#### **Company Research Note**

27 February 2024

Ticker	365550 KS/
	365550 KS
GICS Sector	
GICS Sector	Real Estate
	Industrial REITs
Rating	Not Rated
Target Price	N/A
Current Price	3905
Upside/(downside)	N/A
MarketCap (US\$m)	625
Total Shares (m)	213



#### Ke Yan, CFA Equity Analyst yan.ke@icaasia.com

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research@icaasia.com

## **ESR Kendall Square REIT**

# Pure-play Korean logistics REIT, backed by renowned Sponsor

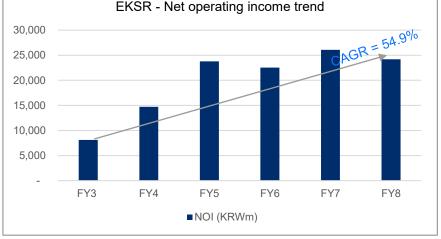
#### **Investment thesis**

1) Unique exposure to the logistic asset sector in South Korea with visible growth. ESR Kendall Square REIT is the only listed REIT in Korea providing a pure-play exposure to logistics. The REIT has been pursuing an active strategy of growing its portfolio via acquiring new assets, expanding its portfolio from an initial 10 assets at IPO in December 2020 to 18 modern logistics parks, or a 19% CAGR in terms of GFA. Thanks to the growth of AUM, coupled with positive rental reversions and in-built rental escalations, its net operating income has increased by 199% from 6 months ending in May 2021 to November 2023. Sponsored by Hong Kong-listed ESR Group, the REIT also benefits from a visible pipeline of assets for potential acquisition, and the ability to fill vacancies. The company aims to more than triple its AUM to KRW 10tn by 2030.

2) Track record of asset recycling and expansion. Drawing on its experience after successfully implementing its first capital recycling cycle in 2023, ESKR will look to continually recycle its mid-sized assets which it then aims to top up immediately with new acquisitions. With a proven ability to fill vacancies, ESKR will continue to make on-the-market purchases for properties below full occupancies and then leverage its network to fill the vacancies.

3) Attractive valuation. ESKR is trading at a wide discount to its regional logistics peers. Relative to its Singapore-listed peers, it is trading 25-30% cheaper on PBR multiples, while its TTM dividend yield was towards the wider end of the peer group. The Japan-listed REITs similarly trade at a wider PBR multiple, while offered at a tighter 4.2-4.5% yield. The management has guided to pay KRW274/share of dividends for FY24. At its current share price, it represents an FY24 yield of 7.02%, which was wider than its regional and domestically listed REIT counterparts.

#### EKSR's NOI grew by 54.9% CAGR over the past two and a half years



Source: Company report (FY for the six-month period ending May/Nov), DZT Research

#### **Company background**

ESR Kendall Square REIT (ESKR) is a pure-play warehousing and logistics Korean REIT. The REIT was incorporated in September 2020 and listed on the KOSPI exchange in December 2020. Having listed with a portfolio of 10 assets, the REIT had grown its portfolio to owning and managing 18 assets, as of December 2023.

These 18 assets had a total asset under management (AUM) of KRW2.78tn (US\$2.09bn) and occupied a gross floor area (GFA) of 1.16m sqm.

#### **Asset overview**

Predominantly located in the Greater Seoul Area and Greater Busan Area, ESKR's portfolio is concentrated around transportation hubs in the Seoul metropolitan area. Located near highways, several of its assets surround the Gyeongbu Expressway, which is the second oldest and most heavily traveled expressway connecting Seoul to Suwon, Daejeon, Gumi, Daegu, Gyeongju, Ulsan and Busan.

#### Table: Portfolio Overview

#	Asset	GFA (sqm)	Completion date	Occupancy rate (%)	Acquisition cost (KRWbn)
1	Goyang LP	199,678	Jan-19	100%	478
2	Anseong LP 2	154,990	Jun-20	100%	325
3	Anseong LP 1	95,265	Feb-20	100%	160
4	Icheon LP 5	84,545	Feb-20	100%	198
5	Yongin LP 1	70,028	Nov-17	100%	129
6	Anseong LP 3	63,471	Apr-21	100%	127
7	Icheon LP 6	62,195	Jan-23	100%	114
8	Bucheon Cold LP	58,264	Jul-19	100%	197
9	REF Icheon LP 4	49,616	Jun-18	100%	81
10	Icheon LP 7	46,041	Apr-23	100%	127
11	REF Pyeongtaek LP	43,212	Aug-12	100%	84
12	REF Yongin LP 2	43,176	Jan-17	100%	76
13	REF Yongin LP 3	43,045	Jun-20	100%	92
14	Gimhae LP 2	39,941	Dec-19	100%	71
15	Icheon LP 2	33,365	Apr-18	100%	49
16	Anseong LP 4	27,040	Nov-21	100%	59
17	Gimhae LP 1	25,733	Dec-00	100%	46
18	Icheon LP 3	18,421	Dec-18	100%	29
		1,158,026			2,446

Source: Company report, DZT Research

Currently, the largest asset in ESKR's portfolio is Goyang LP (Asset #1 in the table above), which occupies 60,403 pyeong (~199,678 sqm), a sevenfloor logistics park located in Goyang, Gyeonggi Province. As per the REIT, the site is the largest logistics hub in the Gangbuk area, accessible by the Seoul Outer Circular Expressway, Gangbyeon Expressway, and Incheon International Airport Expressway. Given its proximity to the center of Seoul city, the Goyang LP asset, together with Bucheon Cold LP (Asset #8), are commonly referred to as "Prime Core Assets" in the Korean Logistics market. The two assets had completed construction in January and July 2019 respectively and were part of the initial portfolio owned by ESKR at IPO.



ESKR's second-largest asset is Anseong LP 2 (Asset #2), which occupies 46,643 pyeong (~154,990 square metres), and is located in Wongokmyeon, Anseong. With a total of five floors, the asset is located just 2km away from West Anseong IC and is easily accessible to the Pyeongtaek-Jecheon Expressway and Gyeongbu Expressway.

Across the entire portfolio, ESKR had an overall occupancy rate of 100% as of December 2023. The bulk of its assets are relatively new, having completed construction within the past five years, and are generally ramp-up warehouses, spread over multiple floors.

#### **Expansion since listing**

Starting with an initial portfolio of 10 assets at the time of its listing in December 2020, ESKR has been active in asset acquisitions/disposals, having expanded its portfolio to 18 logistics assets. ESKR's AUM has risen by 99% from KRW1.4tn at IPO to KRW2.78tn as of December 2023.



#### Chart: Portfolio size between IPO till 2023

Source: Company report, DZT Research

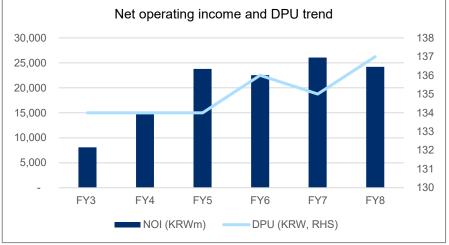
In a bid to fund its growing portfolio, ESKR had undertaken a US\$400m follow-on in December 2021, which together with bank borrowings, was used to fund its acquisition of eight assets in 2021, growing its asset size by 70% in the year. Owing to the newfound contributions, net operating income (NOI) for the REIT had doubled between FY3-4 (full-year period ending Nov 2021) to FY5-6 (full-year period ending Nov 2022). However, limited by Korean exchange regulations, the equity raise had resulted in the REIT being overfunded and a dilution on its share base, thus distributions per unit had been flat in the year.

That being said, gross revenue and net operating income have been rising consistently since FY3 (six-month period ending May 2021). Together with a growing asset base, ESKR also has an unblemished dividend payout record, consistently paying around KRW134-137/ share in each six-month period as well. Paying out 90% of its distributable income, ESKR made KRW135/share and KRW137/share dividend payments in FY7 and FY8 respectively (six-month periods ending May/Nov 2023). It is expected to

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make a dividend payment of KRW274/share in 2024 (FY9 and FY10 combined).

Most recently in mid-2023, ESKR also completed its first capital recycling cycle, selling Icheon Logistics Park 1 in June 2023. The asset was sold for KRW81bn, at a 4.02% capitalization rate, with a 19% holding period IRR over a 2.5-year investment horizon. Proceeds from the asset sale were then used to partially fund the acquisition of Icheon Logistics Park 6 (Asset #7) and Icheon Logistics Park 7 (Asset #10) for KRW120bn combined, at a capitalization rate of 5.0% and 5.1% respectively. The two assets are located along the highway zone in the Icheon province, and their first full-year consolidation is likely to add approximately KRW6bn to 2024 topline, 5-6% of 2023's sales.



#### Chart: Net operating income and DPU trend

Source: Company report (FY for the six-month period ending May/Nov, FY8 ends in Nov 2023), DZT Research

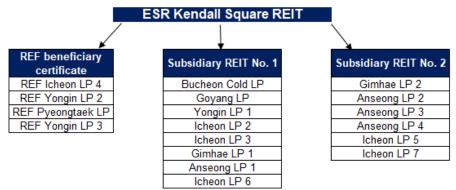
#### **REIT Structure**

ESKR manages its portfolio under three wholly owned subsidiaries namely, Subsidiary REIT No. 1, Subsidiary REIT No. 2, and the REF beneficiary certificate, which collectively house its 18 logistics assets. As of January 2024, REIT No. 1, REIT No.2, and the REF beneficiary certificate held eight, six, and four assets, respectively. With the exception of the newlyacquired Icheon LP 6 and Icheon LP 7, Subsidiary REIT No. 1 and Subsidiary REIT No. 2 houses the assets held by ESKR at IPO and post its 2021 follow-on offering, respectively.

The REIT is structured as such so that each subsidiary can be used to collateralize bank borrowings with limited recourse on the other assets in the other subsidiaries. Moving forward, the REIT will continue adding assets to its existing two REIT subsidiaries and isn't opposed to setting up a new subsidiary should it acquire a large group of assets at one go.



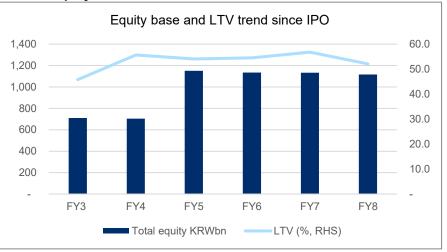
#### **Table: REIT Structure**



Source: Company report, DZT Research

#### Balance sheet & future pipeline

Since May 2021, the first reporting period after ESKR listed in December 2020, ESKR's total assets have doubled, with its equity base growing by 59.5%. Whilst its loan-to-value ratio (asset backed loan/appraisal value of its assets) has been inching upwards as its debt liabilities grew, at 52.1% as of December 2023, it remains comfortably below the regulatory limit of 66%. The debt headroom would provide some capital buffer, allowing ESKR to continue pursuing its active acquisition strategy with potentially limited dilution for future equity investors.



#### Chart: Equity base and LTV trend since IPO

Source: Company report (FY for the six-month period ending May/Nov), DZT Research

Aside from tapping capital markets, ESKR also plans to continually recycle its mid-sized assets in the 40,000 sqm GFA range, worth around KRW100-110bn, where the transaction market is generally more liquid. As per the REIT, it could look to dispose of four to five assets in the near-medium term. While the disposals could result in an approximate 16.7% loss in topline, ESKR aims to top it up immediately with new acquisitions.

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For future acquisitions, ESKR also seeks to further implement its "High Cap-rate Acquisition & Low-cap rate Disposition" strategy, as it has done when it completed its first capital recycling exercise in 2023. One reason for its success is that while average vacancies have stood at 10% for logistics assets located around Seoul's metropolitan area, 20% including cold storage as per Colliers, ESKR has been able to consistently report maximum occupancies for the bulk of its assets. This is due to the management's ability to fill vacancies which is partly attributed to the reputation of its sponsor as well. Owing to this, ESKR has been and will likely continue to make on-the-market purchases for properties below full occupancies and then use its network to fill the vacancies.

Over the longer term, ESKR expects to grow its AUM from the current KRW2.78tn to KRW10tn by 2030, representing a 20% CAGR.

For undertaking future acquisitions, ESKR also aims to further add newage modern warehouses in the 6% capitalization rate range for growing its portfolio. This rate is set factoring in the associated borrowing costs in the domestic market. Owing to this requirement, while ESKR's sponsor has a rich pipeline of assets, occupying approximately 4m GFA of leasable area, it has guided that it doesn't necessarily need to acquire from its sponsor, but rather to make on-the-market purchases from singlewarehouse/logistics operators.

Post the 2023 domestic rate hikes, ESKR could also begin raising capital again as interest rates stabilize in 2024, to continue fuelling its growth strategy. With exposure to foreign capital, as half of the REIT is owned by foreign institutions, ESKR isn't opposed to looking to diversify and look overseas for asset acquisitions.

#### Industry outlook

As per CBRE, net absorption for Greater Seoul Grade A logistics assets domestically has been averaging at around 2m sqm annually over 2019-2022, before it peaked at 3.2m sqm in 2023. This had been driven by growth in major domestic 3PLs couriers, and e-commerce activity where demand had shot up over the pandemic. Moving forward, demand is likely to come from new e-commerce players with a focus on lower-priced products such as Daiso and CJ Olive Young. Foreign e-commerce companies including AliExpress, Temu, and new Chinese e-commerce players are expected to contribute to logistics demands within South Korea over the longer term as well.

Despite the increase in demand for logistics assets fuelled by the pandemic, annual supply volumes for logistics assets have been tracking closely to period-to-period net absorptions. In 2023, a surge in supply volumes also resulted in overall logistics asset vacancies domestically rising 9% y-o-y to 19% by 2023. The vacancy rate is expected to rise to 25% in 2024 owing to a large supply addition in the Anseong region. With a track record of recording maximum/close to maximum capacities, ESKR seems to have outperformed the overall market for domestic logistics assets on this front.

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While the Anseong region will experience a surge in supply for logistics assets, as per various industry reports, the entire South Korean logistics market is expected to observe some tightness in supply over the medium term, beginning in 2024. This is owed to changes to the domestic project financing (PF) borrowing market and subsequent delays affecting the construction industry. As per the same CBRE report, after registering the strongest growth in investment volumes over 2023, the market for domestic logistics assets will also be more selective in undertaking transactions over 2024 which is expected to push average yields up. Yields are determined by location, floor area ratio, occupancy rates, and rental growth potential.

With a portfolio of new-age warehouses/logistics assets located around the prime Seoul metropolitan area, ESKR is a likely beneficiary from this shifting trend as its assets' value rises. With 17% of leases expiring in 2025, combined with a tight supply market for logistics assets, ESKR could likely benefit from positive rental reversions which would boost its rental income.

#### Sponsor and notable investors

ESKR's shareholding structure is evenly split between foreign and domestic institutions, which held approximately 46% and 42% ownership stakes, respectively.

The REIT sponsor is ESR Kendall Square, which was ultimately owned by the Hong Kong-listed ESR Group, an established Asia-centric real estate developer. ESR Group has a market value of US\$5.6 billion and a focus on logistics properties including warehouses and distribution centres. Aside from a rich pipeline of sponsor assets which could potentially be future acquisition targets, one advantage of an established sponsor is better borrowing terms for funding future liquidity needs. ESR Kendall Square, the Sponsor, held a 10.26% ownership interest in ESKR (as of December 2023).

The largest external investor was the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB) which held a 24.85% ownership stake in ESKR as of November 2023. CPPIB had been a cornerstone investor when the REIT was listed and has also added to its stake on a pro-rata basis when ESKR undertook a follow-on offering to raise US\$400m in December 2021. Aside from being an investor in the REIT, CPPIB also cooperates with the REIT sponsor, ESR Group, and is also an investor in the latter's development and income funds.

Aside from the CPPIB, other notable domestic and foreign financial institutions invested include IGIS Asset Management, Mirae Asset Management, and BlackRock.

#### Table: Notable institutional investors

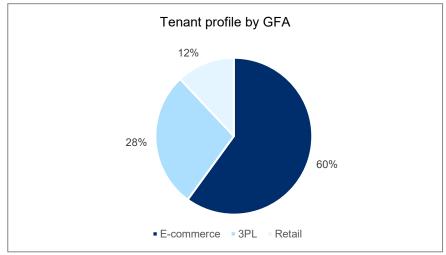
Institution	Stake (%)
ESR Kendall Square/ESR Group	10.26%
Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB)	24.85%
IGIS AM	8.11%
Mirae AM	6.02%
BlackRock	3.78%

Source: Company report, Bloomberg, DZT Research

#### Tenant and leasing profile

ESKR has a diversified tenant profile stemming from the e-commerce, third-party logistics (3PL), and retail segments. With an 81.8% exposure towards e-commerce and 3PLs, the REIT is able to indirectly benefit from a growing demand for e-commerce and supply chain services domestically.

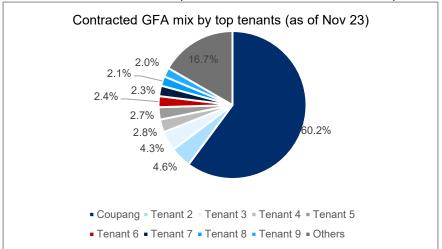
#### Chart: ESKR's tenant profile by GFA



Source: Company report, DZT Research

ESKR's largest tenant is Coupang, which took up 60.2% of the REIT's contracted GFA, contributing a similar ratio to rental income, over FY8 (sixmonth period ending Nov 2023). Coupang, frequently touted as the Amazon of South Korea and listed in the US, is the largest online marketplace in South Korea. Aside from offering a product marketplace with its owned-inventory selection and merchant-sourced SKUs, the firm also provided grocery offerings, logistics food delivery, and digital financial services. Coupang has been a client of ESKR's since the latter's IPO and currently has a remaining lease term of 7-10 years. While the concentration from a singular tenant is high, Coupang recently broke even in 2H22 which minimizes its operational risk. According to the company, Coupang has high switching costs, were it to decide to switch to another logistics provider, given the high setup capital expenditure when locating into a new logistics space, thus diminishing the threat that ESKR could lose its anchor tenant.

Aside from Coupang, the rest of its tenant base is well diversified with the top second to ninth tenants occupying 23.1% of ESKR's contracted GFA combined. These tenants generally have a lease term of 1-3 years, which allows ESKR to capitalize on prevailing market rental rates.



#### Chart: Tenant contribution (based on Nov 23 contracted GFA)

Source: Company report, DZT Research

All of the REIT's leases have an in-built rental escalation rate of 2% fixed per annum (applies to Coupang also), which is in line with South Korea's ten-year inflation record (excluding COVID-19 period), as per the World Bank. In addition, ESKR is able to get an additional reversion boost at the time of lease renewal. In 2023 alone, 20% of ESKR's total leasable area contracts had been fully renewed, with an +18% rental reversion.

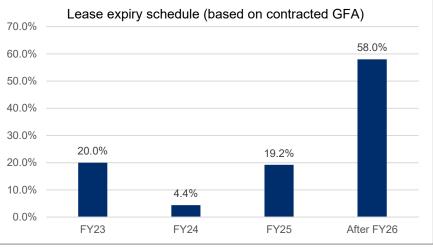


Chart: Lease expiry schedule (based on contracted GFA)

Source: Company report (FY for the one-year period ending Nov), DZT Research

As of Dec 23, ESKR had an average lease expiry of 3.3 years, weighted by contracted GFA with minimal expiries in 2024 (4.4%). In 2025, 17% of leases will come off expiry, based on contracted GFA. ESKR generally

begins renewal negotiations six to eight months prior to lease expiry and it expects positive rent reversions in 2025 owing to a lack of new supply in the domestic logistics market. As per JLL, one of the reasons for supply tightness in the medium/long term is attributed to funding difficulties for other property developers, causing developers to miss their target completion dates.

#### Valuation appears attractive

While there are 23 REITs listed domestically, ESKR is the only pure-play logistics REIT in Korea. Comparing ESKR to its regional logistics peers instead, the REIT appears to be trading at a wide discount to the group.

Relative to its Singapore-listed logistics peer group, ESKR is trading 25-30% cheaper on PBR multiples, while its TTM dividend yield was towards the wider end of the peer group. Within this peer set, the only peers that offered a wider forward yield were ESR-LOGOS REIT and AIMS APAC REIT.

The Japan-listed REITs trade at a wider PBR multiple, averaging around 1.29x one/two-year forward PBRs, while offered at a tighter 4.3-4.5% yield. That being said, on the market capitalization and AUM fronts, they were a lot larger than ESKR, with the smallest peer, Daiwa House REIT, trading with a market capitalization 6x larger.

Domestically, while ESKR trades in line with Lotte REIT, the former's trailing yield at 7% had been wider than the latter's 6% yield. Shinhan Alpha REIT, a predominant office and commercial REIT, trades 16-29% above its own book value on the one/two-year forward PBR fronts.

Management has guided for a KRW274/share payout in 2024, implying a 7.02% dividend yield at the current share price.

#### **Appendix 1 - Valuation Comparison**

Company name	BBG Ticker	Price	МСар	Dividend yield		P/B		ROE	
			(US\$m)	23A	24E	23A	24E	24E	
ESR Kendall Square REIT Co Ltd	365550 KS	3,905	625	7.02	7.02	0.73	0.76	3.23	
Similar-sized domestic REITs (	avg)			5.73	8.61	0.94	0.99	6.53	
LOTTE Reit Co Ltd	330590 KS	3,170	579	5.99	5.99	0.73	0.75	2.20	
Shinhan Alpha REIT Co Ltd	293940 KS	6,880	456	5.47	11.24	1.15	1.22	10.85	
SG-listed logistics peers (avg)				7.06	6.89	1.01	1.01	6.05	
Mapletree Logistics Trust	MLT SP	1.49	5,533	5.43	5.91	1.07	1.02	4.88	
Mapletree Industrial Trust	MINT SP	2.31	4,895	5.38	5.67	1.18	1.25	7.15	
Frasers Logistics & Commercial	FLT SP	1.05	2,932	7.46	6.67	0.90	0.91	5.07	
ESR-LOGOS REIT	EREIT SP	0.31	1,748	9.60	8.52	0.95	0.95	4.93	
AIMS APAC REIT	AAREIT SP	1.26	760	7.43	7.70	0.94	0.92	8.23	
JP-listed logistics peers (avg)				4.35	4.47	1.26	1.26	5.09	
Nippon Prologis REIT Inc	3283 JP	256,400	4,846	3.97	3.94	1.42	1.43	5.11	
GLP J-Reit	3281 JP	120,200	3,942	4.50	4.87	1.25	1.27	5.90	
Daiwa House REIT Investment Co	8984 JP	246,700	3.811	4.58	4.59	1.10	1.09	4.26	

Source: Bloomberg (Data as of market close on 27th Feb 24), DZT Research

Income statement						
KRWm						
Six-month period ending	May-21	Nov-21	May-22	Nov-22	May-23	Nov-23
	FY3A	FY4A	FY5A	FY6A	FY7A	FY8A
Gross revenue	23,710	30,063	46,743	49,006	49,483	53,000
- Property operating expenses	-15,607	-15,332	-22,954	-26,457	-23,403	-28,800
NOI	8,104	14,730	23,790	22,549	26,079	24,200
- Financial income	762	96	242	628	1,002	900
- Other income	0	2	73	278	8	0
- Gains on valuation using equity method	2,630	4,335	21,768	5,043	16,853	5,600
- Financial expenses	-6,086	-8,944	-15,696	-15,649	-15,929	-18,800
- Other expenses	0	0	0	-87	0	0
<ul> <li>Losses on valuation using equity method</li> </ul>	0	-734	0	0	0	0
PBT	5,409	9,485	30,175	12,762	28,014	11,900
- Income tax expense	0	0	0	0	0	C
PAT	5,409	9,485	30,175	12,762	28,014	11,900
DPU (KRW)	134	134	134	136	135	137
Balance Sheet						
KRWm						
Six-month period ending	May-21	Nov-21	May-22	Nov-22	May-23	Nov-23
	FY3	FY4	FY5	FY6	FY7	FY8
Cash and cash equivalents	26,894	23,519	33,921	31,103	25,522	50,608
Long-term financial	21,373	26,716	42,219	42,219	39,158	41,706

Total liabilities and equity	1,187,621	1,443,146	2,268,044	2,253,882	2,377,653	2,343,918	
Total equity	710,682	704,357	1,150,585	1,134,793	1,133,827	1,116,913	
Total liabilities	476,939	738,789	1,117,459	1,119,089	1,243,826	1,227,006	
Others	30,369	42,503	57,173	56,804	69,296	59,966	
borrowings Long-term borrowings	446,570	668,142	1,060,285	1,062,285	919,986	912,070	
Current portion of long-term	0	28,144	0	0	254,544	254,970	
Total assets	1,187,621	1,443,146	2,268,044	2,253,882	2,377,653	2,343,918	
Others	7,052	10,876	26,237	27,019	27,435	29,744	
Investment properties	975,742	1,199,425	1,960,978	1,947,771	2,067,223	2,052,483	
Investments in associates	156,561	182,610	204,689	205,770	218,315	169,378	
Long-term financial instruments	21,373	26,716	42,219	42,219	39,158	41,706	

#### **Cashflow statement**

#### KRWm

Six-month period ending	May-21	Nov-21	May-22	Nov-22	May-23	Nov-23
	FY3A	FY4A	FY5A	FY6A	FY7A	FY8A
PBT	5,409	9,485	30,175	12,762	28,014	11,852
NCC Adjustments	8,372	12,619	6,218	23,052	11,390	26,590
Change in NWC	818	35	1,687	-306	-1,480	-2,687
Interest/tax received/paid	-5,740	-11,565	-17,842	-13,853	-14,607	-17,925
Dividends received	0	7,650	1,057	4,298	3,963	18,674
Net CFO	8,858	18,225	21,295	25,954	27,279	36,505
Net CFI	-1,161,903	-261,895	-811,295	-218	-118,720	27,166
Net CFF	821,660	240,296	800,401	-28,554	85,860	-38,584
Net change in cash flow	-331,385	-3,375	10,402	-2,818	-5,581	25,086
Cash (beginning)	358,278	26,894	23,519	33,921	31,103	25,522
Cash (end)	26,894	23,519	33,921	31,103	25,522	50,608

#### **Key Ratios**

Six-month period ending	May-21 FY3A	Nov-21 FY4A	May-22 FY5A	Nov-22 FY6A	May-23 FY7A	Nov-23 FY8A
Profitability (%)						
NOI margin	34.18	49.00	50.89	46.01	52.70	45.66
Net margin	22.81	31.55	64.56	26.04	56.61	22.45
Growth (YoY %)						
Gross revenue		26.79	55.49	4.84	0.97	7.11
NOI		81.78	61.50	-5.21	15.65	-7.21
PAT		75.36	218.12	-57.71	119.50	-57.52
DPU		0.00	0.00	1.49	-0.74	1.48
<b>Leverage (%)</b> LTV	45.80	55.70	54.10	54.50	56.80	52.10
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