



# Apartment Cost Metrics

Design Smarter. Build Leaner. Deliver with Confidence

2025





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# Market Sentiment

Housing completion targets of 50,000 for 2025 will not be achieved.

## Housing Targets

The programme for government commits to delivering 300,000 houses between 2025 and the end of 2030, an average of over 50,000 per annum. The CSO reported that 5,938 new homes were completed in Q1 2025. Planning permissions also remain low, with just 6,890 units approved in Q4 2024. This is further evidence that the rate of completion will be closer to 30,000 units per annum rather than the target of 50,000 units.

## Why Developer Confidence is Falling and How to Rebuild

Confidence in delivering housing is at “rock bottom” with developers and housing bodies increasingly frustrated by the following:

### Why Rent Caps are Deterring Investment

The Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) legislation is seen as a major deterrent to investment. The rent cap is discouraging institutional funding, which is essential for large-scale apartment projects.

### Planning Delays Undermine Viability

The current planning process is slow, inconsistent, and overly bureaucratic. Urgent reform to streamline approvals, reduce delays and, rezoning of more land is required.

## Utility Delays are Stalling Projects

Uisce Éireann (Irish Water) can only connect about 35,000 new homes per year, far below the level needed to meet housing targets. Delays in connecting new developments to utilities (especially water and sewage) are stalling projects, even after planning permission is granted.

## Slow Schemes, Slower Housing

Programmes like the Croí Cónaithe Cities Scheme aim to subsidise apartment construction, but they are too limited in scope and slow to implement. The Affordable Housing Fund is not scaled to meet the ambitious targets set by the government. Thousands of homes are being delayed due to slow government approval processes and bottlenecks in releasing funding.

## Cost Pressures

The total cost of delivering 2 bed apartment units is circa €550,000. The construction cost equates to circa 55% while the soft costs are 45%. This report focuses on the construction costs of apartment developments and how we assist delivering successful schemes that sell, rent and provide a return on investment. Additional expenditure on the construction costs directly impacts the soft costs as illustrated in this document.

## Recommendations to Boost Supply

1. Remove or reform rent caps to make projects financially viable and allow market-based rental pricing.
2. Invest in infrastructure, especially utility connections.
3. Rezone more land for high-density housing.
4. Create a pro-investment culture to attract institutional capital back into the market.
5. Increased access to bridging and development finance.
6. Increase staffing resources and expertise to enable planning authorities to perform their functions efficiently and effectively.
7. Fix the issues with the Affordable Housing Fund and Croí Cónaithe Schemes.
8. Reduce soft costs (e.g., VAT, utility levies) to lower total development costs.



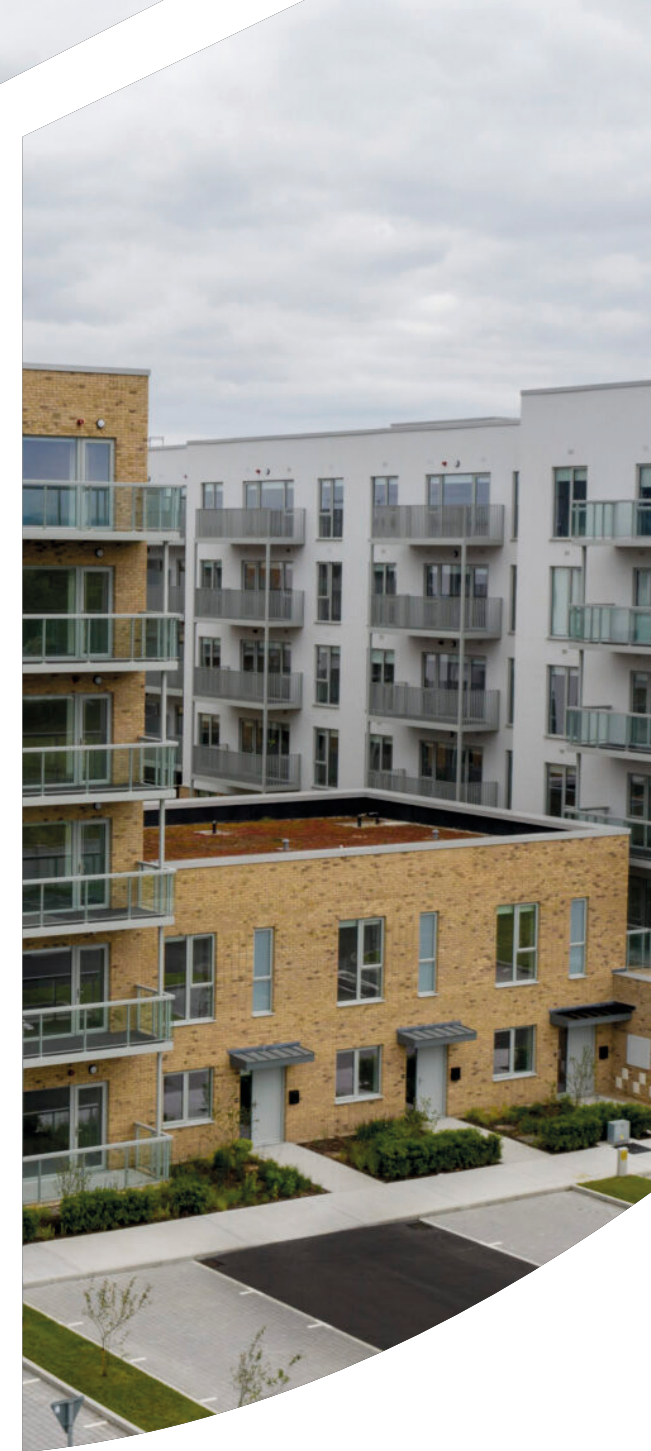
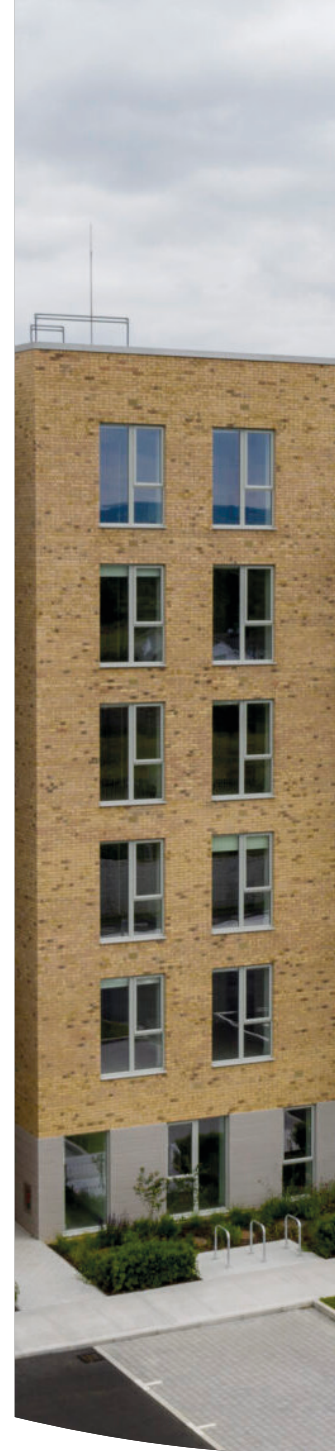
# We Build Smarter, Not Costlier

## Our Proven Formula for Apartment Success

At Buildcost, we are recognised industry leaders in cost managing residential developments. From urban infill to city-centre landmarks, we help developers deliver successful schemes that sell, rent, and provide a return on investment.

You benefit from seamless collaboration across design, delivery, and finance - with everyone aligned around making your project viable and profitable.

Our expertise lies in identifying cost drivers early, setting clear design parameters, and guiding key decisions to ensure value is delivered at every stage.





## This Guide and Real World Projects

Use this guide to spot the most important cost drivers early, make informed design decisions, and maximise your site's potential. These insights are drawn from our experience across a wide range of projects.

**Where insight meets innovation:** You get clarity, confidence and control over your project, powered by insights from thousands of successful apartment builds. We help you get better returns and fewer design headaches.



### Real World Projects, Real Results

We have included a sample of some of our residential developments. These projects demonstrate how our data-led structured approach has helped clients realise their project goals, on time, on budget and to the highest standards.



A background image of a modern apartment interior. It shows a living area with a dark grey sofa, a glass coffee table with a vase of orange flowers, and a dining area with a round table and black chairs. In the background, there is a kitchen with white cabinets and a brick wall. The lighting is bright and natural, coming from a window on the right.

## The Economics that Make or Break your Scheme

“ Delivering cost-effective apartment schemes depends on optimising three key areas: **building economics, design efficiency, and material selection.** ”

The greatest impact on the cost of apartments comes from the following eight key building economic factors:

### Building Form

Stacked floor plates are preferred over designs with set-backs and overhangs. This simplifies the structure and avoids costly cantilevers, transfer slabs, and structural beams. It also minimises detailing, flashings, and weathering issues, leading to lower maintenance costs in the future. **Simple building forms can save up to 20% on the cost of these elements.**

### Floor-to-Wall Ratios

A simple building form helps achieve an efficient floor-to-wall ratio. **Aim for a ratio of 0.6 or better, where the envelope area is no greater than 0.6m<sup>2</sup> for every 1m<sup>2</sup> of floor area.** The envelope is one of the largest cost elements in any apartment development.

### Standardisation

Design units with repetition in mind. Standardised designs improve buildability and reduce costs. This also supports modern methods of construction, and off-site production of bathroom pods, kitchens etc. **Savings of between €1,500 - €2,000 per unit can be achieved in this way.**

### Storey Heights

Storey heights under 3.1m are optimal. **Each additional 100mm in storey height adds circa 3%-4%, in relation to structure, fire, envelope, and preliminary costs.**



# The Economics that Make or Break your Scheme (continued)

## Net-to-Gross Efficiency

Reducing circulation areas improves the net-to-gross ratio. Aim for a net-to-gross of approximately 80%. This will reduce the overall building footprint.

## Minimum Sizes

Unit sizes should be designed in accordance with relevant guidelines. Additional floor space beyond the minimum increases the cost of each unit.

## Mix of Units

Studios and 1-bed units cost less per unit but more per m<sup>2</sup> compared to 2-bed and 3-bed units. Balancing the mix is important for efficiency and market appeal.

## Units per Core

Maximise the number of apartments served by each core. Fewer cores result in lower costs per unit.

An additional **5%** of floor area can add **€7,000** per unit to the overall construction costs.





# What Really Drives Apartment Costs

## Design Decisions that Save Millions

Once the building economics have been established, consider the following design elements:



### Substructures

Choose the right foundations early and avoid costly surprises later - we help you weigh up whether strip, raft or piled solutions are the most economic option for your site.



### Structure

Evaluate systems such as blockwork, in-situ concrete, precast, ICF, SFS, or steel.



### Balconies

Target minimum allowable sizes. Avoid additional doors or complex balcony structures. Consider metal balconies in lieu of recessed balconies.



### Smarter Car Parking, Smaller Costs

On sites well-served by public transport, aim for a lower parking ratio (e.g. 0.5 spaces per unit). Avoid basement parking where possible. Consider surface or undercroft spaces.



### Façade Design

Limit the extent of glazing where possible. Balance daylighting needs with cost-efficiency. Minimise deep reveals, bands, or decorative features.



### Attenuation Strategy

Assess the need for tanks, green roofs, blue roofs, and rainwater harvesting.



# Material Choices that Cut Costs, Not Quality

When it comes to materials, careful selection is key to controlling costs



## Façade Materials

Use a minimal palette of materials. Reduce expensive materials like stone and metal cladding.

**Solid Walls:** Render, Brick.

**Glazing:** uPVC, aluminium, aluclad, double/triple glazed.

## Asset Class

The intended use, whether 'build-to-sell', 'build-to-rent' or 'social and affordable' shapes everything from layout efficiency to finishes and durability. Aligning specification to asset class early avoids costly redesigns and ensures the development meets market expectations and investor requirements.



## Quality of Finishes

Ensure that the internal apartment finishes are in line with market expectations for your target demographic, avoiding unnecessary expenditure.

## Siteworks

Be strategic with the hard and soft landscaping choices. Aim for cost-effective materials for hard landscaping. Introducing soft landscaping can add value without excessive costs.

# Your Apartment Cost Efficient Design Metrics

Below are some of the key apartment cost drivers and design metrics that determine a cost-effective development.

Efficient designs =  
less waste, lower  
maintenance,  
and stronger ESG  
credentials.

## Building Design Metrics

Item	Target Metric	Comments
Building Form	<b>Stacked</b>	Regular, stacked floor-plates reduce structural complexity and cost.
Floor-to-Wall Ratio	<b>≤ 0.60 : 1</b>	Efficient forms minimise envelope area relative to floor area.
Storey Heights	<b>≤ 3.1m</b>	Optimal for structural, M&E, and façade cost efficiency.
Overall Building Heights	<b>≤ 20 m</b>	Avoids higher fire engineering and structural requirements.
Net-to-Gross Efficiency	<b>80%</b>	Aim for ≥80% net area to maximise revenue-generating space.

## Minimum Apartment Floor Areas

Unit Type	Suitability	Size
Studio Apartment	1 Person	<b>37 m<sup>2</sup></b>
1 Bedroom Apartment	2 Persons	<b>45 m<sup>2</sup></b>
2 Bedroom Apartment	4 Persons	<b>73 m<sup>2</sup></b>
3 Bedroom Apartment	5 Persons	<b>90 m<sup>2</sup></b>

*These floor areas need to be considered in conjunction with the entire guidelines in the design standards published by the department of housing.*

## Core Efficiency

Item	Target	Comments
Units per Core	<b>8 - 12 Units</b>	Fewer cores serving more units improves build efficiency.

## Balcony Guidelines

Unit Type	Target Size
Studio	<b>4 m<sup>2</sup></b>
1 Bed	<b>5 m<sup>2</sup></b>
2 Bed	<b>6 - 7 m<sup>2</sup></b>
3 Bed	<b>9 m<sup>2</sup></b>

## Façade Breakdown

Component	Target %	Notes
Solid Elements	<b>65%</b>	Most economical finish: render.
- Brick	<b>25%</b>	Use strategically for visual impact.
- Render	<b>35%</b>	Cost-effective, clean finish.
- Cladding	<b>5%</b>	Use selectively to reduce cost (possibly omit).
Glazing	<b>35%</b>	Includes all window and door glazing. Optimal height: 2.25m.

## Parking Efficiency

Type	Efficiency Ratio	Metric
Undercroft	<b>&lt; 25 m<sup>2</sup></b>	1 space per 25 m <sup>2</sup> of parking area
Basement	<b>&lt; 35 m<sup>2</sup></b>	1 space per 35 m <sup>2</sup> of parking area

Basement  
parking can add  
up to **€20,000**  
per space.



# The true cost of a 2-bed apartment Explored

Case Study of a standard 2-bed suburban apartment with a gross floor area of 91 sq.m. The total development costs are presented below.

Source: Total Development Cost Study September 2024 prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Construction Costs	€ Costs	€ / sqm	%
Substructure	€8,717	€96	1.63%
Structure	€52,243	€574	9.76%
Internal Sub-division	€18,505	€203	3.46%
External Enclosure	€34,620	€380	6.47%
Finishes & Fittings	€55,143	€606	10.30%
Services	€52,131	€573	9.74%
Preliminaries	€36,524	€401	6.82%
<b>Sub-total (A)</b>	<b>€257,883</b>	<b>€2,834</b>	<b>48.18%</b>
Basement car parking	€20,893	€230	3.90%
Site development works	€22,020	€242	4.11%
<b>Sub-total (B)</b>	<b>€42,913</b>	<b>€472</b>	<b>8.02%</b>
Soft Costs	€ Costs	€ / sqm	%
Utility Levies (ESB, Uisce Éireann, Planning fees, BER Certificate, DAC, Fire, Latent Defects Insurance)	€8,938	€98	1.67%
<b>Sub-total (C)</b>	<b>€8,938</b>	<b>€98</b>	<b>1.67%</b>
Professional fees	€27,072	€297	5.06%
<b>Sub-total (D)</b>	<b>€27,072</b>	<b>€297</b>	<b>5.06%</b>
Land cost (including stamp duty and acquisition fees)	€45,790	€503	8.56%
Sales, Marketing & Legals	€8,000	€88	1.49%
<b>Sub-total (E)</b>	<b>€53,790</b>	<b>€591</b>	<b>10.05%</b>
Finance costs	€40,782	€448	7.62%
<b>Sub-total (F)</b>	<b>€40,782</b>	<b>€448</b>	<b>7.62%</b>
Developer Risk / Margin	€48,587	€534	9.08%
VAT	€55,233	€607	10.32%
<b>Sub-total (G)</b>	<b>€103,820</b>	<b>€1,141</b>	<b>19.40%</b>
<b>Total Development Costs (excluding Dev. Contributions)</b>	<b>€535,198</b>	<b>€5,881</b>	<b>100%</b>
Development contributions (including finance)	€14,592	€160	
<b>Total Development Costs</b>	<b>€549,790</b>	<b>€6,042</b>	

Just 1 extra M<sup>2</sup> beyond guidelines = +€2,000 per unit



## How small design tweaks add big costs

We set out below an example of building economics and the compound impact of a few changes. This example considers 3 items:

Construction Costs	Qty	Unit	Rate	Additional €/unit
Floor area increase by 5%	4.55	m <sup>2</sup>	1,500	6,825
Floor to wall ratio efficiency decreased from 0.6 to 0.7	16.7	%	34,620	5,770
Additional balcony area of 1.5m <sup>2</sup> per unit	1.5	m <sup>2</sup>	1,500	2,250
				<b>14,845</b>
<b>*Soft Costs</b>				
Developer risk / margin	10	%	14,845	1,485
VAT	13.5	%	16,330	2,205
Finance costs	7.4	%	18,535	1,372
				<b>5,062</b>
<b>Additional Cost of Small Design Inefficiencies Per Unit</b>				<b>19,907</b>

### Notes

\* For the purpose of this example, our soft costs above assume no changes to utility levies, professional fees, land costs, sales, marketing, and legal fees, and development contributions.

As illustrated above, small changes compounded can add significant costs to each unit.

All figures are based on the Total Development Cost Study September 2024.



# What Success Looks Like Our Recent Projects





# Turning Insights into Smart Design

From Feasibility to Final Account -  
We're With You Every Step

We collaborate with clients and design teams from concept through to delivery. We challenge cost drivers, guide design decisions, and align budgets with project goals. By focusing investment where it matters most, we ensure developments are viable, high-quality, and market-ready.

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to tender.

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## The Buildcost Team



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#### Dublin Office

---

13 Merrion Square North,  
Dublin 2.  
D02 HW89

#### Donegal Office

---

Unit 4D, Riverside Office Park,  
Neil T Blaney Road,  
Letterkenny,  
Co Donegal.  
F92 R928

#### Contact

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Tel. +353 (0)1 685 7219  
Email. [info@buildcost.ie](mailto:info@buildcost.ie)  
[www.buildcost.ie](http://www.buildcost.ie)