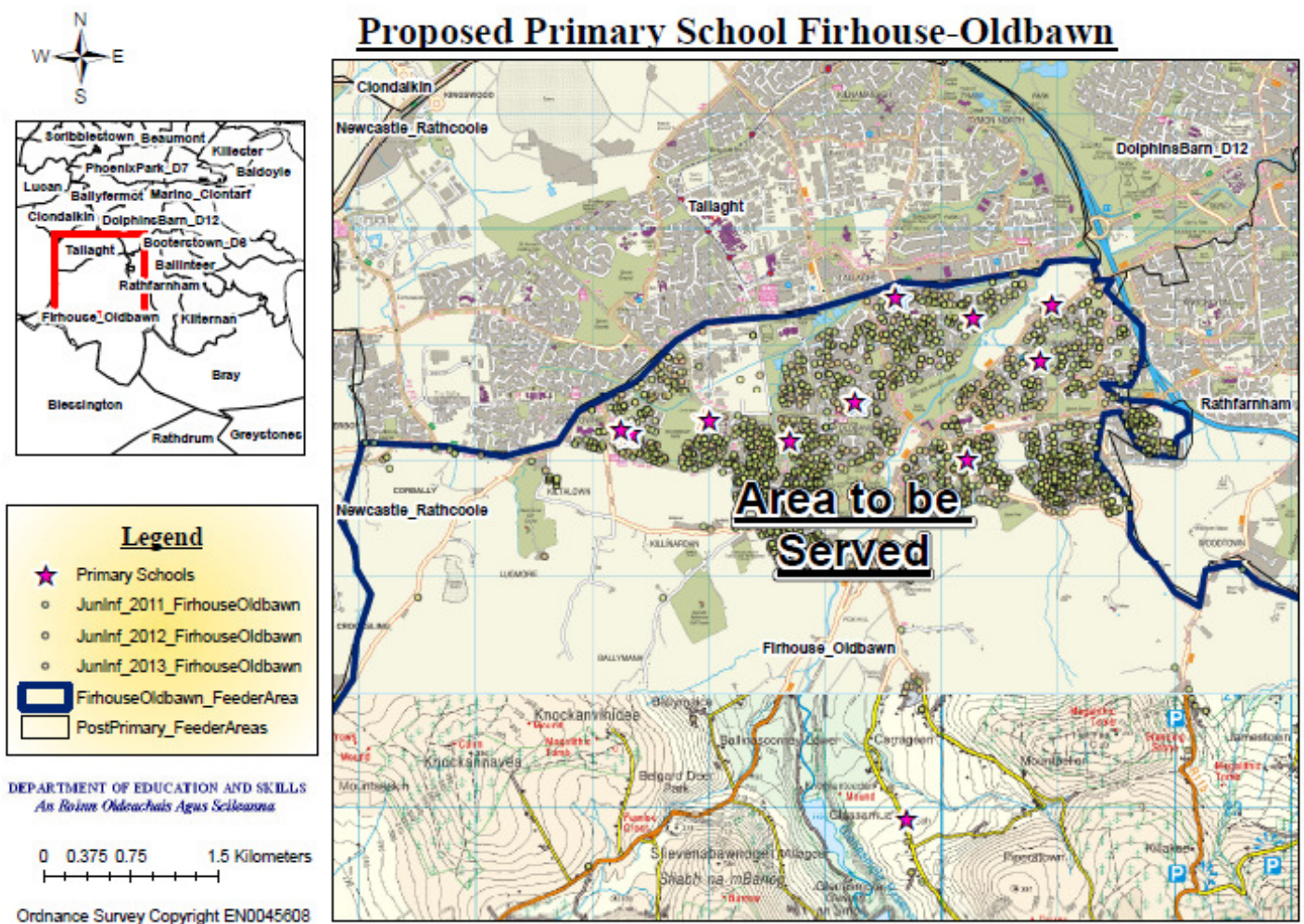
The Department of Education and Skills catchment for the built-up area of Firhouse – Oldbawn area extends from the N81 to the north, the M50 to the east and the undeveloped lands to the south (See Figure 1 below).

The Department of Education and Skills introduced a Geographical Information System (GIS) in the Planning & Building Unit in 2008 and this GIS technology is being used to assist in planning school requirements in the future. The GIS contains information on all schools in the country, primary and post-primary level, geo-coded to their location. The information is then linked to the relevant demographic information for those areas - typically the demographic information is taken from the Central Statistic's Office Census data, the General Register of Births, the Department of Social Protection, An Posts Geo-directory and information supplied by Local Authorities through Development Plans.

The system allows the Department of Education and Skills to view, understand, question, interpret and visualise data in many ways that reveal relationships, patterns and trends in the form of maps, reports and charts.

In 2012 the Department of Education and Skills analysed Child Benefit and Census data in the Firhouse area which demonstrated that the student population at primary level has grown significantly over the past decade. This growth is equivalent to an additional 38 classrooms at a pupil teacher ratio of 28:1 and therefore the Department of Education and Skills was of the view that the establishment of new schools was essential in the Firhouse area to cater for this increase and also to add to the choice of school type available to parents in the area.

Figure 1: Department of Education and Skills Educational Catchment for Firhouse

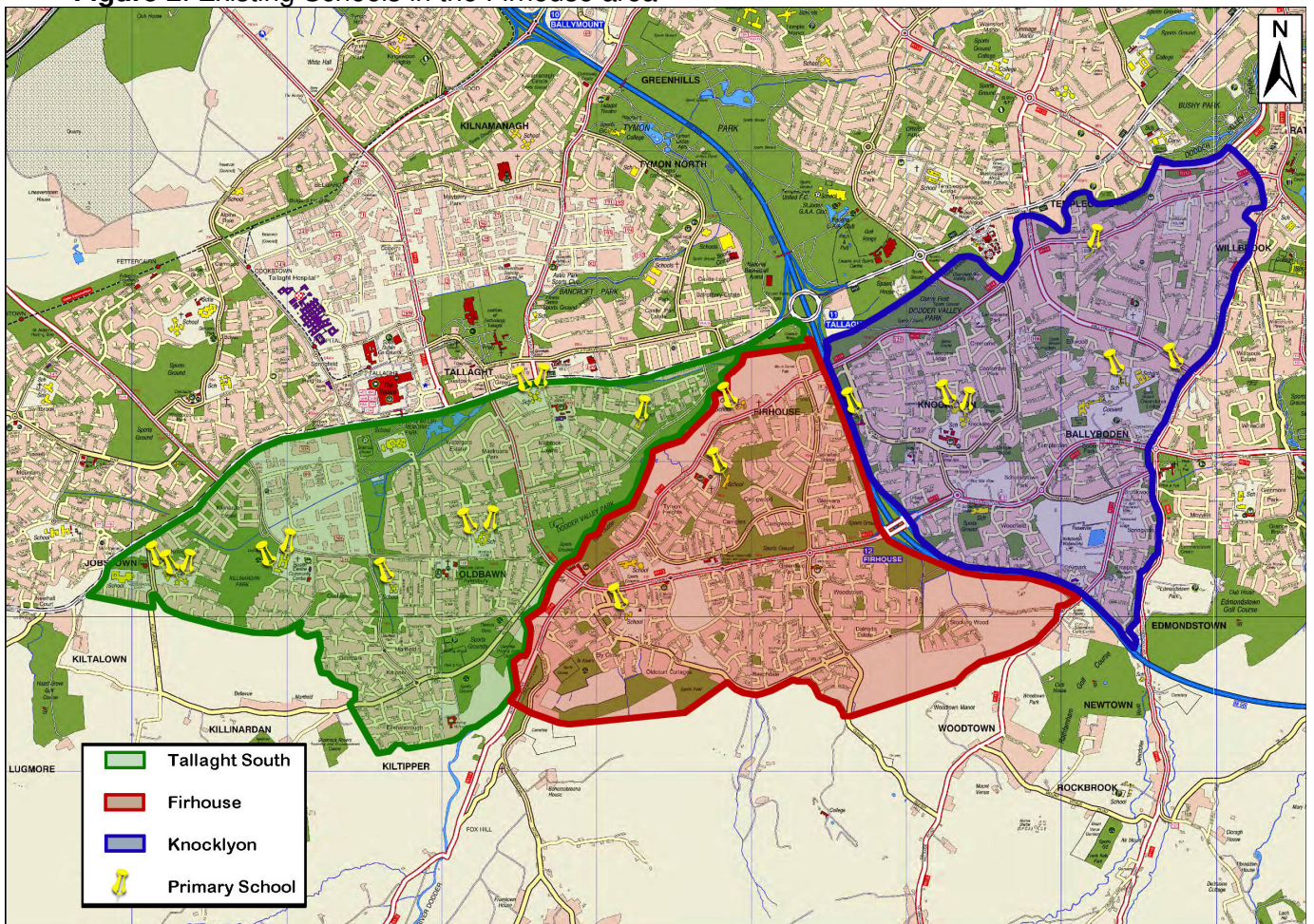


Step 2: Defining the Geographical Area

In order to accurately pinpoint and refine where new schools were needed to meet demand in the right location, within the large Department of Education and Skills catchment, an assessment was carried out by SDCC's planning department of the geographic distribution of the existing primary schools across the overall catchment.

There area a total of 14 existing primary schools in the DES catchment, comprising eleven primary schools being located between the N81 and the Dodder, in the South Tallaght / Oldbawn area, while there are just three primary schools located between the Dodder and the M50, in the Firhouse area (See Figure 2). It is clear that the projected demand for increased pupil places could not be catered for by the three existing schools in the Firhouse area and therefore the data suggested that new schools should be located within the particular geographic area of Firhouse, between the Dodder and the M50.

Figure 2: Existing Schools in the Firhouse area



A further analysis of the population and the enrolment patterns of the existing schools in the DES catchment is set out below.

Table 1: Population and School Enrolment patterns for existing schools in DES catchment

2011 Stats/Area	Ballycullen/Firhouse/Oldcourt	South Tallaght	Knocklyon-Ballyroan	Total
Population	17,389	19,097	23,169	59,655
Population 5 -12	2,467	2,536	2,447	7,450
Housing Stock	6,035	6,845	8,598	21,478

Schools Info/Area	Ballycullen/Firhouse/Oldcourt	South Tallaght	Knocklyon - Ballyroan	Total
Primary Schools	3	11	7	21
2011 Enrolments	1,382	2,885	3,138	7,405
Enrolments as % of 5-12 year olds	56.0%	113.8%	128.2%	99%

An assessment of the 2011 enrolment patterns of the existing schools within the Department of Education and Skills catchment area (Figure 1) demonstrates clearly educational provision in the area. Only 56% of the Firhouse 5 to 12 age child population is being accommodated locally, resulting in 44% of local children having to leave their local area to attend school. Enrolments in the South Tallaght and Knocklyon (outside the educational catchment in question but included for assessment purposes) areas exceeded the 5 to 12 age child population in those areas, 113.8% and 128.2% respectively, meaning children from outside those areas were travelling to those schools for their educational requirements.

This initial assessment therefore concluded that the most appropriate geographic area boundary for the area in which two new schools should be located to meet demand would be to the Firhouse area:

- East of the Dodder River;
- West of the M50; and
- North of Oldcourt Road / Stocking Avenue

Step 3: Identifying Site Options

Having defined the geographic area described in Step 2 above, in which new schools could be located to meet the existing and future educational demands of the local area, the next step was to assess all site options within that area. The site identification process was informed by a number of elements including:

- **Technical Guidance Document TDG – 025 Identification and Suitability Assessment of Sites for Primary Schools** (Department of Education and Skills, 2012).

The objective of these guidance notes is to assist in the identification and assessment for suitability of new sites for Primary Schools. New school sites should aim to:

- optimise school design, build and expansion potential;

- ensure safe access and traffic management;
- enable connections to services and utilities; and
- avoid abnormal costs.

The Technical Guidance Document also states that the final design and layout of a school site will be site specific. Although every effort should be made to meet all requirements of the TGD this element does provide a degree of flexibility in the site identification and acquisition process, particularly in relation to site configuration and site area, as a non-standard school can be designed for a restricted site, where no other options are available.

- **Planning Policy and Sustainable Development**

In order to ensure that any future school development complies with proper planning and sustainable development objectives the sites were identified having cognisance to:

- South Dublin County Development Plan 2010 – 2016 zoning objectives;
- Principles of sustainable development that enables pupils to cycle and walk to school, therefore minimising traffic congestion and promoting healthy lifestyles; and
- Ensuring that the future development would meet the technical requirements of the local authority including environmental services, traffic management and access arrangements, and would not impact on existing wayleaves.

- **Acquisition Potential**

The site identification process must have cognisance of the potential to acquire the site in a timely fashion.

Figure 3 below, illustrates the sites within the defined geographic area that were considered to have potential to meet existing and future educational demand in the Firhouse area, through the provision of two new schools. Since the process began in March 2012, the list of potential new school sites grew and contracted over time, as relevant technical information or additional options became available.

Identifying suitable sites for new schools in built-up established areas, in contrast to Greenfield locations, can give rise to a number of issues, including;

- The scarcity of land, with development potential of the scale required for a school;
- The existence of community and sporting uses on, or adjacent to, potential sites;
- Public expectations regarding land use.

As outlined previously, the advantage of involving the local authority in this site identification process is that the local authority's technical expertise in the areas of planning, environmental services and access / mobility/ traffic management, inform the process. Notwithstanding the technical assessment of the suitability for the development of sites for schools, any such development must still be subject to a planning application and any future Council planning decision may be subject to appeal to An Bord Pleanála by any interested party who has made a submission on the planning application. The site identification and acquisition of a site for new schools is therefore only one element of the process and forms part of a planning, funding and build process.

Figure 3: Potential Sites for New Schools in the Firhouse area



Step 4: Assessment of Potential Sites Phase 1

In March 2012 SDCC's planning department identified 4 possible sites for new schools, namely:

- Site 1: An SDCC owned site at St. Colmcille's Way at M50 junction 12 Firhouse exit.
- Site 2: A privately owned site at Stocking Avenue, Ballycullen, reserved for primary school provision in the South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2010 – 2016.
- Site 3: Privately owned site on Oldcourt Road
- Site 4: SDCC owned site at the junction of Firhouse Road / Killinenny Road.

Following detailed discussions with SDCC's environmental services department in May 2012 Site 1 was eliminated from the list of possible locations as the green field nature of the site currently assists the time delay of the surface water run-off discharge entering the sewer network. The adjacent Knocklyon and Castlefield / Glenvara housing estates along the north western area of the site have experienced major flooding in the recent past. A €1.2 million flood relief scheme, that involves laying a 1200mm diameter pipe within the site from the existing 4.5m deep manhole located in the south western corner extending northwards towards Castlefield Way before turning

eastwards towards Castlefield Green and finally turning northwards from the site, is planned. This site is strategically important to this scheme and any development of the site, prior to its construction would have an adverse impact of the proposed flood relief scheme.

The football pitch, used by Knocklyon United is also located on the site.

Accessing Site 1 for a school would be inappropriate due its location at the junction of St. Colmcille's Way and the M50, where traffic volumes are very high, and the commensurate high traffic volumes crossing in front of the site.

Subsequently the planning department reassessed SDCC owned land in the vicinity of Site 1 and included Site 6 to the east of the Firhouse Community Centre between Ballycullen Drive and Killinenny Road in the list of options.

Phase 2

In late May 2012 a joint site inspection was carried out of Sites 2, 3, 4 and 6 by the Department of Education and Skills and SDCC. Following this inspection the Department of Education and Skills requested that SDCC arrange for the preparation of valuations for Sites 2 and 6. Site 3 was also excluded as a supermarket proposal was likely to go ahead at this location.

Valuations were prepared for Sites 2 and 6 in August 2012 and issued to the Department of Education and Skills. In September 2012 the Department of Education and Skills requested that Site 2, Stocking Avenue, Ballycullen be reserved for to serve future population in Ballycullen and that the 2.3ha Site 6 should be assessed further to ensure that the technical requirements could be met and also that community related issues could be satisfactorily addressed.

Site 6 is located to the south of the established residential areas of Carriglea and Carrigwood and is bounded to the north by Ballycullen Drive and to the south by Killinenny Road. An existing football pitch is located to the east of the site and the Firhouse Community Centre is located to the west. Further residential areas, including Woodstown, Wood Dale, Hunters Wood and Oldcourt are located to the south of Killinenny Road. The site is centrally located in the Firhouse-Ballycullen area and is within 1km of almost all existing houses, maximising the potential for walking and cycling to school.

In November 2012 the DES advised SDCC that there was a requirement for temporary accommodation for two schools to be in place by September 2013. In order to minimise cost outlays for the DES associated with providing 2 temporary schools and having cognisance of the existing pitch on site, SDCC investigated how site 6 at Killinenny Road / Ballycullen Drive could be best managed in order that the temporary schools would not impede on the best design and layout for the 2 permanent schools, should the Council agree to dispose of the larger, 2.3ha site and subject to planning permission.

Phase 3

Plans and drawings were prepared showing two stages of possible development to provide temporary accommodation and later permanent accommodation at Site 6, Killinenny Road / Ballycullen Drive showing the following:

Stage 1: Temporary Schools at Site 6 Killinniny Road / Ballycullen Drive

The construction of 2 four classroom schools on an SDCC owned site to the east of the Firhouse Community Centre between Ballycullen Drive and Killinniny Road. It is proposed that the schools would be permitted for a period up to four years and this would cater for a single class intake each year for three years. Along with the classrooms the temporary schools would accommodate a small resource room, two small offices and a staff room and would have a floor area of approximately 400sq m. each. Set down areas with a minimum of 15 no. car parking spaces, together with staff car parking would be provided off Ballycullen Drive and off Killinniny Road. The car parking area off Killinniny Road would be used for drop-off during school hours and would be available as a public car park outside these times, to serve the local community and would be controlled and managed by SDCC. The proposal would also involve the realignment of an existing footpath connecting Ballycullen Drive and Killinniny Road and this realigned path would connect with the existing gate onto Killinniny Road.

Stage 2: Temporary Schools at Killinniny Road / Ballycullen Drive

This stage would involve the dismantling of the temporary schools after a period of up to four years, and the construction of a public playground. A number of car parking spaces would be retained to the north of the site, off Ballycullen Drive.

On preparation of these fully informed drawings, which clearly explained the short and long term possibility for educational provision at this location, consultation was undertaken with the Elected Members for the area from February 2013, on several occasions. At this stage it was made clear to the planning department that a small number of public representatives for the area did not agree that there was any need for new schools in the area, notwithstanding repeated explanations and clarity being provided by the Department of Education and Skills regarding the need for two new schools in Firhouse.

In early summer 2013 a Part 8 was put on public display which sought to establish two x 4 classroom temporary schools on part of the site on behalf of the Department of Education, just months prior to the commencement of the first term of the new schools. The existing football pitch to the east of the subject site would not be affected by the Part 8 proposal and access between this pitch and the football club based in the Firhouse Community Centre would be maintained. The Part 8 demonstrated that once the development was fully realised the Firhouse / Ballycullen community would benefit from a new playground and a car parking area off the Killinniny Road to serve the existing pitches and community buildings in the vicinity.

Although not part of the Part 8 proposal (See Figure 4), which was to facilitate temporary school accommodation on site 6, it was made clear that a long-term plan was to seek the disposal of the larger 2.3ha site and that planning permission would be sought for 2 permanent schools at this location. Preparatory design work established that it was possible to construct 2 permanent schools without impacting on the existing hedgerow, watermain wayleave, and gas wayleave and pedestrian gate onto Killinniny Road, all of which are located within the vicinity of the proposed site. Also, the one existing grass pitch, which would be displaced by the permanent schools, would be relocated onto an adjoining area of public space, in the immediate vicinity of the existing location. The possibility of a portion of the return to the Council from the sale of the site to the Department of Education and Skills being made available as matched funding for the development of an all-weather sports facility on an adjoining public site,

in accordance with local objectives and to which the schools would have preferential school-time access, was also considered.

In terms of traffic management both schools would be accessed off Ballycullen Drive and Killininy Road. There is proposed to be a drop off facility to and from Killininy Road, which will help to manage the traffic. It is considered likely that considerable numbers of children will be dropped off on the way to work as many parents will be travelling towards the M50 and the City Centre. This will have the distinct advantage of not adding additional trips to the road network. The significant advantage of this location is that the school can be accessed relatively easily especially from the north and should not affect local junctions too significantly. While if both schools were situated at the Ballycullen Drive sites, this would obviously double the volumes at this location, the availability of access routes in four directions i.e. Ballycullen Drive, Killininy Rd East, Parklands Drive and Killininy Road West provides the required capacity to facilitate these volumes.

Figure 4: Part 8 Proposal for 2 x classroom temporary schools Killininy Road

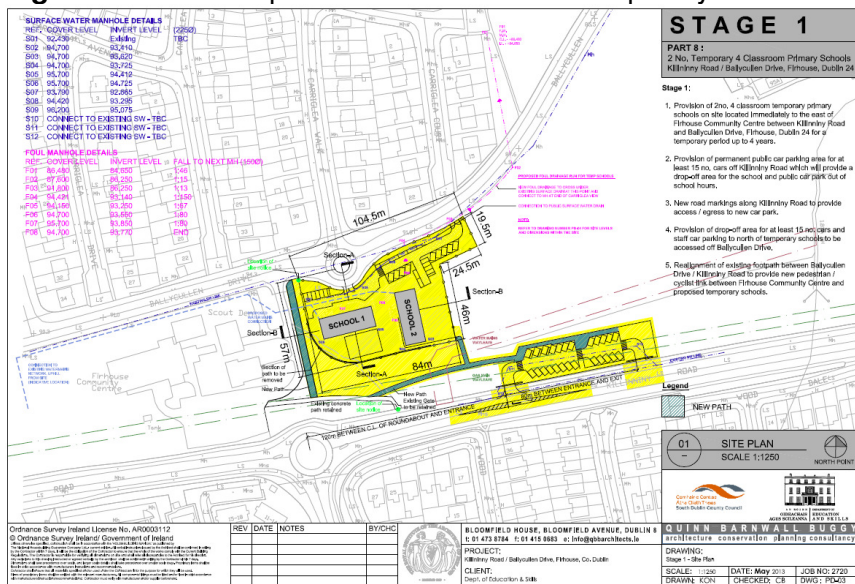
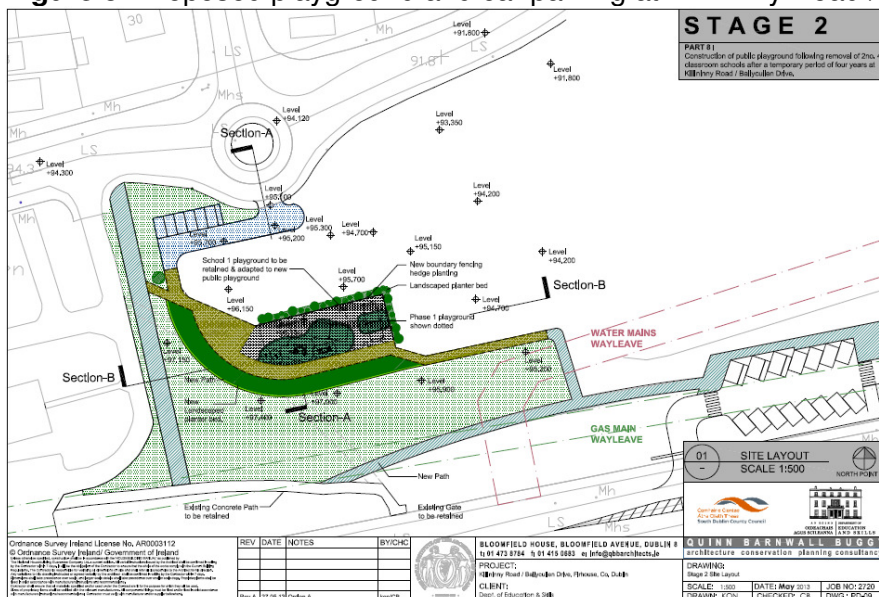


Figure 5: Proposed playground and car parking at Killininy Road / Ballycullen Drive



In the early summer 2013 three separate 'circular' submissions were received by SDCC before and during the public consultation period for the proposed Part 8 for temporary accommodation at the preferred site for new schools in Firhouse. In total 850, out of 912 valid submissions were made in this format. Local opposition was primarily due to concerns about traffic and loss of public space. The Part 8 report was not been brought to the Council for determination until a further review of other sites was undertaken. Any permanent school building would have been subject to further separate site disposal and planning application processes, which it had been intended would have been completed by now.

Phase 4: The Victory Centre Church and Ballycullen Lands Options

Following public consultation in relation to the Part 8 for temporary school accommodation on a portion of Site 6 the planning department reassessed all options (Figure 2) for the development of two new schools again. A matrix of the assessment is provided below.

It should be noted, that following investigations by the DES, SDCC was advised that it had been determined that it was not possible to utilise the Victory Centre Church, Firhouse Road, Firhouse for either temporary accommodation or permanent school. This is due to the layout and construction of the Victory Centre Church not meeting the Department of Education and Skills requirements and standards, and is likely that the building would be required to be demolished to accommodate a primary school. The Victory Centre Church is therefore not an option for primary school accommodation in the Firhouse area at this time.

During the preparation and adoption of the Ballycullen-Oldcourt Local Area Plan it was suggested that the demand for schools in Firhouse could be met on reserved sites in Ballycullen-Oldcourt. The DES reiterated that the Oldcourt-Ballycullen area is a separate and distinct geographic area, which will have educational infrastructural needs in its own right should planned housing developments for this area materialise. Co-locating schools which serve different areas is not acceptable to the Department of Education and Skills for a number of reasons not least of which is that it would leave unmet demand in one of the feeder areas in question. Locating new Firhouse schools in Ballycullen-Oldcourt is not possible and the Department of Education and Skill has clarified repeatedly that it will not pursue the acquisition of sites in Ballycullen-Oldcourt for schools that are needed in Firhouse..

Phase 5: Reassessment of Sites 1, 4 and 10

As outlined above, the adoption of the Ballycullen-Oldcourt Local Area Plan in January 2014 provided finality regarding to the DES's position regarding the inappropriateness of accommodating new schools for Firhouse at Sites 2 and 7. Further to this another re-assessment of all possible sites was carried out.

Site 1: St. Colmcille's Way / M50 Firhouse junction

Development of a school would be possible at this location however, there are significant difficulties associated with realising this due to:

Abnormal Costs:

- €1.2 million euro flood relief scheme that would be required to be undertaken prior to any development.
- The abnormal costs associated with having to remove and dispose of a high level of spoil on site prior to construction works.

- The uncertainty around the possible recoupment of Sports Capital Funding that may be due.

Traffic Management

- Higher traffic volumes at the M50 junction at Site 1, compared to at Sites 4 and 6.

Loss of Community Infrastructure

- The removal of a pitch, without a current viable alternative for its relocation in close proximity (in contrast to Site 6). This is particularly significant given the location of Firhouse Knocklyon's clubhouse on site.

Site 4: Firhouse Rd. / Killinenny Road junction

Development at this site presents difficulties due to the small site area, which would require a site specific design and the location of the site at a busy junction which would require traffic management including mobility management plans. However, in an area where land availability is scarce this site does offer potential:

- The site is zoned for development and therefore the principle of development at this location has been established.
- The traffic section of SDCC recommends that access to this site would be best accommodated to and from Killinenny Road. The access would need to be carefully designed, in order to reduce its impact on the Killinenny Road/Firhouse Road junction. A priority junction into the school could be installed immediately west of the Old Court junction. Alternatively the Old Court Rd and the school entrance could be connected and a mini-roundabout or signals installed at this junction.

The peak hour for the Killinenny Rd/Firhouse Rd junction is between 8 and 9am. It would greatly help all traffic movements in the area if the school opened after 9.15 am at the earliest.

A pedestrian and cycle access from the Firhouse Road could be facilitated which would allow access for children from the north.

- Although the site area is below the standard area required by the Department of Education and Skills the Department has determined that a site specific school can be designed for this site that would meet the requirements of the Department.

Site 10: Firhouse Road

This site, located on the edge of the Dodder Valley, is zoned Objective G 'to protect and improve High Amenity', and although Educational uses are open for consideration it would be difficult to grant permission for a permanent school at this location as it would result in the erosion of the Dodder Valley Park and would be contrary to Council Policy regarding the development of a linear park at this location. Also, notwithstanding multiple attempts by SDCC to contact the owner of this site this has not been possible. Therefore acquisition of the site would be lengthy and possibly problematic.

Phase 6: S.183 Disposal Site 4 Firhouse Rd./ Killinenny Road

Further to consideration of the site options as per above, and following the local elections in May 2014 together with the establishment of a new Council, a briefing session was arranged with the local Elected Members in early September 2014 to discuss the possibility of disposing of the SDCC owned site at the junction of Killinenny Road / Firhouse Road (Site 4) to the Department of Education and Skills. On foot of this briefing a S.183 disposal was prepared for Site 4 and was presented at the September 22nd Council Meeting. However, prior to the Council meeting the Boards of Management of both schools currently in temporary accommodation, together with parent groups, contacted local Councillors to voice their dissatisfaction with Site 4 as an option for a permanent school. As a result the S.183 was deferred and a report on the Site Identification Process was requested to be presented to the Council.

The Department of Education and Skills was updated following the September 22nd Council meeting and the DES made clear to SDCC that Site 4 is a viable option and would not result in a 'second rate' educational experience. The Department of Education and Skills, together with SDCC have met with representatives of national patrons and local management for both schools and outlined the work to date in trying to establish permanent sites for both schools at this meeting.

Conclusion

The process of identifying and acquiring sites to provide for two schools in Firhouse has been ongoing since March 2012. Over that time South Dublin County Council has been committed to meeting the terms of the MoU and has endeavoured to find sites for two new schools

- where there is a demand for school places;
- will meet the technical requirements of the DES without incurring excessive abnormal costs;
- is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development objectives for the area; and
- will meet the technical requirements of the Council, including traffic / water and drainage / etc.

Identifying sites in built-up established areas is particularly challenging due to the scarcity of available lands and the expectations of the existing community regarding land use.

It is the opinion of the SDCC's Land Use Planning and Transportation Department and the Department of Education and Skills that Site 6, Killinenny Road / Ballycullen Drive present the optimum solution to meet the demand for two new schools in Firhosue. This site represents the best use of land, whereby:

- the necessary school infrastructure can be provided where it is needed,
- it will encourage sustainable and healthy lifestyles choices; while
- it will reinforce and underpin community spirit that is brought about by schools.

Although open space will be given over to school buildings, investment will be made to strengthen community facilities through the provision of:

- a playground, in an area that has a dearth of play facilities;
- car parking to facilitate the football clubs in the area; and
- match funding for all weather pitches on adjoining land.

SDCC's Land Use Planning and Transportation Department and the Department of Education and Skills are of the opinion that a school can also be satisfactorily provided at Site 4, Firhouse Road / Killininn Road junction, although it would incur excessive abnormal costs due to site constraints. Site 4 could only accommodate one school and there would be a need to provide a second site.

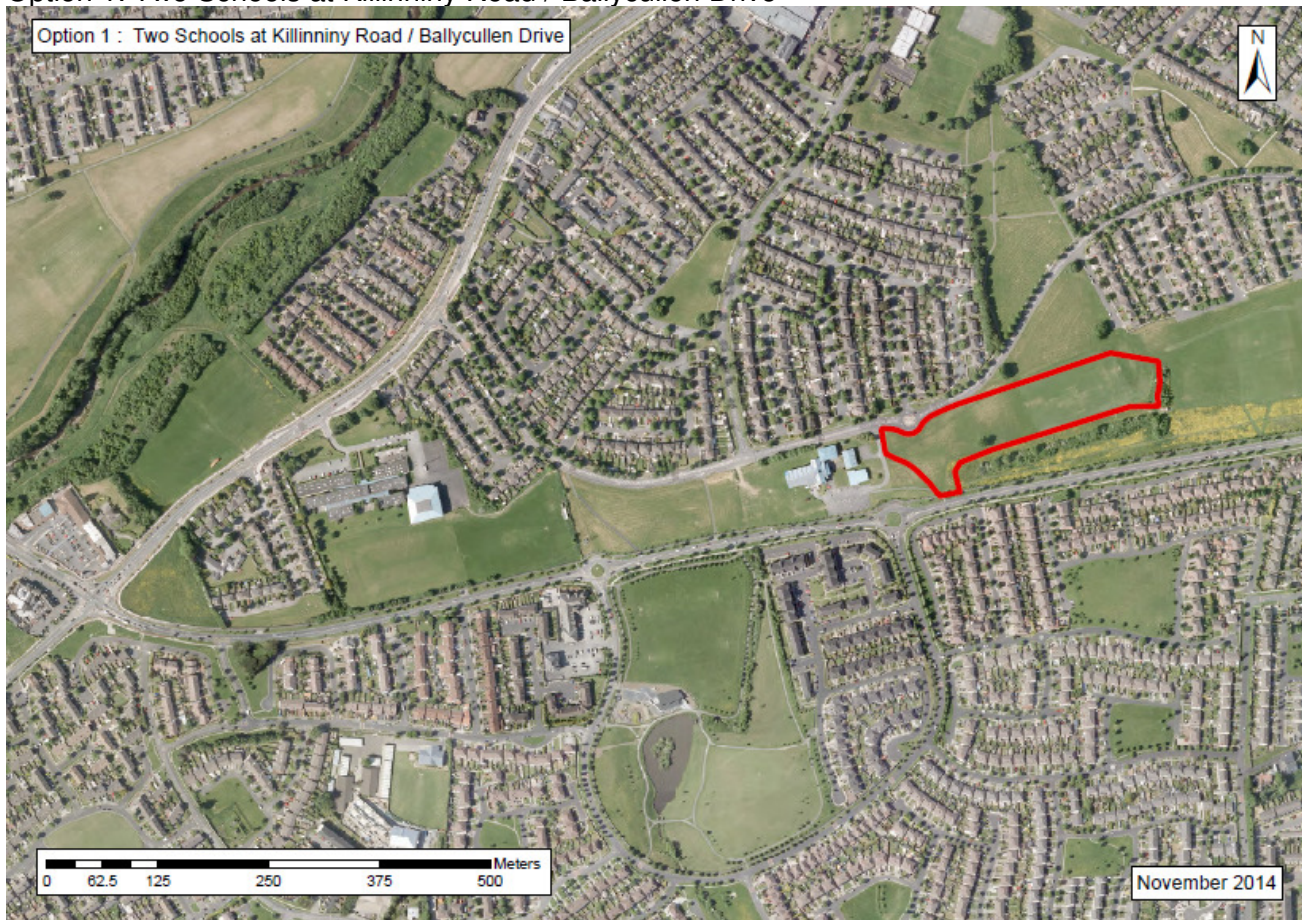
Therefore SDCC's Land Use Planning and Transportation Department and the Department of Education and Skills concludes that the following options, both of which are equally viable, are available to meet the needs for two new schools in Firhouse:

1) S.183 disposal of 1.964 ha SDCC site at Killininn Road / Ballycullen Road (Site 6) to the Department of Education and Skills.

This would result in:

- Planning Application for 2 permanent primary schools
- relocation the existing pitch eastwards;
- construction of a permanent playground;
- construction of public car parking along Killininn Road that; and
- potential for matched funding for all-weather pitches on an adjoining site.

Option 1: Two Schools at Killininn Road / Ballycullen Drive



Or

2) S.183 disposal of .889 ha at Site 6

This would result in:

- Planning application for 1 permanent primary school
- Retention of the existing pitch

And

S.183 disposal of .69 ha at Site 4, as per proposal at September Council Meeting.

This would result in:

- Planning application for 1 permanent primary school

Option 2: One School At Killinniny Road/ Ballycullen Drive and One School at Old Mill

