

Castlecomer: Social and Civic Infrastructure Audit

1 Introduction

This is an audit of social infrastructure (e.g. schools, library, health services), carried out to inform the preparation of the Castlecomer Settlement Plan. The study area is taken as being the 2018 Castlecomer Local Area Plan boundary.

This assessment comprises an examination of the existing situation with regards to infrastructure provision and recommendations based on that assessment.

All physical social infrastructure features identified and assessed in the study area are illustrated in Figures 1-4 below.

1.1 Education and Training

Facilities examined under this theme include primary schools and post-primary schools. There are no third-level services available at present. Within the study area there are three primary schools and one post-primary school, see Figure 1.

Name of facility	Level	Female enrolment 2023/2024	Male enrolment 2023/2024	Comment on Capacity
Castlecomer Community School	Secondary	264	349	Planning application for extension granted ¹ . According to the Dept. of Education, capacity is currently around the peak, and is projected to decrease from this point.
Presentation Convent (Mixed and Senior Girls)	Primary	70	38	To join with Boys' school to become Scoil Iosagain from September 2025
Castlecomer Boys'	Primary	0	39	Four teacher school– to join with Presentation Convent to become Scoil Iosagain from 2025
Wandesforde Mixed	Primary	25	32	59 enrolled at present. Three teacher school, at capacity.

Of note, the Presentation Convent and Castlecomer Boys' are to amalgamate from September 2025. The detail of how this is to operate is yet to be fully determined, however the current proposal is that they will operate from the Presentation Convent site.

¹ P24/60515 granted 25/04/2025

Demand analysis

According to consultation with the Department of Education, who use child benefit data to plan for their 'School Planning Areas' to 2040, the primary school peak has passed. The peak for post-primary is ongoing, and demand is expected to decrease from this point. The increase in population projected by the Settlement Plan is not at a scale to affect this.

In terms of physical sites and facilities, direct engagement with the schools identified issues related to traffic management, and playing facilities. Traffic management issues will be addressed under the Transport Assessment.

All sites have been zoned for Community Facilities, with provision made for expansion of facilities. The Presentation convent site is the most constrained at present. However the amalgamation of this school with the Boys School offers opportunities for the future development of facilities.

1.2 Childcare

There are two childcare facilities operating in the town, as follows, see Figure 1.

Name of facility	Enroll ed places	Capacity	Type
Castlecomer Creche and Montessori Ltd, Oak Hill	70	Physical capacity available, but staffing is the constraint	Full day service for pre-school. No after school provision.
Deenside Early Years, Kilkenny Street	55	Physical capacity available, but staffing is the constraint	Full day service for pre-school. No after school provision.

There are currently no extant permissions for childcare facilities in the town.

Demand analysis

The lack of after school places in the town is an identified issue, however according to the creche operators this is a human resources issue rather than a physical capacity constraint. The two creches have available capacity if the staffing issue was overcome. The creche at the Community Hall has a small hard-surfaced play area, but does not currently have access to any grassed area for play.

1.3 Health

The assessment of health facilities included GPs, health centres, dental, pharmacy care and other related facilities, see Figure 2.

Name of facility	Services
District hospital	Convalescent, respite, palliative and long stay. With a maximum capacity of 18 beds.
Castlecomer Medical Centre	3GPs, nurse and admin team.
Castlecomer health centre, Coolbaun	GP

Q Health, Kilkenny Street	Pharmacy
Harrington's, The Square	Pharmacy
Giles Barrett, Barrack Street	Pharmacy
Dental Repair Service, Chatsworth Street	Dental

Demand analysis

There are no national standards for health provision in Ireland relating to the provision of primary care centres or the number of doctors in an area.

Ireland has an ageing population with the growth in the older age groups exceeding growth in other age cohorts. Census 2022 indicates 18.7% of the population in Castlecomer is over 65 years of age. In relation to care for the elderly it is noted that there is no private nursing home located within close proximity of the study area.

1.4 Open Space and Recreation

The open space audit was carried out, having regard to the overall public open space minimum standard and the public open space hierarchy contained in the Development Plan.

1.4.1 Open Space

The areas of open space are set out below, and are shown on Figure 3.

Name	Type	Area in hectares
Discovery Park	Regional Park	32.3 ha
Playground/park, Church Avenue, Kilkenny Street	Local	0.51 ha
Erin's Own Sports ground, Ballycomey	Sports Ground	3.6 ha
Deen Celtic Sports ground	Sports Ground	1.37 ha
Total		37.78

The total area of open space is approximately 38 hectares. The Discovery Park is an invaluable resource to the town.

1.4.2 Sporting/Activity clubs

There are a number of sporting and activity clubs operating in the town, as set out below.

Name	Location	Activity
Deenside Wheelers	Old Fire station	Cycling
Erin's Own	Ballycomey	GAA
Deen Celtic		Soccer
Aanahata Yoga & Healing Centre	Discovery Park estate yard	Yoga, meditation
Athletics club	Community School	Running, athletics
Basketball club	Community School	Basketball
Golf Club	Golf club, Drumgoole	Golf

Demand analysis

The population of Castlecomer in 2022 was 1,495, therefore approximately 25 hectares is provided per 1,000 population. This is generous by Development Plan standards, which requires 2.4 ha of open space per 1,000 population. The Discovery Park is the major contributor to this over-provision. There is scope however for a smaller park to be located within the town centre itself.

1.5 Social and Community

Social and community facilities are varied in nature and can include general civic services as well as services targeted to specific sections of the community. A number of services operate from the Community Hall including sports and cultural facilities. All facilities are shown on Figure 4.

Name/Location	Facilities/Services
Library, Kilkenny Street	Library
Community Hall, Kilkenny Street	KLP offices, Creche, drama, health and fitness classes, dancing, Active retirement, history society
Courthouse	Foróige
Garda Station, Kilkenny Road	Gardai
Deenview Centre, Kilkenny Road	Supporting adults with intellectual disability
Men's Shed, Kilkenny Street	Men's shed

1.6 'Faith' Facilities

A total of three faith facilities were identified in the town, comprising of two churches with graveyards attached, and one cemetery on the Clogh Road.

Name/Location	Facilities/Services
Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kilkenny Street	Church and graveyard
St. Mary's Church of Ireland	Church and graveyard
Cross Hill Cemetery, Clogh Road	Spare capacity available

Demand analysis

That graveyard has spare capacity, so there is at present no demand for any additional graveyard provision.

2 Conclusion and Recommendations

Social and community infrastructure is essential to achieving a balanced approach to sustainable local communities and it is of critical importance to the economic and social development of any town. This audit examined the current context with respect to social infrastructure facilities, examining any gaps in provision, and future requirements based on projected population growth. The findings highlight the presence of some excellent social infrastructure facilities in the area, and a shortfall or absence of some others, that will influence the delivery of future improvements. The issues that the Plan should consider are provision for school facilities and creche expansion, and provision for a nursing home.

Figure 1: Schools and creches in Castlecomer

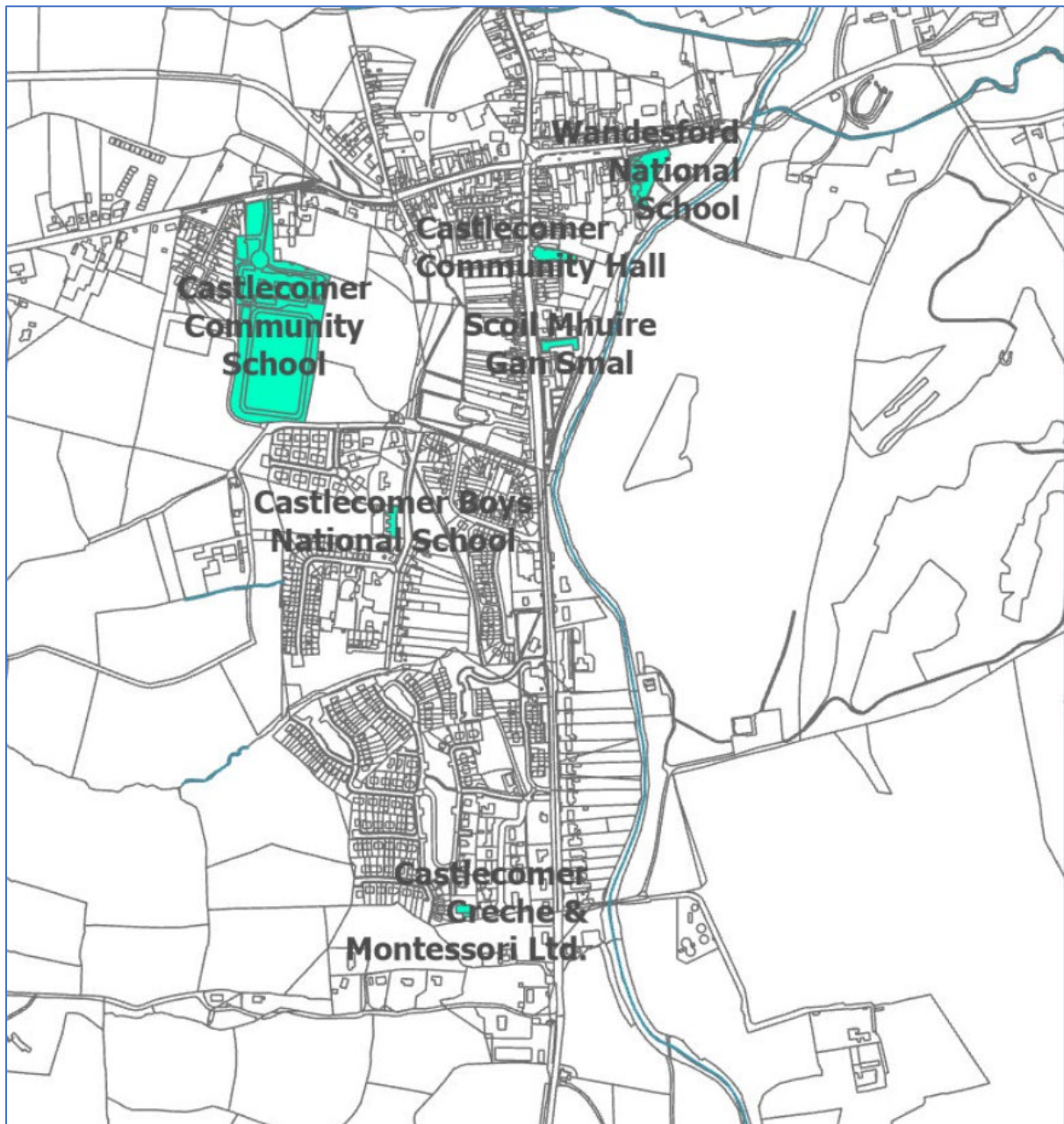


Figure 2: Health facilities in Castlecomer

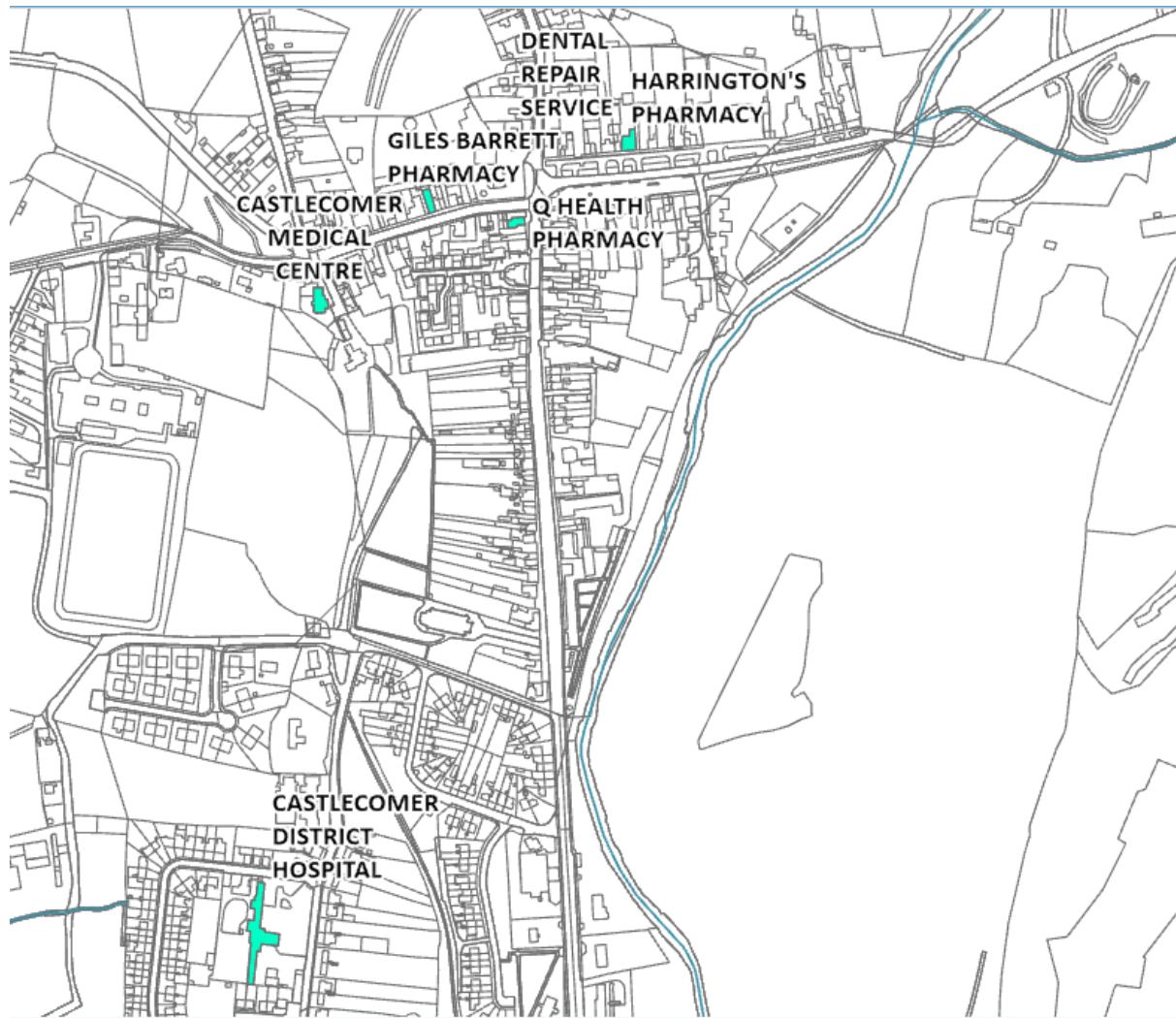


Figure 3: Areas of open space in Castlecomer



Figure 4: Social facilities in Castlecomer

