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Homezones and growing homes

Located in the centre of Hospital, a rural village in east Co. Limerick, Extensible Housing is a social housing project won by Denis Byrne Architects (DBA) through an open tender process in 2016. Phase 1 of this thirty-three-unit housing project was delivered in 2023. Like many housing schemes across the country, initiation of Phase 2 — the remaining thirteen homes — is primarily dependent on increased capacity of the local wastewater treatment system.

The housing scheme is designed to delineate the boundary edge of the site, creating a public green in its centre with all housing units located along the site's perimeter. Phase 1 of the scheme comprises twenty residences, specifically: seven three-bedroom houses; eight two-bedroom houses; one four-bedroom house; and four two-bedroom apartments. Drawing reference from historic planned towns such as Tyrrellspass, Clonakilty, and Mitchelstown, a coherence is achieved across the varying unit types through the adoption of the terrace typology. Terraced rows of houses and apartments occupy the western and northern edges of the site, with two detached houses filling the northeastern corner of the plot, accessed via the neighbouring housing estate.

The homes are easily accessible on foot from two directions: off Main Street, via Bank Place; and off Emily Road, via Glenview Drive. Flanked to the south, north, and west by residential development, and by industry to the east, the scheme is stitched into the village fabric, activating a secluded, underutilised greenfield site in the heart of Hospital village. The two-storey A-framed gable of the apartment units bookends the residential street of Bank Place, forming a new focal point that can be seen from the centre of the village's main street. A similar visual bookend is formed as the scheme meets Glenview Drive's neighbouring housing, some of which dates from the 1980s and 1990s, some of which was added in the early 2000s.





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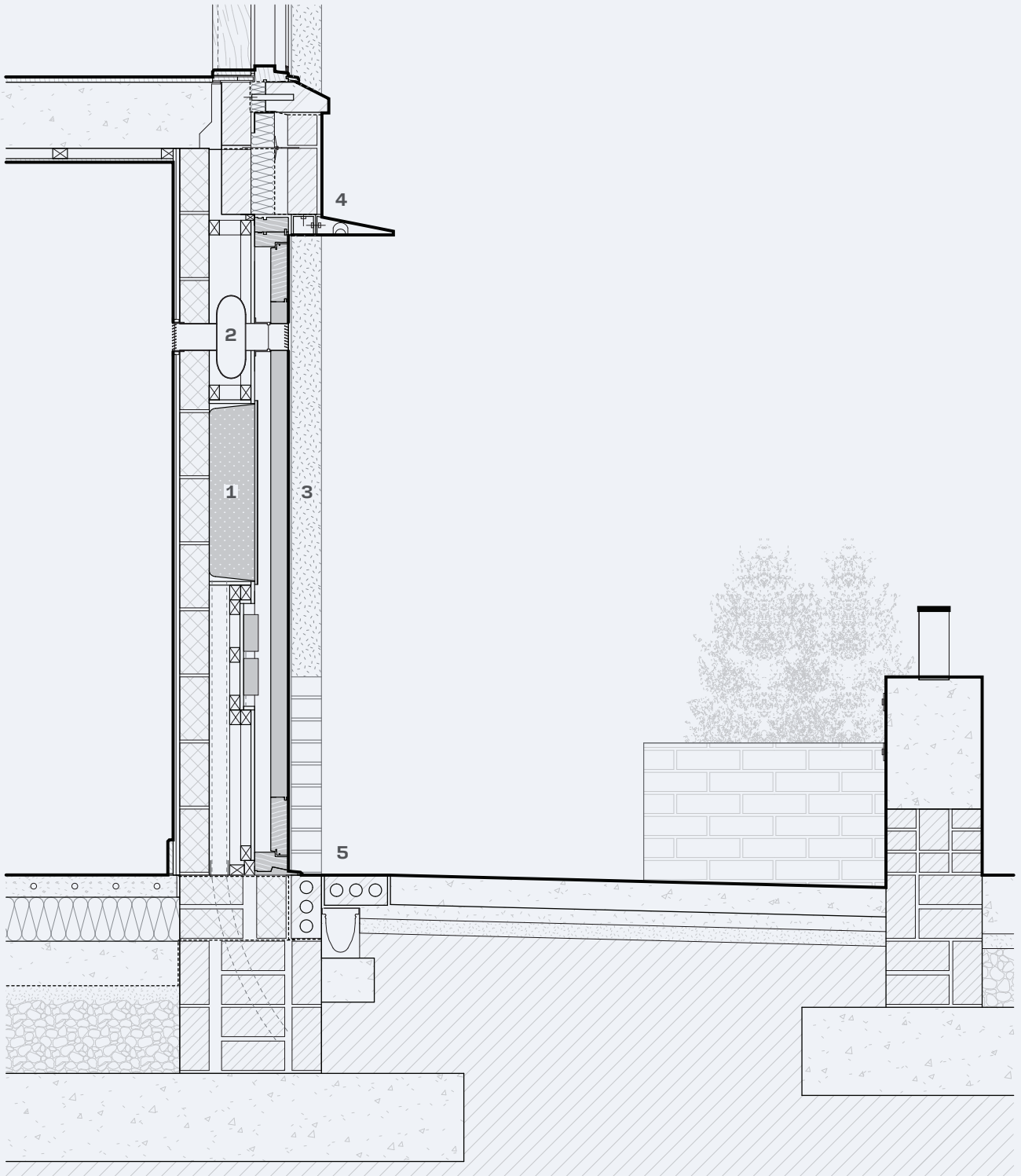
Desire lines are evident on aerial maps dating to 2001, and more prominently inlaid as temporary tarmac paths on an aerial view from 2013. In its scheme, DBA chose to apply a shared surface design approach, or ‘homezone’, to the public realm — a far superior replacement to the aforementioned tarmac path. A ‘homezone’ prioritises the needs of home living over traffic flow and considers the needs and safety of pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers with equal measure. This level-access, uniform material treatment to the public realm increases safety and accessibility when compared with traditional segregated road and kerbed footpath conditions. The benefit of this improvement extends to the neighbouring housing, providing direct and generous pedestrian access to the centre of the village and a safe route to the children’s playground that sits at the junction of Bank Place and Main Street.

My visit to the residential scheme, with project architect Julien Camuset, proved joyous. No greater insight can be gained

of the qualities of a housing scheme than through the lived experience of its residents. Like their neighbours, Michelle and her daughter Mia received keys to their home in December 2023. While showing us around their home, it was evident that Michelle and Mia have been working hard to make this house a home, and that the house design delivered by DBA welcomes inhabitation. A large mirror, a selection of lamps, a sideboard, and family photographs comfortably decorate the generous entrance hallway. A wooden staircase provides a burst of warmth, and the underside of its half-landing creates a nook to hide bikes, coats, and boots. Michelle has seamlessly integrated a small, hatched door within the architects’ design, concealing this storage underbelly. Standing with Michelle in the entrance hallway, Julien describes how a downstand in the ceiling, approximately two metres into the plan, was designed to accommodate an internal porch, should any of the residents desire one. Foresight and flexibility are

two words that come to mind as Julien and Michelle show me through the various rooms. DBA’s desire for coherent and simple exterior elevations is balanced with many consciously designed opportunities for resident intervention within the internal plan layouts.

The idea of extensible housing was proposed by DBA at the project’s earliest concept stage. This concept promotes and proactively facilitates cost-effective extension of the houses to accommodate the changing needs of a family over time. The design is future-proofed to accommodate three key adaptations: the provision of a lift; the extension of the downstairs WC into a fully accessible shower room and bedroom; and the extension of the stairs to accommodate a third-floor habitable room. The modest additional cost incurred during the construction of the project, including three additional courses of blockwork and increased fire rating on internal doors, affords each occupant a viable, practical, and reasonably affordable means to adapt their home in the future.



Detail

- 1. ESB meter, data, Eircom
- 2. Vent to WC
- 3. Door to service cabinet
- 4. Canopy
- 5. Brick threshold





"The brick plinth extends from each house to form low garden walls that delineate the private front garden from the shared surface area of the wider site"

In addition to considering these flexible and lifelong home design standards, Michelle described the positive impact of the floor-to-ceiling aluminium and wood composite windows and doors throughout her home. They provide a bright atmosphere in each room, allowing for a dynamic flood of daylight around the house at various times of the day. For Michelle, the windows are a positive contemporary feature that maximise daylight and reduce the potential for clutter and dust throughout her home. Where other schemes might reduce glazing to achieve cost savings, here, DBA's decisive and determined design ambition ensured maximal glazed openings throughout the scheme.

Another example of the architects' rigour is evident in the scheme's refined material palette. A nine-course brick plinth wraps the base of each terrace row, with externally insulated white render walls and slate roof finishes. The brick plinth extends from each house to form low garden walls that delineate the private front garden from the shared surface area of the wider site. The brick wall rises in perforated metal sheeting to create a feature element along the boundary edge of each front garden, thoughtfully accommodating bin storage and a post box for each home. A single brick course runs as a capping along the rear gardens' raw blockwork boundary walls. This brick capping links the walls back to the overall materiality of the scheme.

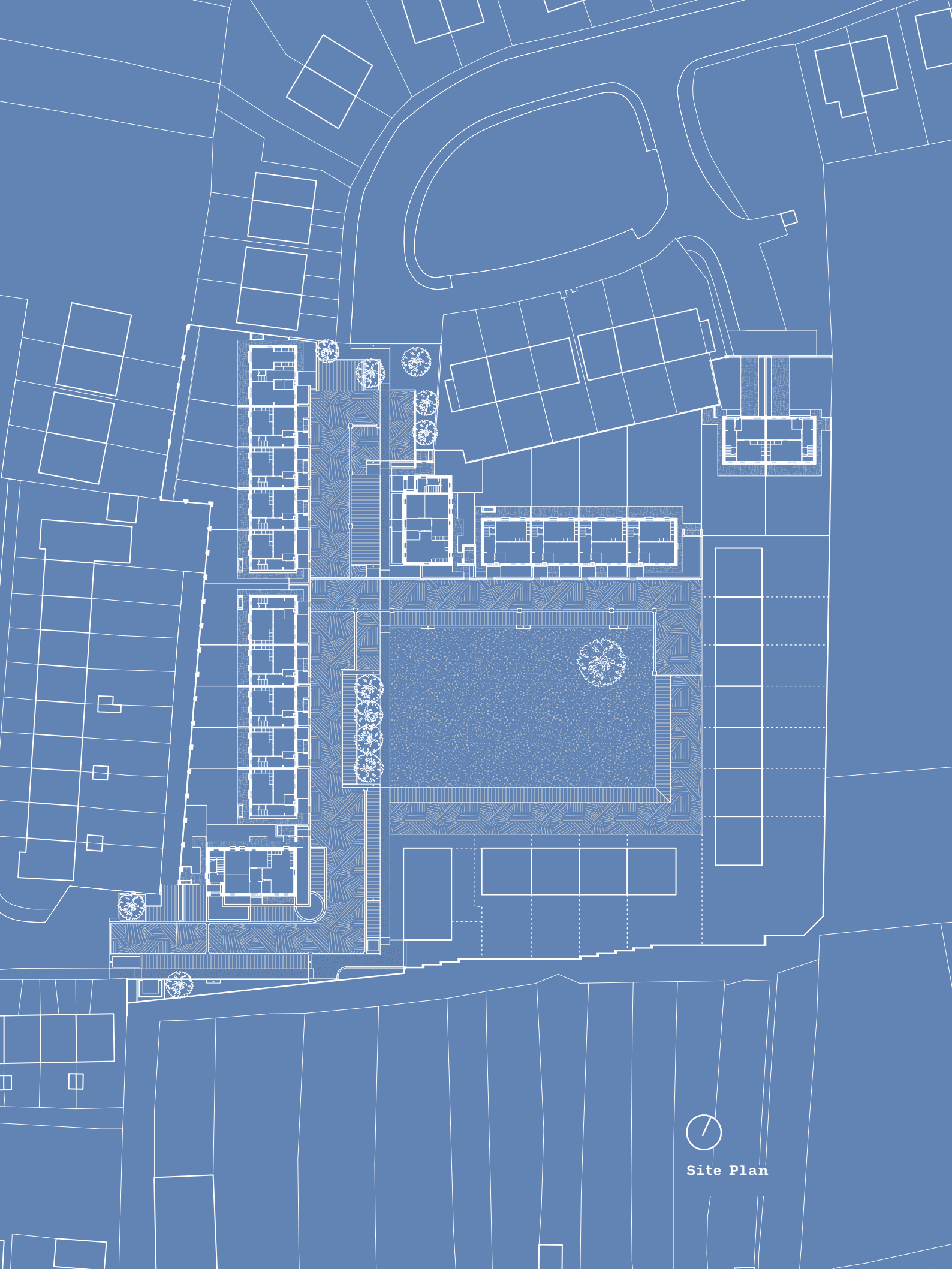




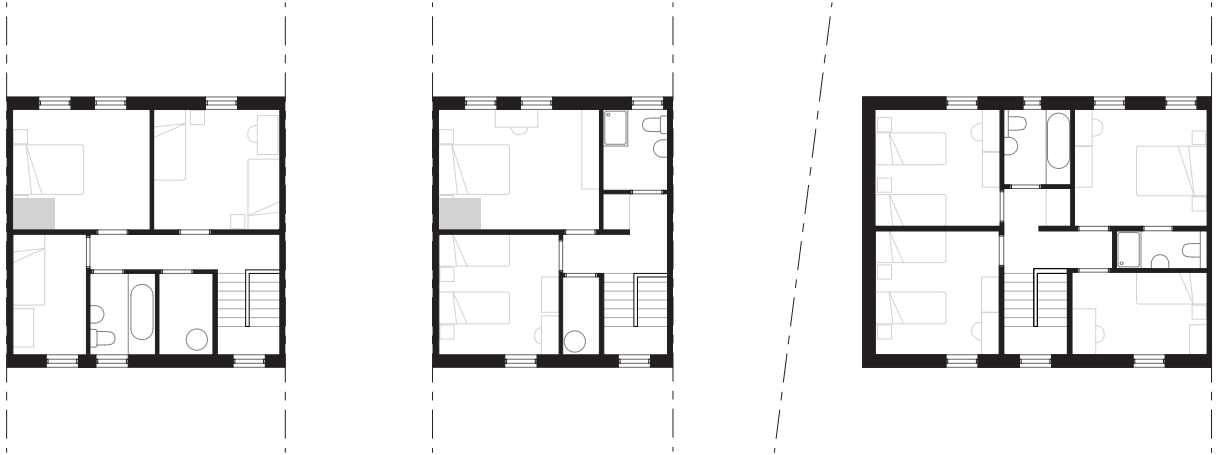
Parking spaces are positioned parallel to the edge of the green, providing sufficient parking for all of the houses and eliminating the need for individual driveways. Michelle describes how the pedestrian-only red footpath that passes between the parking and the green is somewhat superfluous. This she ascribes to the effectiveness of the shared surface, which is the preferred route of residents and visitors when traversing the site on foot, by bike, or by car. In addition to the material treatment of the cul-de-sac, the sitting rooms are located to the front of the houses, providing passive surveillance of the public realm. Michelle describes this as a reassuring feature for children and the community as a whole. These two design considerations mean that primary-school-aged Mia has abundant access to safe space to play in alone and with neighbours. Young sapling trees edge the green, showing promise for a mature landscape to take root over the years and decades to follow. The green, a vast open lawn, feels like a ripe opportunity for future community intervention.

Deriving its name from its medieval roots, Hospital and its environs are home to both prehistoric and medieval sites. Denis Byrne Architects' housing scheme provides a contemporary architectural boost to this historically rich rural village. It is evident from my visit to Hospital that the twenty families who have joined the village community are living in well-designed, high-quality homes: places of comfort, security, and long-term stability. The mix of one-, two- and three-bed homes meets a diverse range of needs, including an accessibly designed apartment for a young family with wheelchair needs. Housing shortages and an ageing population are two key topics in contemporary Irish society. DBA's scheme provides a timely exemplar in how housing providers can proactively consider and equip contemporary Irish housing stock for easy accommodation of changing family needs over time; housing that provides quality in day-to-day life and dignified ageing in place. From the visual connection to Main Street, through to the design of the bin store screens, it is evident that care and attention to detail has been brought to all elements of Extensible Housing. Denis Byrne Architects' design considers and celebrates the elements that make a house a home.

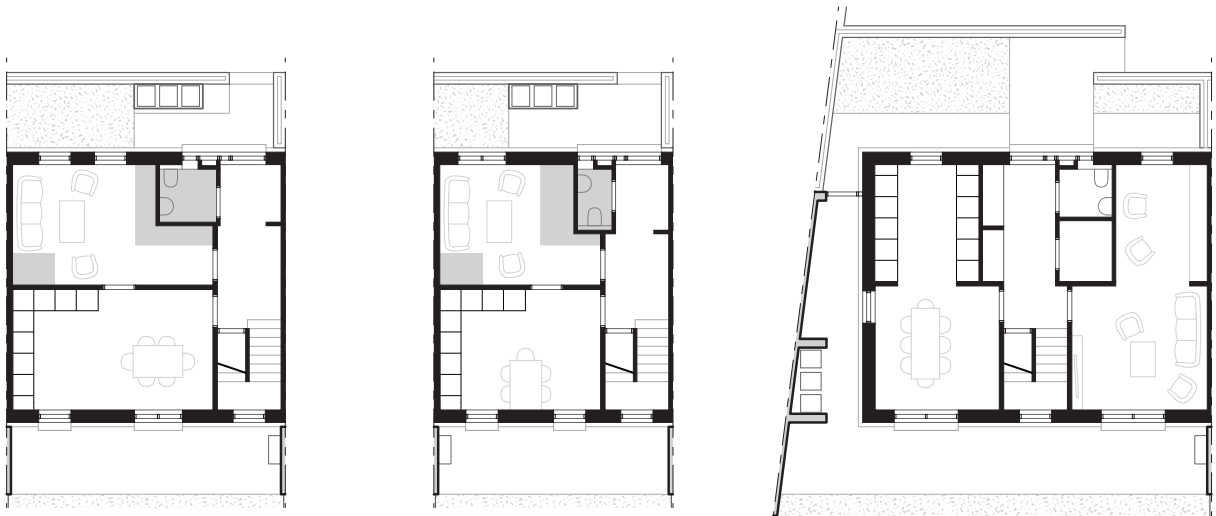
**Review by Ailbhe
Cunningham MRIAI**



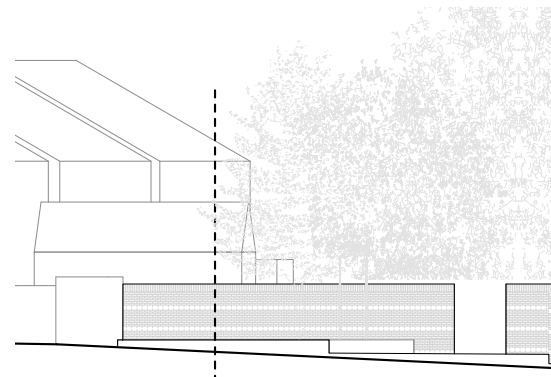
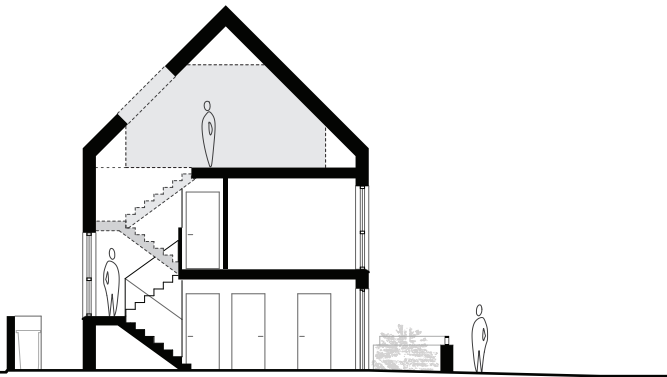
Site Plan



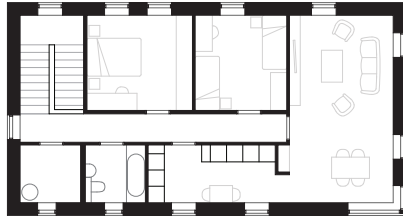
First Floor
Plan Types A - C



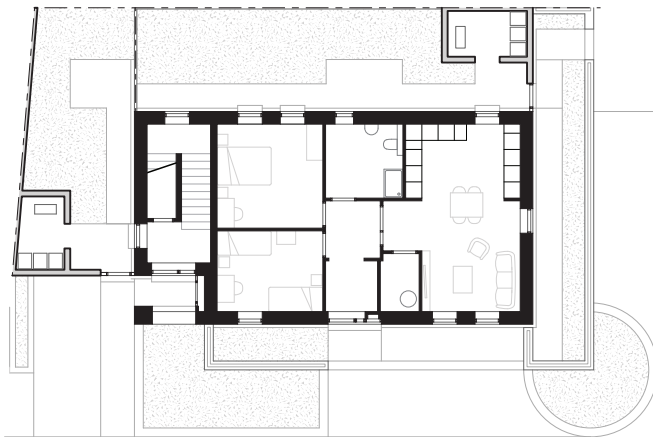
Ground Floor
Plan Types A - C



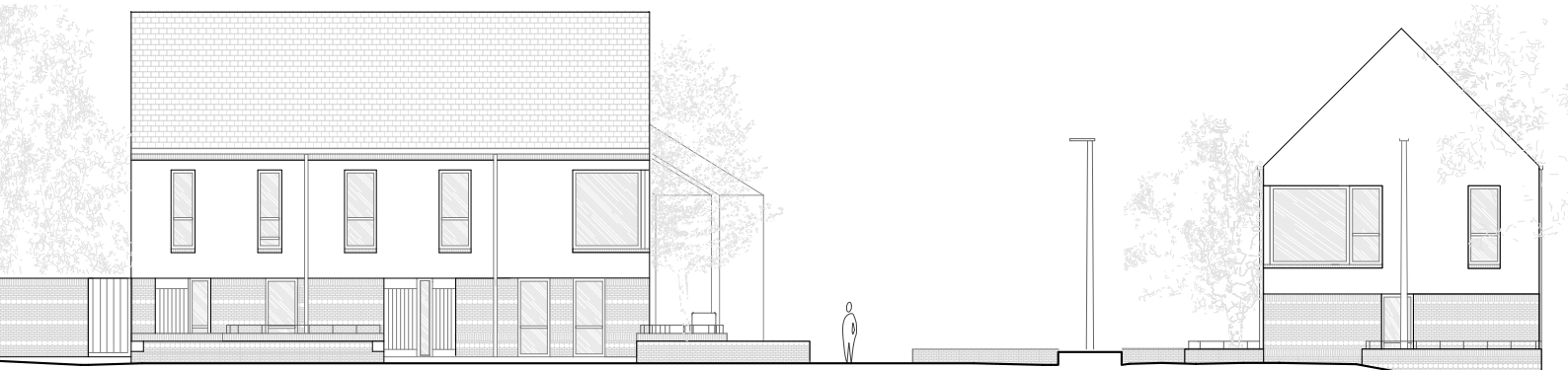
Section



First Floor
Plan Type D



Ground Floor
Plan Type D



Elevation

Extensible Housing

Bank Place and Glenview Drive,
Hospital, Co. Limerick



Items considered private are marked 'undisclosed'. Items not available or applicable to the submitted projects are marked 'n/a'. Information that is not available but is in the process of measurement is marked 'TBD'.

Area

Site Area	10,236m ²
Floor Area	1,153m ²
Plot Coverage	0.12
Plot Ratio	0.23
Unit Density	20 dph

Procurement

Client	Local Authority
Building Type	Housing
Contract	PW-CF5
Value	€4,351,696

Performance

BER	A2
Airtightness	n/a
Biodiversity Net Gain	n/a
Certification	n/a

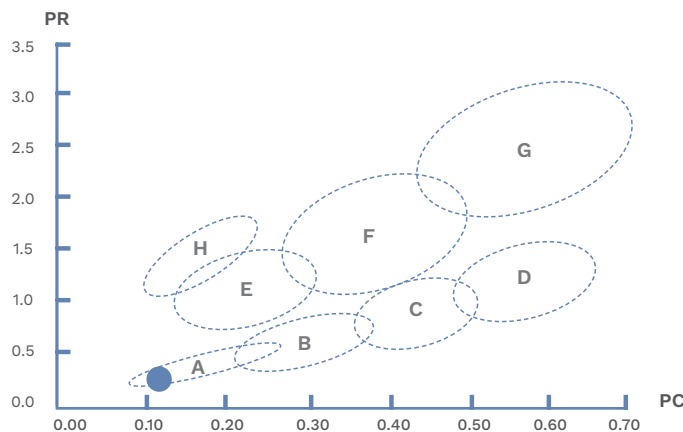
Performance (cont.)

measurement	project value	RIAI 2025 target	RIAI 2030 target
Primary Energy Demand (Part L) ¹	41.35 kWh/m ² /yr	n/a	n/a
Operational Energy (estimated) ²	n/a	< 60 kWh/m ² /yr	< 35 kWh/m ² /yr
Operational Energy (in use) ³	n/a	< 60 kWh/m ² /yr	< 35 kWh/m ² /yr
Embodied Carbon ⁴	n/a	< 800 kgCO ₂ e/m ²	< 625 kgCO ₂ e/m ²
Potable Water (estimated)	n/a	< 95 l/p/day	< 75 l/p/day
Potable Water (In use)	n/a	< 95 l/p/day	< 75 l/p/day
Overheating	n/a	25-28 °C maximum for 1% of occupied hours	
Daylighting	n/a	> 2% av. daylight factor, 0.4 uniformity ratio	
CO ₂ levels	n/a	< 900 ppm	
Total VOCs	n/a	< 0.3 mg/m ³	
Formaldehyde	n/a	< 0.1 mg/m ³	
Radon	n/a	< 50 bq/m ³	

Duration



Density



- (A) low-rise, detached
- (B) low-rise, terrace
- (C) low-rise, hybrid
- (D) low-rise, courtyard block
- (E) mid-rise, terrace
- (F) mid-rise, hybrid
- (G) mid-rise courtyard block
- (H) high-rise terrace

Architects' description

The site at Glenview, Co. Limerick, adjoins existing housing estate developments to the rear of the main street, at the edge of the town of Hospital. The key site-specific issue that informed the design strategy is the integration of the new housing within the town structure. Conceived of as an urban square linked to the town, it is to be delivered in two phases. Phase one envisages the construction of twenty social housing units on two sides of the central space, while phase two will provide a further thirteen units to complete the New Square, modelled on Kings Square, Mitchelstown. A red pathway through the new development visually indicates the pedestrian connection between the adjoining housing estate and the town.

The house type chosen was narrow-span, wide-frontage, with an entrance hall and dogleg staircase running front to rear, country house style. We looked to provide Lifetime Homes in the units by allowing for: a suitable through-floor lift position from ground to first floors; a suitable downstairs temporary bed position; future provision for a longer-term downstairs bedroom and shower room; and a cost-effective future attic conversion.

The house features an in-built extension within the pitched roof volume: an attic space that can be readily adapted by the tenant to provide an inexpensive additional large room, delivered within a social housing budget. To achieve this, the dogleg staircase may be continued up a level through the purpose-built floor joists and trimmers to a roof space with built-in openings for future roof windows.

In addition, the generous hall area can be used as an additional room, as a library, home office, workspace, or spillover storage. It may also accommodate an inner door to provide an outer hall lobby, if required.

The positioning of utility boxes (ESB and data) on the facades of terraced houses can be a challenge. We negotiated over several months with the ESB to allow us put meter boxes behind a service door, adjacent to the front door - something normally prohibited. This is an innovation; the ESB now see this as a pilot project potentially leading to amendments in their domestic guidelines.

Externally, the shared surface was very carefully designed with different textures and colours of in-situ concrete to delineate the through pathway (in red), the designated parking areas, and the shared carriageway. Service access covers (manholes, AJ's, gullies) were controlled within large surface areas to reduce their visual impact. Drainage channels and road gullies were located to operate within the hard landscaping system. Public lighting lampposts are positioned and coordinated with the low brick walls that assist in delineating parking areas.

Construction was completed in December 2023.

Photography

1. Turning the corner.
2. View from Main Street.
3. Covered entrance porch.
4. Front elevation and entrances.
5. Pedestrian link from adjoining housing to main street.
6. Gable end.
7. Terraces enclose the central space.
8. Stair hall.

Photography by Aisling McCoy, John Jordan

Credits

Architect

Denis Byrne Architects

Project Team

Denis Byrne MRIAI
Julien Camuset MRIAI
Kynan Harb
Ola Odunlade

Client

Limerick City and County Council

Landscape

Denis Byrne Architects

Assigned Certifier

Denis Byrne Architects

Window and Door Supplier

NorDan Vinduer

Notes

1. Excludes unregulated loads, calculated using DEAP/NEAP.
2. Includes regulated and unregulated loads, calculated using a performance-based standard/software.
3. Includes regulated and unregulated loads, calculated using metered or utility bill verification.
4. Measured using EN 15978 and Level(s) GWP.

Density diagram and block types based on the Spacemate, developed by M. Berghauser Pont and P. Haupt in *Spacematrix: Space, density and urban form*, Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2010.