

3.7 Urban Structure, Design & Public Realm Qualities

3.7.1 Introduction

This section seeks to translate the high level themes and core objectives set out in the previous policy sections into an overall spatial layout that is legible, coherent and responsive to the local context. The overarching objective is to create an attractive and sustainable new residential neighbourhood at Woodbrook-Shanganagh.

The real measure of success will be the extent to which the Plan can deliver an appropriate quantum and quality of new homes, as well as create a unique place informed by its setting.

To underpin the new residential community, the Plan must also deliver an attractive public realm, key civic spaces, a vibrant neighbourhood core and a linked open space network to facilitate permeability and passive / active recreational opportunities.

To this end, the Plan must have clarity on the fixed or non-negotiable elements such as key routes, spaces and connections and guidance on those elements that may have some flexibility - within certain parameters - including design layouts, building height and density ranges.

The approach to urban design will be driven by high-level themes and a series of key structuring principles, drawing on the intrinsic assets of the Plan Area whilst also acknowledging the many challenges.



Photo 19: Footpath artwork in Shankill

3.7.2 The Way Forward

The urban form and structure will be driven by a number of high level themes and key structuring principles. The two respective development parcels will be distilled further, as appropriate, for the purpose of density bands and / or phasing, while the overall framework strategy will set out a number of fixed elements in relation to public open space, key streets and connectivity.

i. Key Structuring Principles

The key structuring principles prioritise existing physical elements or concepts which will underpin a legible order and inform the layout of the Site Framework Strategies. In general, these are as follows: Landscape Elements & Greenways; View Corridors; Protected Structures; Neighbourhood / Community Hubs; Civic Spaces; DART Station.

The objective for the Local Area Plan is that the character of each of the two development parcels will evolve through a combination of a unique design response to the site-specific natural and cultural assets, diversity in architectural design, quality open space and a distinctive public realm with a neighbourhood core or community hub at the heart of the respective development parcels.

ii. Building Heights

The Plan Area relates to zoned, but as yet undeveloped lands set within the context of a surrounding wider greenbelt zoning. As such there is little immediate context or relationship in terms of the existing built form. The residential development in the immediate vicinity (to the north) typically comprises of the traditional low rise two-storey housing, which represents a generally unsustainable form of urban development. However, at a further remove, there are examples of recent quality infill developments which successfully employ sustainable densities, for example Aubrey and Olcovar.

It is generally endorsed by various studies that both in Metropolitan Dublin and internationally, the vast majority of accommodation needs in an urban context can be met by buildings of fairly modest height of 4-5 storeys, with elements up to 8 storeys, and that this range works well in creating a legible dense urban structure - akin to the traditionally evolved European City. It is proposed to apply a building height range of circa 3-5 storeys, plus a setback level, generally in the LAP Area having regard to its location and the need to cater for a diverse range of housing typologies, albeit with the provision for potential greater height at certain key or landmark locations.

For the most part a height range of 3-5 storeys, plus a setback level, will apply. However, there are a number of locations where height above this may be considered appropriate for reasons of legibility, identity and visibility and / or to support a particular activity. At Woodbrook, for example, an element of height at the neighbourhood square may be appropriate to signal the focal point or heart of the community, whilst potentially, allowing, for a greater vertical mix of uses and vibrancy. Other locations appropriate for landmark buildings relate to way finding points along the main street or central avenue connecting to the DART Station and also at gateways to the Park.

In general, height should be well considered in order to impact optimally on the street scene, create an interesting vista or a sense of enclosure to public spaces, whilst the height range of any perimeter block scheme should be informed by a shadow analysis to safeguard the amenity value of communal courtyard spaces.

It is also accepted that lower building heights may apply in limited circumstances, such as a sensitive boundary locations or transitional zones, or to address particular housing needs, for example elderly accommodation. For Shanganagh Castle, the development site represents a more obvious extension of the existing built environment of Shankill Village. It also includes a Protected Structure. Hence, there is a rationale for an alternative height strategy. On this basis, the building heights increase in a north-south direction across the site acknowledging the need for a more considered and

sensitive boundary treatment to the north having regard to the adjacent two-storey residential development at Castle Farm. The central portion of the site provides for building heights of circa 3-5 storeys, plus a setback level, potentially incorporating terrace formats, whilst higher elements of 4-5, plus a setback level and potentially up to 6-storeys, are located towards the south-western quadrant of the site creating a strong frontage onto the Dublin Road to bookend the existing urban edge. Lower rise and lower density housing is proposed for the south-eastern corner of the site to protect the established sylvan woodland character and the curtilage and setting of the Protected Structure. This massing strategy represents a considered response to the constraints and assets of the site, as well as its relationship to existing residential properties and Shanganagh Park as adjoining land uses.



Photo 20: Example of Innovative house types - Accordia - (Cambridge)

For Woodbrook, the height or massing strategy focuses on a concentration of higher buildings towards the centre of the site. This approach allows for greater massing in the vicinity of key public spaces and facilities - such as at the Neighbourhood Centre and in the vicinity of the Green Axis with the Village Green, thereby contributing to the overall vitality and vibrancy of these focal points, meet and greet spaces, or recreational areas (c. 4-6 storeys). It also allows for a potential landmark element of height at the neighbourhood square to support and celebrate the objective of a new neighbourhood core for the community. It is considered that there is potential for a quality landmark building, subject to detailed design and impact assessment. Lower building heights are considered more appropriate along the site boundaries, in particular along the coastal sweep and the southern edge in response to the surrounding landscape setting (c. 3-4 storeys).

Building heights at the Dart Station Area will require a responsive design approach to ensure successful integration with the surrounding landscape context, namely, the coastal fringe.

An element of two-storey buildings may be permissible to cater for diverse housing needs. This approach reflects the intent to create a compact urban village form within the surrounding greenbelt and to incorporate the sylvan landscape character in so far as possible.

iii. Density & Urban Form

The LAP comprises of greenfield lands in close proximity to well established settlement centres and immediately proximate to a DART Line with a planned future DART Station as a key component of the overall development strategy, which make it inherently sustainable from the outset.

In accordance with a suite of National guidance and best international urban planning, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown will continue to promote sustainable higher densities – particularly so in these Key Future Development Areas specifically identified in the Core Strategy, and within the catchment areas of high capacity public transport – all as set out in Section 2.1.3.3 of the County Development Plan.

The previous Local Area Plan set out target densities of 65-75 units per hectare for the Shanganagh Castle Site and 80-100 units per hectare for the lands at Woodbrook, both at net density levels. It is now considered that these prescribed densities were particularly high and limited the potential for a diverse range of housing typologies.

Whilst the Ministerial Guidelines on Residential Densities promote a minimum net density of 50 units per hectare (Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, DEHLG, 2009), Woodbrook-Shanganagh must aspire to a higher minimum if it is to (i) acknowledge the proximity to a high quality public transport network, and (ii) deliver the indicative quantum of residential units envisaged in the County Development Plan Core Strategy which is responding to the overarching 2010-2020 Regional Planning Guidelines.



Photo 21: Olcovar Duplex Units, Shankill

Accordingly, an average minimum net density of 60 units per hectare shall apply to the lands at Shanganagh Castle and Woodbrook. This is the minimum density level appropriate and the Council will promote higher densities as market viability and supply delivery improves. This considered approach whereby there is a specified range of densities applicable under each density band, builds in a flexibility factor and will allow for the attainment of higher densities if required, or appropriate.

Clearly, the delivery of higher densities is not a stand-alone-objective; rather higher densities must be delivered in tandem with a high quality living environment to ensure the creation of sustainable homes and good urban places. Woodbrook-Shanganagh will develop as a sustainable residential neighbourhood with unrivalled access to the coastline, Shanganagh Park, the strategic green network and the Dublin Mountains. The plan will promote an urban design quality-led approach to achieving sustainable urban densities.

The DART Station Area will need a specific response to ensure that any massing or higher density strategy - that may typically apply to a public transport node - will retain permeability and a generous visual connection to the coast. The creation of an attractive public realm to support the very obvious public role of the planned station could prove a challenge in the absence of any notable scale of commercial development and having regard also to the need to safeguard the viability of the primary neighbourhood core at Woodbrook.

Place-making and identity will be also key considerations given the predominance of residential use on the zoned lands. In this regard, there is an opportunity to consider how the urban layout and form can best respond to the need for a range of tenure types, typologies and diversity of residential accommodation, whilst the two hubs of social activity on the respective sites offer potential to create further visual and functional variety.

iv. Density & Open Space Standards

Net Density

Net density is considered to be a more refined tool to measure residential density as it uses the net site area, including only those areas available for housing and directly associated uses.

The DEHLG 'Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas', advocate the use of net densities for inter alia, housing land in Local Area Plans and where phased development is over time taking place in a large-scale residential development. The Guidelines also provide guidance on those elements for inclusion or exclusion for the purposes of net densities.

In the interest of clarity, net densities - for the purposes of development proposals or master plans for each of the respective development parcels - shall be calculated in accordance with the above DEHLG Guidelines (See Appendix 4).

As outlined above, an average minimum net density of 60 units per hectare shall apply to each of the development parcels at Shanganagh Castle and Woodbrook, although the Council will promote the attainment of an overall higher density level in response to changed economic circumstances in relation to market viability and confidence.

Notwithstanding, and only in exceptional circumstances at the sole discretion of the Planning Authority, variations or a deviation from the average minimum density level of 60 units per hectare may be considered, where precise adherence to this density level may not achieve the best planning outcome, for example: -

- where a proposal can be demonstrated to significantly advance the social and environmental policies of the LAP;
- where a lower density to respect the setting of a Protected Structure is necessary;
- or where it can be demonstrated that a proposal for lower densities, significantly contributes to the objective to create a high quality public realm, civic space or strategic connections.

Private Open Space

The County Development Plan can provide for a relaxation in the quantum of private open space provision from the standard requirements in instances where an innovative design response is advanced (Section 8.2.8.4 Private Open Space).

It also allows for a relaxation of the standard separation distances in an exceptionally well-designed scheme, which otherwise provides very high quality living environment and that is in close proximity to existing public open spaces (Section 8.2.8.4 Private Open Space).

Having regard to the immediate proximity to extensive publicly accessible open space in the Shanganagh Park and the planned provision for a quality public transport in the form of a new DART Station, the Plan Area presents an ideal opportunity for innovative design solutions with new typologies for own door housing that reflect the reduced need for car ownership, as well as private open space. These attributes mean that any reduction in private open space may be counter-balanced by attractive usable shared surface streets, pockets parks and quality usable connections and corridors to the adjoining Shanganagh Park.

To assist in achieving higher density residential layouts, the Plan actively promotes innovative residential typologies where the private open space requirements for the housing units may be lower than the standard requirements set out in the County Development Plan. This provision applies primarily to own door housing - for example, detached, semi-detached, and terraced housing. Elsewhere, for apartment or multi-unit developments, the private open space standards apply as set out in both the 'Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments', DECLG, (2015) and the County Development Plan, will continue to apply.

v. A Vibrant Neighbourhood Core

A central element of the development strategy is to provide a community hub or focal point on each of the development parcels so as to underpin the emergence of a sustainable residential neighbourhood. Shanganagh Castle, as a publicly accessible facility, has immense potential for community, cultural and/or recreational uses. Woodbrook, in comparison, has greater potential to support a vibrant neighbourhood core having regard to the greater scale of the development lands and closer proximity to the planned DART Station. Notwithstanding, the two hubs are, in any case, considered complementary given the relative immediacy of the respective development parcels and the strong inter-connectivity to be established between them.

Under the original 2006 Local Area Plan, a neighbourhood centre was proposed on each of the sites, although at different scales and with a 'town' square proposed for Woodbrook, as well as a commercial node at the DART Station. The current plan sets out an alternative strategy on the basis of the likely synergies and connectivity between the two development parcels and also the need to ensure the viability of any retail or commercial component, as well as a vibrancy to the neighbourhood core. For these reasons, a single neighbourhood centre with a smaller civic space is now proposed for Woodbrook.

Good quality convenience and retail services to cater for the needs of residents is an important prerequisite of any compact neighbourhood in terms of sustainable and accessible retail provision, especially for families with children and elderly persons, as well as facilitating ease of access for workers and enabling possible multi-purpose trips combining access to DART

with small-scale convenience shopping. The Neighbourhood Centre will primarily cater for daily needs of residents and as such the scale of provision should be subordinate to that at Shankill Village as an established and vibrant centre in close proximity. It is envisaged that the scale of retail / retail services is likely to comprise of an anchor convenience store (up to c. 500m²) with a number of ancillary fine shops and café or restaurants (c.100-200m²), as well as perhaps a crèche and appropriately scaled community facility.

The viability and vitality of a Neighbourhood Centre in any newly emerging residential area may be a challenge pending a critical mass of users, but it will ultimately support the concept of the 'five-minute walkable neighbourhood'.

The optimum location for the Neighbourhood Centre is at the heart of the development parcel, in close proximity to key community facilities such as the proposed primary school, the Green Axis, Village Green and the primary connections to the Park. This has the potential to create synergies and a thriving community hub.

The LAP approach is to cluster retail and other quality active frontages in the neighbourhood square and along key pedestrian routes, achieving a fine grain of uses at street level. It will be a key objective to create a rich mix of uses and attractive spill out spaces with a favourable orientation as part of the neighbourhood core. This is an important aspect of the strategy that will deliver vitality, convenience and help engender a sense of community – the very qualities that emulate a 'traditional' village and that potential residents seek out in an area. It is also considered that an element of height may be appropriate to celebrate and distinguish the Neighbourhood Centre as a focal point for the community.

At the Neighbourhood Centre, the emphasis will be on small-scale retail units generally on the ground floor of mixed-use residential development. These units will be primarily convenience and retail service outlets functioning as neighbourhood shops to serve the daily needs of residents, and commuters accessing the DART Station. Own-door offices, houses or community spaces may also be appropriate on routes leading to the civic spaces. Elsewhere, a small retail element may be appropriate at the DART Station (c. 100m²).

Ground floors in the Neighbourhood Centre and possibly the DART Station should have a more generous commercial floor-to-ceiling height of circa 4m for design, function and adaptability reasons.

A vibrant mix of neighbourhood uses and facilities in the developing area will take time to evolve, being contingent on a critical mass of end users. Nonetheless, it will be necessary to secure the spatial provision of active ground floor units from the outset in order to realise the longer term objectives. In this context, the strategy will be to actively seek appropriate temporary uses as an interim solution.

3.7.3 Policy and Objectives

Policy WS7: It is the Policy of Dún Laoghaire- Rathdown Council:

To ensure that all development is of high quality design and assists in promoting a sense of place with a quality public realm, having regard to the good urban design and place making principles as set out in the County Development Plan. The Council will require that a 'Design Statement' accompany all medium-to-large scale (30+ residential units) and complex applications in the Plan Area, to demonstrate how the proposed development addressed or responds to the design criteria as set out in the 'Urban Design Manual – A Best Practice Guide', 2009 and the Site Framework Strategies for the respective development parcels at Woodbrook and Shanganagh Castle.

It is an objective of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council:

US1:	To achieve sustainable densities, not as a stand-alone objective, but in conjunction with other safeguarding qualitative criteria - as set out in the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Development Plan - in order to achieve a high quality living environment and attractive residential neighbourhood.
US2:	To promote a variety of residential typologies, including terrace housing, duplexes and apartments with coherent streets and open spaces to create a distinctive neighbourhood that will promote whole life-cycle living.
US3:	To establish a coherent urban structure based on proven urban design principles (See County Development Plan Policy UD1), and the creation of a compact sustainable residential community that can support a range of social activities and a high quality public transport network.
US4:	To promote streets, routes and spaces which are human-scaled, memorable as places, have a high standard of amenity and are in accordance with the guidance set out in Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, 2013 (DMURS).
US5:	To define a single Neighbourhood Centre with a civic space and potentially a landmark element in order to create a focal point and potentially facilitate the clustering of other social, community and recreational activities and functions.
US6:	To ensure that new north-south linkages and routes are created to allow for quality usable connections between the future residential communities at Shanganagh Castle and Woodbrook, as well as Shanganagh Park as a major recreational resource.
US7:	To ensure that the public realm is legible, cohesive and operates as a connected network and that it interfaces successfully with the public realm of the wider area and facilitates future strategic connections.

US8:	To ensure that the design of the public realm incorporates the principles of Green Infrastructure.
US9:	To retain and protect, where possible, natural historic features such as the pond, located on the lands at Shanganagh Castle.
US10:	That future housing within the Plan area shall have regard to the Council's commitments to build sustainable, attractive, liveable and energy efficient buildings with the purpose of reducing CO2 emissions.