

# LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Project: **SWORDS CIVIC QUARTER, SWORDS, COUNTY FINGAL**

Project no.: **Fc.02**

Prepared on behalf of: **FINGAL COUNTY COUNCIL**

Prepared by: **DERMOT FOLEY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**

Date of First Issue: **11.04.2022**

Revisions: **P01 09.06.2022**  
**P02 07.07.2022**

**ISSUED FOR:** INFORMATION/BILLING/**PLANNING**/TENDER/CONSTRUCTION

# Table of Contents

1. Introduction
  - 1.1 Proposed Development
  - 1.2 Photomontage Report
  
2. Assessment Methodology
  - 2.1 Desktop
  - 2.2 Impact Significance Criteria
  - 2.3 Definition of Visual Impacts
  - 2.4 Choice of Views
  - 2.5 Photomontage Methodology
  
3. Existing Environment
  - 3.1 Site Description and Context
  - 3.2 Site Boundaries
  - 3.3 Topography and Drainage
  - 3.4 Vegetation
  - 3.5 Contiguous Land Use
  - 3.6 Visual Analysis
  
4. Planning Context
  - 4.1 Landscape Character
    - 4.1.1 Historical Landscape Character Assessment
  - 4.2 Landscape Sensitivity
  - 4.3 Natural Heritage
  - 4.4 Protected Views and Prospects
  - 4.5 Public Rights of Way
  - 4.6 Architectural Conservation Areas
  - 4.7 Protected Structures
  - 4.8 Tree Protection Orders

- 5. Predicted Impacts**
  - 5.1 Impact on Existing Vegetation**
    - 5.1.1 Construction Phase**
    - 5.1.2 Operational Phase**
  - 5.2 Impact on Landscape Character**
    - 5.2.1 Construction Phase**
    - 5.2.2 Operational Phase**
  - 5.3 Impact on Views**
    - 5.3.1 Construction Phase**
    - 5.3.2 Operational Phase**

- 6 Mitigation Measures**
  - 6.1 Existing Vegetation**
    - 6.1.1 Construction Phase**
    - 6.1.2 Operational Phase**
  - 6.2 Landscape Character**
    - 6.2.1 Construction Phase**
    - 6.2.2 Operational Phase**
  - 6.3 Views**
    - 6.3.1 Construction Phase**
    - 6.3.2 Operational Phase**

- 7 Residual Impacts**
  - 7.1 Construction Phase**
  - 7.2 Operational Phase**

- 8 Conclusions**

- 9 References**

## 1 Introduction

This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) report describes the existing receiving environment, contiguous landscape and the methodology utilised to assess the impacts. It assesses the visual extent of the Proposed Development and its visual effects on key views throughout the study area. It describes the landscape character of the application site and hinterland, together with the visibility of the site from significant viewpoints in the locality. The report summarises the impact of the Proposed Development on the visual and landscape amenity of the application site and contiguous area.

The following visual receptors are addressed in this assessment:

- Any designated protected views and views/scenic routes protected through development objectives in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017 -2023;
- Local Amenity and Heritage Features;
- Local community views to assess the landscape and visual impact of the proposals on those who live and work in proximity to the Proposed Development as well as those utilising local amenities;
- Relevant local settlement nodes; and
- Major routes adjacent to the site.

### 1.1 Proposed Development

This application is seeking permission for a Civic and Cultural Building, public realm works, demolition works and all associated site works at a site located in the middle of Swords town centre, on the junction of North Street, Seatown Road, Main Street and Bridge Street adjacent to Swords Castle, and Fingal County Offices.

The proposed development will comprise of public realm upgrade works and the construction of the proposed Swords Civic and Cultural Building, located on the existing Fingal County Council car park site at Seatown Road and St. Michaels House Centre, ranging in height from 2-4 storeys. The proposed Swords Civic and Cultural Building will include for:

- A 165-no. seated theatre with associated control/ sound rooms & light lobbies
- Dressing rooms and rehearsal spaces
- An art gallery
- Café/theatre bar
- Exhibition spaces
- Workshop and study areas
- Meeting rooms

- Public library
- Offices
- Storage rooms, toilets and other ancillary uses.

The proposed development will consist of minor external works to the southern entrance of the Swords District Court House (Protected Structure).

## 1.2 Photomontage Report

This report should be read in conjunction with the Photomontage Report produced by Digital Dimensions and included separately as part of this planning application.

## 2 Assessment Methodology

Landscape and visual impact assessments are two separate but closely related topics. The assessment of visual impact focuses on the extent to which new developments can be seen. Visual analysis forms one part of a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA), the process by which the potential significant effects of a Proposed Development on the visual resource of an area are methodically assessed. In turn, VIA forms just one part of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). Landscape assessment focuses on the character of the landscape, examining responses which are felt towards the combined effects of the new development.

### 2.1 Desktop Study

A site assessment was undertaken in February 2022. Desktop studies were carried out to evaluate the existing site conditions such as topography, vegetation, settlement patterns, contiguous land use, drainage, landscape character as well as overall visibility of the site from surrounding areas. Information was also collated on protected views, scenic routes, special and protected landscapes, etc.

The following documents and web resources were consulted for the desktop study:

- Fingal County Development Plan, 2017-2023
- The Historic Landscape Characterisation Project of the General Swords Area, Margaret Gowen & Co. Ltd, 2007
- 'Your Swords – An Emerging City, Strategic Vision 2035', Fingal County Council
- National Parks and Wildlife Service – Interactive Mapping and Aerial Photography - [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie);
- Ordnance Survey Ireland – Interactive Mapping and Aerial Photography – [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie);
- The National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994, Section 12; and
- National Monuments – Historic Environment – [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie).

This LVIA has been prepared utilising the following guidance documents:

- Landscape and Landscape Assessment Draft Guidelines, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) 2000;
- *A Handbook on Environmental Impact Assessment – Guidance on the Environmental Impact*, Scottish Natural Heritage (SHN) - Assessment 2009. Appendix 1: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, The Institute of Environmental Assessment / Landscape Institute (2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed 2002, 2013).
- Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Statements Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Protection Agency, 2002;
- Revised Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Statements. Draft 2015;
- Advice notes on current practices (in the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement), Environmental Protection Agency, 2003;
- Advice notes for Preparing Environmental Impact Statements. Draft. Environmental Protection Agency, 2015;
- Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, Environmental Protection Agency, Draft August 2017.

## 2.2 Impact Significance Criteria

The impact significance and rating criteria used are those outlined in the EPA guidelines for preparing an EIS when quantifying the duration and magnitude of impacts. The quality of the impact is described as ‘negative’, ‘neutral’ or ‘positive’.

		Existing Environment: Significance / Sensitivity			
		High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Magnitude of Change	High	Profound	Very Significant	Significant / Moderate	Moderate / Slight
	Medium	Very Significant / Significant	Significant / Moderate	Moderate	Slight / Not Significant
	Low	Significant / Moderate	Moderate / Slight	Slight / Not Significant	Not Significant / Imperceptible
	Negligible	Slight / Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant / Imperceptible	Imperceptible

**Table 1:** Classification of Impacts

The significance of visual impacts are described as follows:

- **Imperceptible:** An impact capable of measurement but without noticeable consequences.

- **Not significant:** An impact which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment but without noticeable consequences. The proposal is adequately screened due to the existing landform, vegetation or constructed features.
- **Slight:** An impact which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities. The affected view forms only a small element in the overall visual composition or changes the view in a marginal manner.
- **Moderate:** An impact that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging trends. The proposal affects an appreciable segment of the overall visual composition, or there is an intrusion in the foreground of a view.
- **Significant:** An impact which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the environment. The proposal affects a large proportion of the overall visual composition, or views are so affected that they form a new element in the physical landscape.
- **Very Significant:** An impact which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity significantly alters the majority of a sensitive aspect of the environment. The proposal affects the majority of the overall visual composition, or views are so affected that they form a new element in the physical landscape.
- **Profound:** An effect which obliterates sensitive characteristics. The view is entirely altered, obscured or affected.

In terms of duration, impacts are considered as follows:

- **Brief:** lasting up to one day
- **Temporary:** lasting up to one year
- **Short-term:** lasting one to seven years
- **Medium-term:** lasting seven to fifteen years
- **Long-term:** lasting fifteen to sixty years
- **Permanent:** lasting over sixty years

Impacts are considered at both the construction and operation stage and further aspects including do-nothing, worse-case, cumulative, interactive, indirect and residual impacts are also considered, where appropriate, in the assessment.

### 2.3 Definition of Visual Impacts

The following terminology, used in this visual assessment, is defined as follows:

**Visual Intrusion:** where a Proposed Development will feature in an existing view but without obstructing the view.

**Visual Obstruction:** where a Proposed Development will partly or completely obscure an existing view.

**Sensitivity and Significance:** The significance of impacts on the perceived environment will depend partly on the number of people affected, but also on value judgments about how much the changes will matter. In this

respect, it is important to identify actual visual and physical connections between the site, its adjacent occupiers/land owners and those who interact with it from further afield, in the context of the existing and the proposed situations.

While our visual sense is generally acknowledged to represent the dominant contribution to our perception of place and its context, other factors also contribute. Hearing/sound, smell and a variety of social/cultural factors relating to the land-use, function or business conducted on the land (or indeed, memory) can sometimes overrule or outweigh the visual aspects and lead to individual perceptions which could be described as relatively subjective. The purpose of this report is to objectively examine and assess the nature and extent of the visual impact created as a result of the development proposal.

## **2.4 Choice of Views**

The views were chosen to accurately represent the likely visual impact from all directions. Views are from the public domain, particularly from main roads and access routes. The views submitted are considered to be the most important and representative, having regard to the requirement to examine the greatest likely impacts.

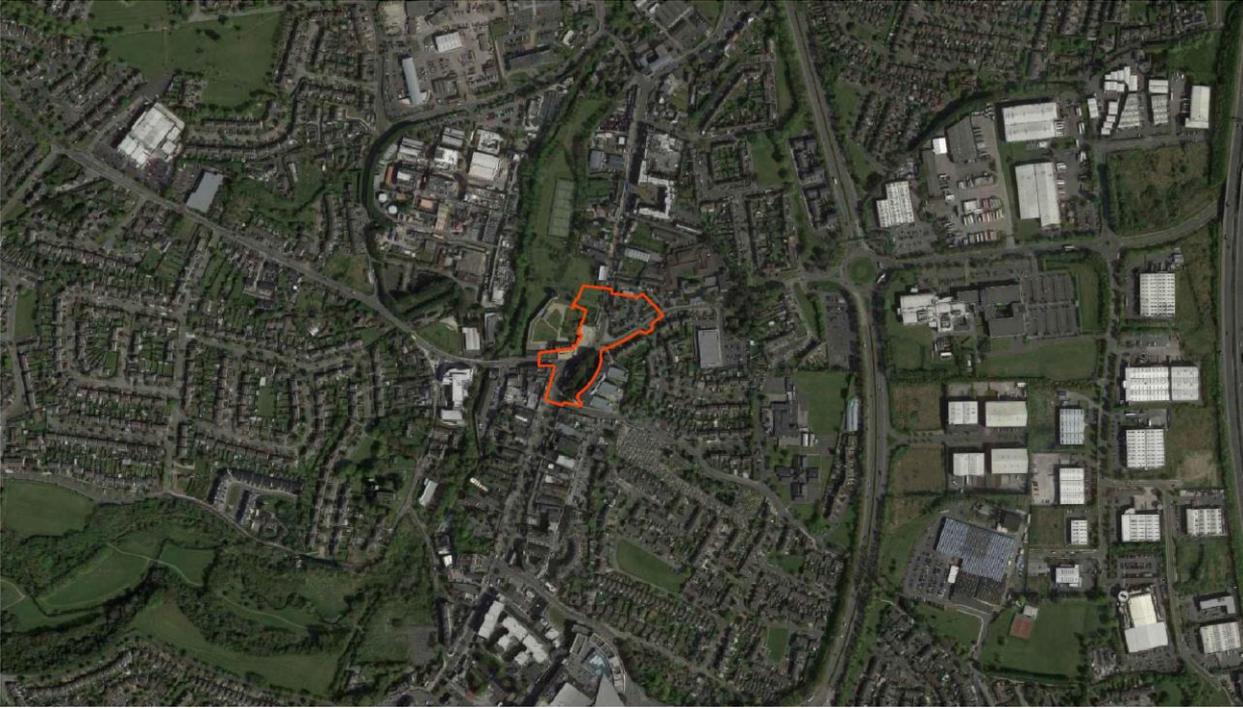
## **2.5 Photomontage Methodology**

The methodology for preparation of photomontages is included with the Photomontage Report produced by Digital Dimensions included separately as part of this planning application.

# **3 Existing Environment**

## **3.1 Site Description and Context**

The subject site is in the centre of the town of Swords, where the north-south alignment of Main Street and North Street meets the east-west alignment of Bridge Street and Seatown Road. The subject site straddles the roads from the eastern elevation of Swords Castle walls and Swords Community Park, to the eastern boundary of the existing county council carpark north of Seatown Road; and from the western side of Main Street at its northern section across the street to the western elevation of Fingal County Hall.



**Figure 1:** Satellite image of subject site with red line boundary showing surrounding context of built environment; Ward River Valley Park to the south-west; and, North Dublin Corporate Park to the east

The town of Swords began in the 6<sup>th</sup> century with the founding of a monastic settlement and has gone through various stages of development, including the construction of the landmark Swords Castle, a medieval Episcopal Manor (Archbishops Palace), located immediately west of the subject site. The surviving round tower and blessed well of St. Colmcille's monastery remain intact and preserved within the urban, and suburban character and are located to the south-west of the subject site.



**Figure 2:** Round tower screened by mature trees in grounds of St. Colmcille's church

The medieval town grew from the alignment of Main Street, which early photographs show as being a market space to the south of Swords Castle.



**Figure 3:** Main Street, Swords, looking south (Lawrence Collection, c. 1865-1914)

Swords House, now demolished, was part of a demesne property with large gates fronting onto Main Street and was located at the site of Fingal County Hall today, following a short time as a public park.



**Figure 4:** Swords House shown to the south-east of Swords Castle in centre of image, 6" map, Ordnance Survey, 1831-1846

The current character of the site is mixed. The northern section, part of Swords Community Park and north of the castle walls, is parkland in character with open managed grass, considered tree planting and macadam paths for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as a small, vacant building.



**Figure 5:** Parkland to the north of the castle walls, Swords Community Park

The historical courthouse, a protected structure, dating from 1843 fronts onto North Street, behind which the ground level county council carpark is located. Access to the carpark is available from Seatown Road.



**Figure 6:** View from Fingal County Council car park, looking south-west towards Swords Castle and north Main Street, rear of courthouse visible to the right of image.

The open space west of Fingal County Hall is dominated by mature evergreen trees forming a dense canopy which extends over the footpath of Main Street and beneath which is a shaded, flat space, partly paved, and punctuated with sculptures. A stone wall topped with railings separates the footpath and bus stop on Main Street from the county hall open space.

The western side of Main Street is comprised of commercial buildings, street trees, a bus stop, and street furniture such as bins, bollards, and railings.

The northern section of Main Street forms part of a staggered road junction dominated by traffic, with bus stops, railings, signals and street furniture contributing to the visual atmosphere. The southern elevation of the castle walls address Main Street and close the vista.



**Figure 7:** View from Main Street looking north to Swords Castle, showing evergreen trees west of Fingal County Hall, bus stops and street furniture.



**Figure 8:** Open space west of of Fingal County Hall, looking north, with evergreen trees to the left of the image, creating boundary with Main Street

The castle walls continue to the east, where the ground falls down to the western edge of North Street; currently a building fronting onto North Street has boundary walls accreted to the eastern elevation of the castle walls at the north-eastern section and has created a solid edge to this part of North Street.



**Figure 9:** Eastern and southern elevations of Swords Castle, viewed from north Main Street, looking north. Southern elevation of remaining built structures previously joined to castle walls are visible to the right of image



**Figure 10:** Remaining building on North Street (side boundary walls accreted to castle walls, not shown in image)

### **3.2 Site Boundaries**

The boundaries to the site vary significantly. The northern boundary is composed of several conditions: open parkland to the west; North Street, with no current fixed or solid boundary; commercial buildings on North Street; and Fingal Community College which consists of varying heights of block wall to the east.

The block wall continues in a southerly direction along the boundary with Fingal Community College to the east until it meets Seatown Road. The south-eastern boundary runs along the low brick wall at the southern edge of Seatown Road. The eastern boundary is made up of the western elevation of Fingal County Hall, and follows the curve of the building to its south-western point. The southern boundary is composed of the northern kerb of Chapel Lane which crosses Chapel Lane and runs west across Main Street to join the eastern elevation of buildings on the west of Main Street. The western boundary is comprised of commercial buildings on the west of Main Street which turns west at the north of Main Street to follow the building line for a short distance, then crosses Bridge Street in a northerly direction and joins with the southern elevation of Swords Castle. The boundary continues along the castle walls to the south-eastern point and swings north, following the changes in the walls to the north-eastern point of the castle walls.

### **3.3 Topography and Drainage**

From the north of Main Street and Swords Castle entrance which is located at +16.2 above Ordnance Datum (OD), the ground falls down to the gentle valley created by the Ward River in the west. From Seatown Road in the centre of the site (+15.8 OD), North Street falls gently to the north (+16.3 OD). Localised topography exists in a number of areas: the ground falls away to the east at the base of the castle walls at their eastern elevation; the ground slopes down to North Street in Swords Community Park, north of Swords Castle; a mixed limestone wall supports a change in level from the open space in front of Fingal County Hall (+18.5 OD) to the eastern pavement of Main Street (+17.4 OD).

The nearest water body is the Ward River which runs in a north-south direction and lies 80m to the west of the western boundary of the site. No standing water was observed on site visits.

### 3.4 Vegetation

Vegetation in the wider context is mixed. To the north, vegetation on North Street comprises of street trees of a single species, *Acer platanoides* (Norway maple), in varying stages of maturity and located in the footpath. Parkland in Swords Community Park to the north and west of Swords Castle, is composed of open managed grass with lines or groupings of trees of varying species and maturity, including *Tilia sp.* (lime), *Quercus ilex* (holm oak) and *Platanus x hispanica* (London plane). Evidence of swathes of wildflower planting within the managed grass was noted on the site visits. The Ward River, which runs north-south along the western boundary of the Community Park has a riparian edge composed of mixed tree species and under-storey species associated with river banks. Occasional tree planting and grass verges exist along roads leading off Seatown Road and Chapel Lane lending a suburban character to these areas. East of the county council carpark on Seatown Road, groupings of mature trees associated with a religious property and educational institute overhang the road and footpath, and hedging associated with front gardens is evident along the roadside and footpaths.



**Figure 11:** *Ward River in Swords Community Park with riparian vegetation*

Vegetation within the site is mixed also. To the north of the site, parkland trees and managed grass comprise the area of Swords Community Park within the redline boundary. Species within the park include 4no. *Tilia sp.* (lime), and 7no. *Quercus ilex* (holm oak). Along the eastern side of North Street, 6no. *Acer platanoides* (Norway maple) are located in the footpath.

To the east of the site, scattered tree planting exists in islands within the county council carpark, and comprise of a single species in two habits, 6no. *Carpinus betulus fastigiata* (fastigate hornbeam) and 9no. *Carpinus betulus* (hornbeam).

In the open space west of Fingal County Hall 25no. *Quercus ilex* (holm oak) have grown to various levels of maturity and formed a dense canopy. Within this space 1no. *Cedrus deodora* (Himalayan cedar) is located close to the county hall building and 1no. *Quercus x hispanica* 'Lucombeana' is located in a separate planted bed along Chapel Lane.

To the south of the site, vegetation along the east and west of Main Street comprises of street trees and consist of *Platanus x hispanica* (London plane) and *Acer platanoides* (Norway maple).

An area of managed grass exists west of the entrance to Swords Castle and is contained behind a low, mixed stone wall.



**Figure 12:** Street trees on Main Street, including *Platanus x hispanica* (London plane) and *Acer platanoides* (Norway maple)

A detailed Tree Survey has been carried out by Charles McCorkell Arboricultural Consultancy and is included separately as part of this planning application.

### 3.5 Contiguous Land Use

The contiguous land uses adjacent to the subject site are mixed.

The subject site is located east of Swords Community Park which is an area of public open space with a parkland character. A tennis club and timber gazebo, both in the northern half of the park, are the only built structures, along with outdoor gym equipment, west of the tennis club. The park is comprised of open managed

grass with lines and groupings of semi-mature and mature trees, and a network of macadam paths which are used for recreational walking as well as links between different areas of Swords.

The county council carpark, in the east of the site, has vehicular access from Seatown Road and is used by Fingal County Council staff. The historical Swords courthouse to the west of the carpark has regular circuit court sittings and is only opened at these times for public access from North Street.

To the south-east of the subject site, Fingal County Hall operates as the administrative centre of the county and is a public building with public access at its western elevation.

To the south, and running through the site, Main Street functions as a busy vehicle route with frequent bus movements, stopping at the two bus-stops west of Fingal County Hall, and cars using the on-street parking spaces. Shoppers and delivery vehicles add to the busy commercial character of the street.

Swords Castle, located to the west of the subject site, has a single public access point at its southern elevation, which addresses Main Street. The castle grounds, the chapel associated with the castle and the castle itself are a tourist attraction; an event space and a quiet area to rest, with picnic tables and managed grass.

Residential housing is located to the west and east from the subject site, while the areas north and south of the site are dominated by commercial buildings.

### 3.6 Visual Analysis

The subject site is located at the convergence of four busy roads and therefore has varying views from each of the four directions, dependant on the distance from the junction, the built environment and the local topography.



**Figure 13:** View looking north towards subject site, from Main Street, with evergreen trees west of Fingal County Hall to right of image



**Figure 14:** View from open space west of Fingal County Hall open space, looking north-west towards entrance of Swords Castle

The views of the subject site are concentrated to the south, on Main Street, and mostly in the northern zone of the street. The site is open and visible from the front of Fingal County Hall at footpath level and from the access ramp to the west of Fingal County Hall. Glimpse views of Swords Castle and the subject site are available from the open space at the front of Fingal County Hall, through the lower branches and between the trunks of the Holm oaks growing in this area.

Views of the subject site from the west become visible on Bridge Street only when the ground rises from the bridge at Swords Castle entrance. As Bridge Street bends to the north to join with Main Street and North Street, the site is fully visible all through this elongated junction.

From the north, the subject site only becomes visible along North Street from the front of Swords Credit Union due to the slope of the road, existing street trees and commercial properties on the east side of North Street.



**Figure 15:** View looking west towards Swords Castle (rear of image) from Seatown Road, with St. Colmcille's Drive approaching from left of image and evergreen trees associated with Fingal County Hall at rear of image on left, which forms part of the subject site

Views of the site are visible from Seatown Road on approach from the east and from St. Colmcille's Drive, to the south of the site, which is an access road to residential housing. There are open views of the site from the external eastern walls of Swords Castle. In the wider context of the Swords townscape, the site as it exists is not visible due to local topography, the local built environment and existing street trees.



**Figure 16:** Part of the subject site looking south from Swords Castle entrance, showing evergreen tree canopy and traffic at junction.



**Figure 17:** Part of the subject site looking west towards castle walls from western kerb of North Street, showing local changes in topography

#### **4 Planning Context**

Landscape Planning Policy for the area is laid out in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023 and 'Your Swords – An Emerging City, Strategic Vision 2035', a master plan for the town. The subject site falls within the zone of MC – Major Town Centre, which is to 'protect, provide for and/or improve major town centre facilities' and includes the aim of '... ensuring a mix of ... recreational, civic, cultural and urban streets, while delivering a quality urban environment .... The zone will enhance and develop the existing urban fabric.'

The Swords Castle Conservation Plan (Fingal County Council 2014) was commissioned, inter alia, to 'assist in the preparation of a strategic planning framework to develop a greater definition of the historic precinct of the castle within a modern town...'. According to the document, the site of the castle has lacked public legibility and its importance in the development and layout of the town is not apparent to the people of Swords.



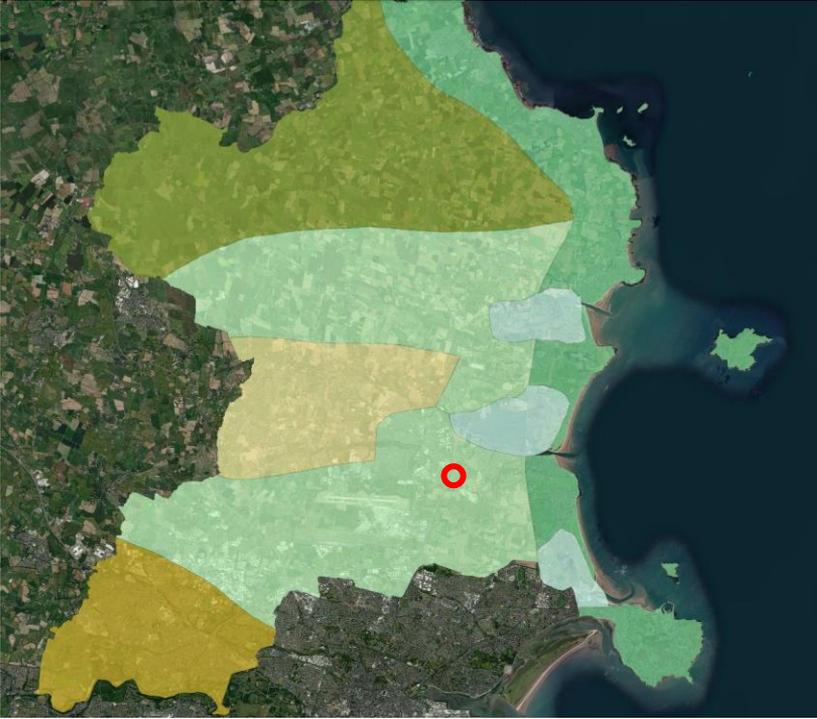
**Figure 18.** Zoning map from Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023, showing outline of subject site in yellow, and Zone MC – Major Town Centre shaded in orange.

#### 4.1 Landscape Character

The subject site is located in the town of Swords, which is in the Rolling Hills Character Type of Fingal County. To the west of the site, the Ward River valley meanders in a northerly direction towards the Broadmeadow Estuary in the north-east.

There are six Landscape Character Types identified in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023. Swords falls into Rolling Hills Character Type which is described as ‘*mainly agricultural land made up of rolling landscapes across the Ward and Broadmeadow River valleys*’. The Landscape Character Assessment chapter of the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023 notes that an important quality of the Rolling Hills Character Type is the archaeological heritage in Swords, described as the main settlement within this area.

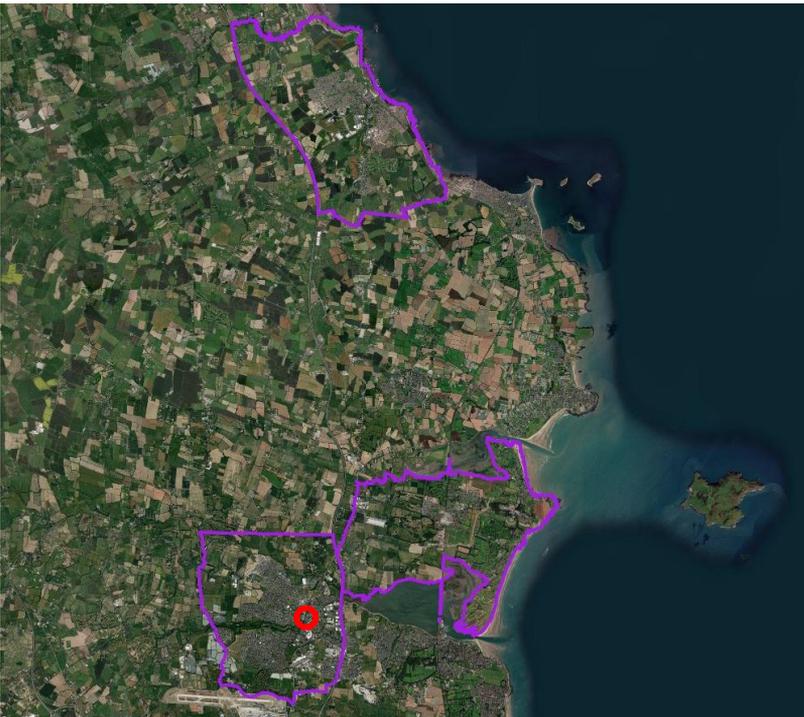
The Rolling Hills Character Type is categorised as having a *modest value* and *medium sensitivity*.



**Figure 19:** Landscape Character Areas with red circle showing location of Swords in the Rolling Hills Character Type, Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023

#### 4.1.1 Historic Landscape Character Areas

Three Historic Landscape Character Areas (HCLAs) are included in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023. The subject site falls into the Swords HCLA, shown in image below.



**Figure 20:** Historic Landscape Character Areas shown in pink, Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023, location of Swords shown with red circle

## 4.2 Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the site is a function of its lands use, landscape patterns and scale, visual enclosure, distribution of visual receptors, and the value place on the landscape. Trends of change in the landscape and relevant policy are also taken into account.

The sensitivity of the site and receiving environment is classified as *medium* (definition derived from the GLVIA and EPA Guidelines: “Areas where the landscape has certain valued elements, features or characteristics but where the character is mixed or not particularly strong, or has evidence of alteration, degradation or erosion of elements and characteristics. The landscape character is such that there is some capacity for change in the form of development. These areas may be recognised in landscape policy at local or county level and the principle management objective may be to consolidate landscape character or facilitate appropriate, necessary change”.

Sensitivity	Description
<b>Very high</b>	Areas where the landscape exhibits very strong, positive character with valued elements, features and characteristics that combine to give an experience of unity, richness and harmony. The landscape character is such that its capacity to accommodate change in the form of development is very low. These attributes are recognised in landscape policy or designations as being of national or international value and the principle management objective for the area is protection of the existing character from change
<b>High</b>	Areas where the landscape exhibits strong, positive character with valued elements, features and characteristics The landscape character is such that it has limited/low capacity to accommodate change in the form of development. These attributes are recognised in landscape policy or designations as being of national, regional or county value and the principle management objective for the area is the conservation of existing character.
<b>Medium</b>	Areas where the landscape has certain valued elements, features or characteristics but where the character is mixed or not particularly strong, or has evidence of alteration, degradation or erosion of elements and characteristics. The landscape character is such that there is some capacity for change in the form of development. These areas may be recognised in landscape policy at local or county level and the principle management objective may be to consolidate landscape character or facilitate appropriate, necessary change.
<b>Low</b>	Areas where the landscape has few valued elements, features or characteristics and the character is weak. The character is such that it has capacity for change; where development would make no significant change or would make a positive change. Such landscapes are generally unrecognised in policy and the principle management objective may be to facilitate change through development, repair, restoration or enhancement.
<b>Negligible</b>	Areas where the landscape exhibits negative character, with no valued elements, features or characteristics. The landscape character is such that its capacity to accommodate change is high; where development would make no significant change or would make a

	positive change. Such landscapes include derelict industrial lands or extraction sites, as well as sites or areas that are designated for a particular type of development. The principle management objective for the area is to facilitate change in the landscape through development, repair or restoration.
--	--

**Table 2.** Categories of Landscape Sensitivity (GLVIA 2013)

### 4.3 Natural Heritage – Environmental Designations

This section outlines the closest areas to the site with environmental designations.

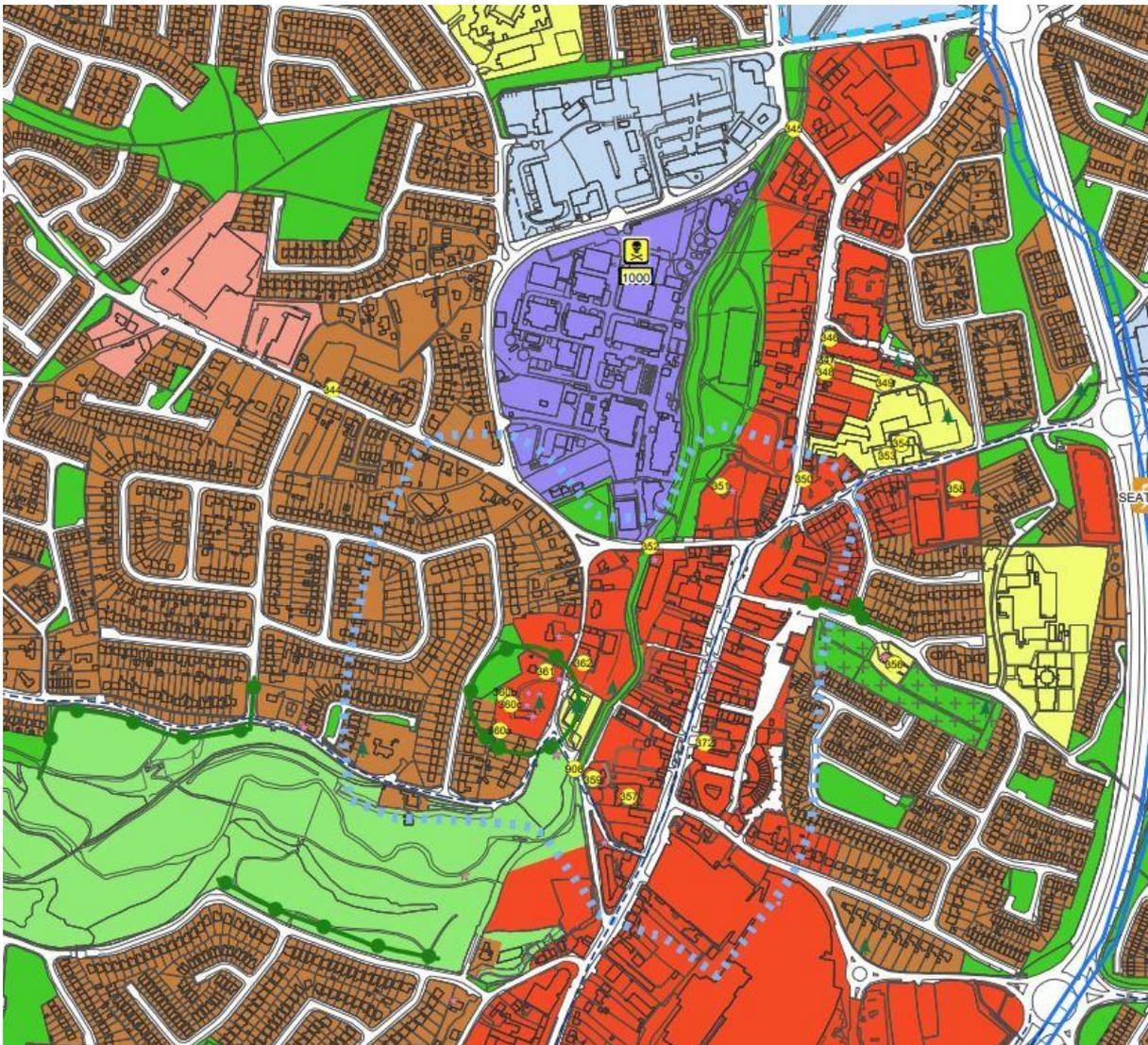
Site No. / Designation	Name	Distance to site
<b>SPA</b>		
Site No. 004016	Baldoyle Bay	6.9km south-east of site
Site No. 004015	Rogerstown Estuary	4.9km north-east of site
<b>SAC</b>		
Site No. 00199	Baldoyle Bay	6.9km south-east of site
Site No. 00208	Rogerstown Estuary	4.9km north-east of site
Site No. 00205	Malahide Estuary	1.1km north-east of site
<b>pNHA</b>		
Site No. 00199	Baldoyle Bay	6.9km south-east of site
Site No. 00208	Rogerstown Estuary	4.9km north-east of site
Site No. 00205	Malahide Estuary	1.1km north-east of site
Site No. 001208	Feltrim Hill	2.6km south-east of site
Site No. 001215	Portraine Shore	4.4km north-east of site
Site No. 001763	Sluice River Marsh	5.8km south-east of site

**Table 3:** Sites with environmental designation, taken from NPWS map viewer

### 4.4 Protected Views and Prospects

Views designated as protected have been mapped in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023, Green Infrastructure Map 1 and Swords Map Sheet 8. The nearest protected view to the subject site is along Chapel Lane, however is looking south-east towards St. Colmcille's Church and graveyard, away from the subject site and 120m from the subject site. Protected views are mapped along the northern edge of the Ward River Valley

Park, 470m south-west of the site. Due to the local topography no views of the subject site are afforded from this area. Further protected views are shown along the southern edge of Ward River Valley Park, 570m south-west of the subject site and tree lines and local topography prevent views of the subject site. Protected views are shown at St. Columba's Church, 280m south-west of the subject site. The local built environment, mature trees within the church grounds and local topography prevent views of the subject site from this area. Protected views are mapped at the western point of Malahide Estuary 1.3km north-east of the subject site, and the distance from the subject site as well as residential housing and the M1 motorway prevent views of the subject site. There are protected views which are listed in the Development Plan from the R108 (St Margaret's to Naul road) and R125 (Swords to Ashbourne road) from which the subject site is not visible.



**Figure 21.** Extract from Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023, Swords Map Sheet 8, showing protected views with green lines/circles



**Figure 22.** View looking towards subject site from St. Columba's church grounds.



**Figure 23.** View looking towards subject site from southern boundary of Ward River Valley Park.

#### **4.5 Public Rights of Way**

There are no public rights-of-way identified in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023, however Objective RF116 states:

*Map and document existing rights of way within two years of the adoption of this Development Plan. This work will be completed in consultation with landowners and the public for inclusion in the Development Plan by way of a Variation.*

#### 4.6 Architectural Conservation Areas

An Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, technical, social, cultural, or scientific, interest, or that contributes to the appreciation of a Protected Structure. The Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023 designates 32 Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs).

The following are the nearest ACAs to the subject site:

Name	Distance to site
Newbridge House Demesne and the Square, Donabate	4.4km north-east of the site
Malahide Castle	4.0km east of the site
The Rise, Malahide	4.7km east of the site
St. Sylvester's Villas, Malahide	4.8km east of the site
The Bawn, Malahide	4.8km east of the site
Historic Core, Malahide	4.9km east of the site
Abbeville Demesne	4.3km south-east of the site

**Table 4:** Architectural Conservation Areas, as noted in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023

#### 4.7 Protected Structures

There are several protected structures located in the vicinity of the site, listed below:

RPS No.	Name	Description	Distance to site
345	Scotchstone Bridge	Fine stone road bridge over River Ward	1360m
346	Carnegie Library	Three-bay two-storey yellow and red brick library building with projecting central canted bay	253m
347	Building	One of pair of semi-detached former Residences of New Borough Female School	206m
348	Building	One of pair of semi-detached former Residences of New Borough, Female School	195m
349	Former New Borough Female School	Thirteen-bay single-storey former School building to rear of No. 44 North Street	210m
350	Court House	Mid-19th century stone courthouse building	0m (within site)

351	Swords Castle	Remains of Episcopal Manor, terminates north end of Main St in town park	0m (adjacent to site)
352	Mill Bridge	Stone single arched bridge carrying road over River Ward	164m
353	Accord	Former Residence New Borough Male School	654m
354	Swords Youth & Resource Centre	Six-bay two-storey former New Borough Male School	196m
356	St. Columcille's Church (RC)	Catholic Church, font, graveyard	161m
357	Old Borough School	Nine-bay two-storey former national school	341m
358	Parochial House	Three-bay two-storey redbrick parochial house	1200m
359	The Old School House Restaurant	Three-bay two-storey Tudor style former school house	395m
360	St. Columba's Church (C of I)	19th century church plus ecclesiastical remains, Round Tower, Graveyard, Whetstone, Cross, Sheela-na-gig	391m
361	Sexton's House	Three-bay single-storey ashlar limestone Tudor style house	245m
362	Old Vicarage	Three-bay two-storey former vicarage converted to apartments	161m
372	Bank	Early 20 <sup>th</sup> century five-bay single-storey ashlar granite bank building	289m
908	Road bridge	Mid-19 <sup>th</sup> century double-arch road bridge over River Ward	43m

**Table 5:** Protected Structures, as noted in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023, and distance to subject site



**Figure 24:** View of Old Vicarage, protected structure 362, as noted in Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023, looking towards subject site

#### **4.8 Tree Protection Orders**

While no Tree Protection Orders are noted in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023, reference is made to the protection and preservation of trees. It is the aim of:

Objective NH26 (Natural Heritage, Chapter 9):

*To protect existing woodlands, trees and hedgerows which are of amenity or biodiversity value and/or contribute to landscape character and ensure that proper provision is made for their protection and management.*

Objective NH28 (Natural Heritage, Chapter 9):

*To consider the use of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) to protect important trees, groups of trees or woodlands.*

Objective DMS77 (Development Management Standards – Tree Policy, Chapter 12):

*To protect, preserve and ensure the effective management of trees and groups of trees.*

## **5 Predicted Impacts**

### **5.1 Impact on Existing Vegetation**

#### **5.1.1 Construction Phase**

The construction works will require removal of some of the vegetation and trees existing on the subject site. Charles McCorkell Arboricultural Consultancy have assessed and produced a Tree Survey Report and Arboricultural Assessment included separately as part of this planning submission. The proposal requires the removal of a total of 21 trees: 8no. trees of moderate quality and value (Category B); 11no. trees and one group of self-seeded trees of low quality and value (Category C), and 2no. trees of poor quality (Category U).

The trees for removal are located within the existing council carpark on Seatown Road, Swords Community Park, and North Street. Trees to be removed in the carpark area include 4no. *Carpinus betulus* (Fastigate hornbeam) all of which are designated Category B. Trees proposed for removal in parkland of Swords Community Park include 4no. *Tilia sp.* (lime) all designated Category B, and 4no. *Quercus ilex* (holmoak), three of which are designated Category C and one designated at Category U. Trees to be removed on North Street include 2no. *Acer platanoides* (Norway maple), one which is designated Category B and one which is designated Category U. While no trees are marked for removal on Main Street or to the west of Fingal County Hall, the Arboricultural Assessment notes that 3no. *Platanus x. hispanica* (London plane) have the potential to be impacted by works related to the proposed alterations in this area, namely proposed bus stop and cycle way. 24no. *Quercus ilex* (holmoaks) are proposed to be retained to the west of Fingal County Hall.

The impact on existing trees will be *negative, moderate and permanent*.

#### **5.1.2 Operational Phase**

There are no predicted impacts on the existing vegetation in the operational phase.

### **5.2 Impact on Landscape Character**

#### **5.2.1 Construction Phase**

Site hoarding, construction traffic, ground disturbance and temporary structures required for construction will have a *negative, moderate and short-term impact*.

#### **5.2.2 Operational Phase**

The existing subject site is predominantly comprised of road surface and car park; fenced off ground to the east of the castle walls; and defensive space to the west of Fingal County Hall. Much of the site is not readily accessible to the public and the junction is dominated by traffic, providing little opportunity for pedestrian priority. The enhanced public realm with significant tree planting and extensive areas for pedestrian and cycle

activity will have a positive impact on the existing environment. A proposed civic and cultural building will replace the car park and provide residents and visitors with new amenities. Given the existing urban character of the site, the proposed design will likely have a *positive, moderate and permanent impact*.

Where the landscape is not maintained appropriately in accordance with horticultural best practice there may be a *negative, moderate and permanent impact*.

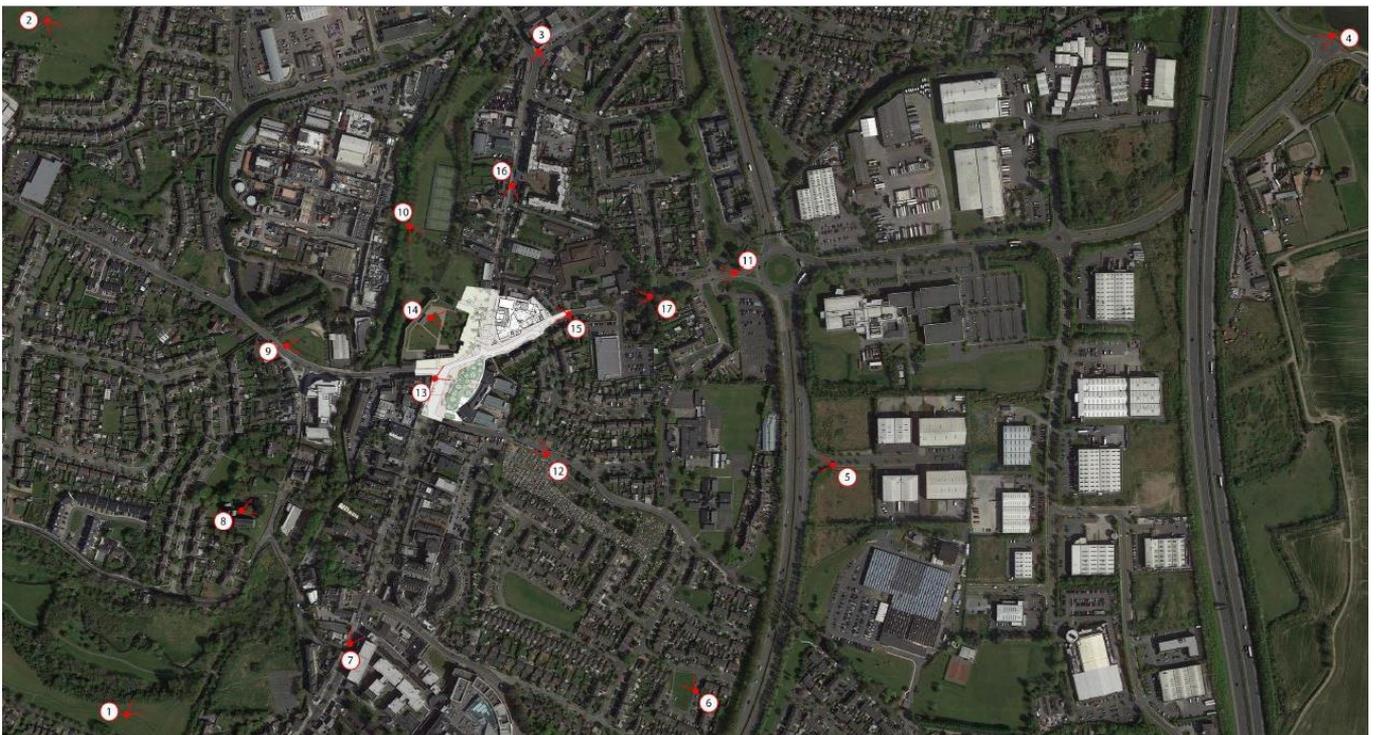
### 5.3 Impact on Views

#### 5.3.1 Construction Phase

Site hoarding and temporary structures required for construction will have a *negative, moderate and short-term impact on views*.

#### 5.3.2 Operational Phase

Seventeen key views were chosen to illustrate the visual impact of the Proposed Development and are included within the Photomontage Report produced by Digital Dimensions. The Photomontage Report includes a view location plan showing the points the views were taken from. Each view is illustrated as existing and proposed and the views are numbered 1 to 17. The views include long, mid and short-distant views.



**Figure 25:** View location map, extract from Digital Dimensions Photomontage Report

**View 1** *From footpath in Ward River Valley Park, looking north-east towards the subject site*

The proposed development will be blocked by existing trees and topography. There will be *no impact*.

**View 2** *From Castle Park Estate open space, looking south-east towards the subject site*

The proposed development is completely blocked by existing houses and the natural slope of the ground.

**View 3** *From the junction of North Street and Balheary Road, looking south towards the subject site*

The proposed development will be predominantly blocked by the existing buildings on the east side of North Street as the street bends to the west. The taller element of the proposed development will create a visual intrusion alongside the western elevations of buildings on North Street. The composition of the view would be slightly altered as the proposed building will provide an addition to the streetscape, however the character would remain unaltered. The impact will be *slight, neutral and permanent*.

**View 4** *From Estuary Road roundabout, looking south-west towards the subject site*

The proposed development will be completely blocked by the existing trees and topography associated with the construction of the motorway. There will be *no impact*.

**View 5** *From North Dublin Corporate Park Height, looking west towards the subject site*

The proposed development is predominantly blocked by existing buildings and trees. The upper storeys and roofline of the proposed development will be visible above the buildings in the middle distance and slightly alter the horizon line however the impact to the character of the view will be negligible. The impact will be *not significant, neutral and permanent*.

**View 6** *From Castle Grove residential estate, open space, looking north west towards the subject site*

The proposed development will be completely blocked by existing houses and trees. There will be *no impact*.

**View 7** *From Main Street, R836, between Well Road and Malahide Road, looking north towards subject site*

The proposed development will be screened by the existing trees and rooflines on Main Street. The composition and character of the view will not be altered. There will be *no impact*.

**View 8** *From Swords Round Tower, looking north-east towards the subject site*

The proposed development will be completely blocked by the existing vegetation associated with the grounds of St. Columba's Church, and by the rooflines provided by residential houses on Church Road. There will be *no impact*.

**View 9** *From the junction of Rathbeale Road and Bridge Street, looking east towards the subject site*

The proposed development will be predominantly blocked by existing trees in the Swords Community Park and the buildings of the HSE health centre and historical telephone exchange. However the roofline of the building of the proposed development will be visible on the horizon. The composition of the view will be slightly altered

however the impact to the character of the view is negligible. The impact will be *not significant, neutral and permanent*.

**View 10** From Swords Community Park, between tennis club and the Ward River, looking south-east towards the subject site

The proposed development will be predominantly screened by the existing parkland trees in Swords Community Park. Glimpses of the building of the proposed development will be seen through the canopies of the trees. The composition of the view will be slightly altered, however the character of the view will remain. The impact will be *slight, negative and permanent*.

**View 11** From the roundabout at junction of R132 and Seatown Road, looking west towards the subject site

The proposed development will be predominantly screened by existing trees and buildings on Seatown Road. The composition of the view will be slightly altered, however the key features of the view would be retained. The impact will be *slight, neutral and permanent*.

**View 12** From Chapel Lane (front of St. Colmcille's Catholic Church), looking north-west towards the subject site

The proposed development will be predominantly blocked by existing residential buildings on Chapel Lane and St. Colmcille's Drive block. The roofline of the proposed development will be visible above the buildings in the middle distance. The character and composition of the view would be altered slightly however the magnitude of change is limited due to the distance of the view. The impact will be *slight, neutral and permanent*.

**View 13** From rear of bus stop on Main Street north, looking north-east towards the subject site

The frontage of the building in the proposed development will be fully visible in this view. The proposed tree planting, road and footpath surface and road and footpath layout as part of the public realm proposals will be visible in this view. The composition and character of the view would be significantly altered by the introduction of the proposed building and tree planting into the view, enclose the space, and result in a positive activation of the streetscape. The building in the proposed development will be partially screened by the existing evergreen trees associated with Fingal County Hall to the right of the image. The impact will be *significant, positive and permanent*.

**View 14** From Swords Castle information kiosk, looking east towards the subject site

The lower storeys of the proposed development will be blocked by the rising ground within the castle walls and the walls themselves. Parts of the of the proposed building's southern façade, brise soleil and most of the west-facing roofline of the building in the proposed development will be visible through and above the canopies of the existing trees and castle walls. The character of the view will be altered. The impact will be *moderate, negative and permanent*.

**View 15** From Seatown Road, looking west towards the subject site

The southern elevation of the building in the proposed development will be fully visible in this view. The composition and character of the view would be altered by the introduction of the proposed building into the view. The impact will be *significant, negative and permanent*.

**View 16** *From North Street, looking south towards the subject site*

The building in the proposed development is partially visible in the centre of the image. The roof profiles of the existing buildings on North Street, including the Carnegie Library, left of centre in the image, create a line towards the horizon which terminates at Fingal County Hall and captures the roofline of the building in the proposed development. The composition and character of the view will be slightly altered, however the key features of the view would be retained. The impact is considered *slight, neutral and permanent*.

**View 17** *From Seatown Road, looking west towards the subject site*

The building in the proposed development is visible in the centre of the image and partially screened to the right by existing trees located in private grounds and the existing 'Prosper' building on Seatown Road. The roofline introduced by the proposed building is not out of character with the existing roofline presented by the 'Prosper' building, however the proposed development does close the vista of the road. The character of the view will be altered. The impact will be *slight, neutral and permanent*.

## **6 Mitigation Measures**

### **6.1 Existing Vegetation**

#### **6.1.1 Construction Phase**

Existing vegetation on the site is mixed. Some mature specimens dominate the centre of the town and are planned for retention. Due to the site being mostly in hard landscape with little tree cover, the specimens which are considered valuable are being retained for the most part, however where disturbance due to re-grading or necessary construction is proposed, the following mitigation measures are proposed:

- Retain some Category B trees as outlined in Arborist Report (Charles McCorkell Arboricultural Consultancy)
- Root protection barrier as specified in Arborist Report to be installed at western boundary for root protection of trees on Main Street
- Install extensive proposed tree, hedge, groundcover, and lawn areas in accordance with drawing 2001 *Landscape Plan* by Dermot Foley Landscape Architects

#### **6.1.2 Operational Phase**

The following mitigation measures are proposed:

- Maintain all vegetation in accordance with the Design Rationale by Dermot Foley Landscape Architects, included separately as part of this planning submission.
- Install replacement planting for any plants that fail during the maintenance and defects liability period;
- Site to be monitored regularly for signs of invasive species.

## **6.2 Landscape Character**

### **6.2.1 Construction Phase**

The following mitigation measures are proposed:

- Construct the proposed landscape design as shown on drawing 2001 *Landscape Plan* by Dermot Foley Landscape Architects so that the site develops in character and integrates into the surrounding urban environment and enhanced, distinctive public realm in the centre of Swords
- Install the tree planting shown on drawing 2001 *Landscape Plan* by Dermot Foley Landscape Architects so that the tree planting matures to integrate the proposed development into the existing green character associated with parkland to the west and north-west of the site.

### **6.2.2 Operational Phase**

The following mitigation measures are proposed:

- Maintain and manage all proposed vegetation to ensure the creation and definition of a new sequence of spaces, integrated into the surrounding context.
- Site to be monitored regularly for signs of invasive species.

## **6.3 Views**

### **6.3.1 Construction Phase**

The following mitigation measures are proposed:

- Demolition of existing structure at north east of castle to open views of the castle walls.
- Plant tree species and sizes as per the proposed landscape plan in order to screen the development, integrate the new proposals into the existing tree-scape, and create an appropriate landscape at ground level

### **6.3.2 Operational Phase**

The following mitigation measures are proposed:

- Maintain and manage proposed tree planting to ensure that it matures to match existing trees proximate to the site

- Plant tree species and sizes as per the proposed landscape plan in order to maintain views of the castle

## **7 Residual Impacts**

### **7.1.1 Construction Phase**

No significant negative residual direct or indirect impacts are anticipated with the implementation of the construction mitigation measures as stated in Section 6 of this document.

### **7.1.2 Operational Phase**

No significant negative residual direct or indirect impacts are anticipated from the operation of the proposed scheme. The increased areas of trees and shrub vegetation, including proposed native species will have a positive, moderate and permanent residual impact as they mature.

## **8 Conclusion**

The proposed development is located on appropriately zoned lands. The layout and design of the proposed development is also consistent with the key development principles set out in the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023 and 'Your Swords – An Emerging City, Strategic Vision 2035', a master plan for the town of Swords.

The sensitivity of the receiving environment of the subject site is medium and it has a high capacity to accommodate change. This is due to a number of factors including (a) the area's history of development which has resulted in mixed townscape character; (b) precedent for large buildings within the Swords town centre area, including Fingal County Hall, CareChoice on Church Road/Bridge Street, and the Prosper building on Seatown Road; (c) mature trees west of Fingal County Hall which form a buffer between the site and certain receptors on Main Street; (d) extensive areas of open space in parkland around Swords Castle.

It is considered the development will have a profound effect on the existing open character of the site, particularly with regard to the current car park on Seatown Road. The landscape and visual change will be most pronounced during the mobilization and construction stage, when activity is unfamiliar and when the existing character of the lands is altered by the removal of excess ground material and vegetation. The changes arising from the initial site development and construction works will have negative landscape and visual effects from the south and east, however the effects will be slight from other directions.

There are some landscape and visual receptors in the area which are sensitive and require a design response to avoid significant negative impacts. These include Swords Castle to the west and Swords Courthouse (part of the subject site). The courthouse is proposed to be cradled by the proposed development which uses the

datum of the cornice to inform the lines of the new building. The mass created by the castle has been balanced on the east of North Street by the proposed new civic and cultural building.

The magnitude of change which would result from the development is very significant. It would introduce a new building to the area resulting in greater enclosure of North Street and Seatown Road and generally a more urban townscape character. While this is in keeping with the zoning objectives for the site, and the roofline height from Fingal County Hall has been continued, the proposed building is tall in the context of North Street and would be prominent locally. The development would alter the character of the townscape, however the visual enclosure would limit this change.

A significantly enhanced public realm design is included in the proposal with large areas of open space incorporating substantial proposed tree planting and other planting proposals. This would compensate for the loss of existing trees from the site, many of which are in poor condition or suffering in their current environment.

The completed development provides for a positive response to the existing site. It provides a town centre space with an appropriate built civic amenity and quality public realm which will make a significant and positive contribution to the townscape character, enhance the visual appreciation of a landmark heritage site such as Swords Castle and create a safe environment for all road users.

## 9 References

*Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Development Plan 2016-2022*

*National Parks and Wildlife Service – Interactive Mapping and Aerial Photography - [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie);*

*Ordnance Survey Ireland – Interactive Mapping and Aerial Photography – [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie);*

*The National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994, Section 12;*

<http://webgis.archaeology.ie/NationalMonuments/FlexViewer/>;

*Landscape and Landscape Assessment Draft Guidelines, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) 2000;*

*Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, The Institute of Environmental Assessment / Landscape Institute (2nd & 3rd Ed 2002, 2013);*

*A Handbook on Environmental Impact Assessment – Guidance on the Environmental Impact, Scottish Natural Heritage (SHN) - Assessment' 2009. Appendix 1: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.*