



ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT SWORDS CULTURAL QUARTER

July 2022

JCA Architects

Courthouse Chambers, 27-29 Washington Street, Cork, Ireland, T12 WN8F

T: 353 021 4393800
F: 353 021 4854145
E: architects@jca.ie
W: www.jca.ie



SCQ - ZZ - RP - JCA - CA - 00001

REV.	DESCRIPTION	DATE	PREPARED	CHECKED
R0	DRAFT	04.04.2022	kmc	goc
R1	REVISION	12.04.2022	kmc	goc
R2	PLANNING	07.07.2022	kmc	goc

Swords Cultural Quarter Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

Introduction	3
Historical Development	8
Site Description	16
Assessment of Significance	23
Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment	24

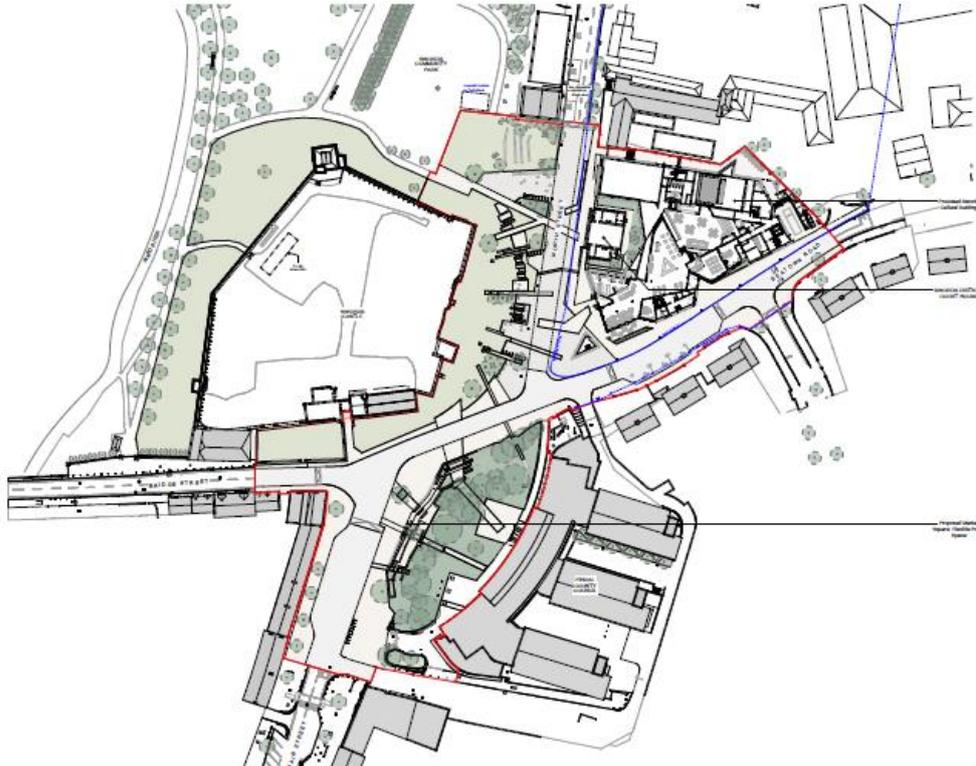


Figure 1: The proposed development in context (ODT)

1. Introduction

This report provides an assessment of the likely architectural heritage impacts of a proposed development in Swords, Co. Dublin.

The following report has been prepared by JCA Architects, RIAI Conservation Grade 1 Architects, on behalf of O'Donnell & Tuomey Architects to support a Part VIII Planning Application. The proposed development relates to a new Swords Civic and Cultural Centre located on lands in Swords Town Centre.

Fingal County Council (Economic Enterprise Tourism and Cultural Development Department) is proposing the creation of a Cultural Quarter, Swords Cultural Quarter (SCQ), within Swords Town centre, Co. Dublin, in proximity to Fingal County Hall and Swords Castle [a National Monument (No.340), Recorded Monument (RMP Ref. DU011-034001-) and Protected Structure (RPS No.351)], with an overall site area of 15,751m² (3.89 acres).

The proposed development will consist of:

(a) Demolition of: 17 and 17A North Street single storey commercial property (c. 182m²) including derelict outbuildings to rear, and side boundary walls abutting Swords Castle, a Protected Structure (RPS No.351) materially affecting the character; single storey structure located on west side of North Street and adjoining railings (note that the partially enclosed public toilet block will be relocated within the town park); St. Michaels House single storey bungalow (c. 208m²), including single storey outbuilding and boundary walls, Seatown Road, Swords; demolition of 4 no. terraced 2-storey commercial vacant properties (c.171m²) at No.20 North Street, Swords including rear and side

boundary walls; demolition of rear & side boundary wall and single storey outbuilding at Swords Courthouse, a Protected Structure (RPS No.350) materially affecting the character;

(b) Minor external works materially affecting the character to the Swords District Court House (Protected Structure – RPS No. 350), comprising the removal of a set of 2 no. granite steps to the southern entrance and the construction of an accessible entrance, provision of new garden to sides and rear of structure, with new railings to North Street;

(c) Construction of a Swords Civic & Cultural Centre on the site of the Fingal County Council Executive car park at the junction of North Street and Seatown Road, site of St. Michael's House, Seatown Road, and site of 4 no. terraced 2-storey commercial vacant properties at Units 1-4 No.20 North Street, to provide a new public county library, theatre, art gallery and auditorium, café / bar, local studies and archives centre, associated office space and ancillary accommodation. The proposed structure ranges from two to four storeys in height with a GIA floor area of 5,686m². Landscaping, public realm works and ancillary works are also proposed as part of the development. External works include a new road entrance from Seatown Road to access a service bay for deliveries at ground floor level;

(d) A total of 128 no. bicycle parking spaces comprising 108 no. visitor spaces within the Public Realm area, located on North Street, Main Street and to the front of the County Hall and 20 no. SCC staff spaces to the rear of the proposed SCC building;

(e) Provide a new Civic Space & Public Realm (area: 13,200m²) including new stone paving, street lighting, street furniture and art work at the following site location: the road junction of North Street, Seatown Road, Bridge Street and Main Street, Swords; vacant plots No.'s 1 – 7, 13, 15 North Street adjacent to Swords Castle, No.17 North Street and Chamber House 17A North Street, Swords; the existing external public space (area: 1,881m²) to the immediate west / front of Fingal County Hall; and the existing side entrance area of Swords Park accessed from North Street. The existing boundary between the Town Park and North Street will be removed and relocated as part of the development abutting Swords Castle, a Protected Structure (RPS No.351) materially affecting the character.

1.1 Planning Context

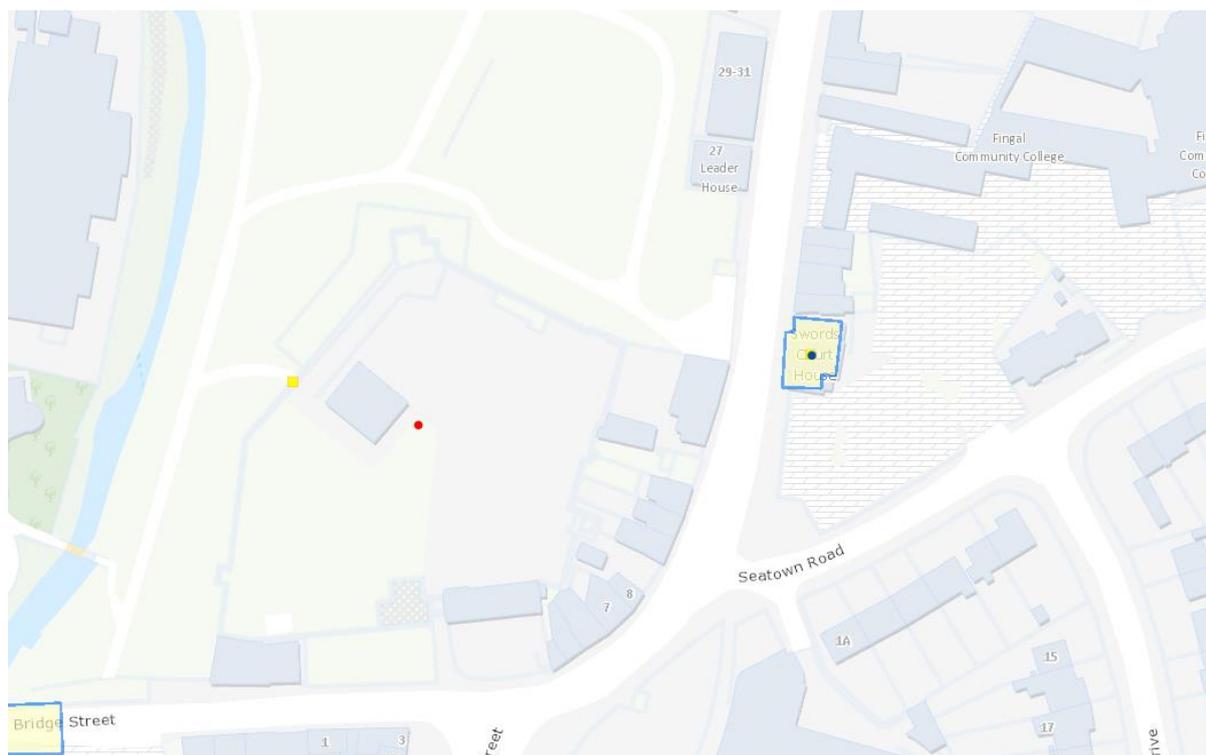


Figure 2: Heritage Map illustrating National Monuments (red dots), NIAH entries (blue dots) and Protected Structures (yellow dots)

The proposed development is located in the historic centre of Swords, Co. Dublin. It is to be constructed on a site arranged around three sides of Swords Court House and located opposite the Eastern Range of Swords Castle. The present curtilage of Swords Court House is within the project area although, apart from alterations to the granite steps to the southern entrance door to provide universal access, no other works are proposed to the building itself as it is under separate ownership. The site is not located in an Architectural Conservation Area. The context of the site contains structures of significant historical, architectural and cultural interest, and respect for the historic character of the surroundings has been integral to the development of the proposed design scheme.

Swords Castle is a National Monument, recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record, SMR no. DU011-034001-

Swords Castle is also on the Record of Protected Structures in the *Fingal Development Plan 2017-2023*: RPS no. 0351

Swords Court House is on the Record of Protected Structures RPS no. 0350 in the *Fingal Development Plan 2017-2023*

It is also included on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage: reg. no. 20512365

The archaeological protections relevant to the site are discussed in the Archaeological Impact Assessment prepared by Rubicon to accompany this application

The statutory protection afforded to the two adjoining sites with regard to their architectural heritage significance relates to their inclusion on the SMR, RPS and NIAH.

Within the current *Fingal Development Plan 2017-2023*, the following sections are of particular relevance:

Objective CH20- Ensure that any development, modification, alteration, or extension affecting a Protected Structure and/or its setting is sensitively sited and designed, is compatible with the special character, and is appropriate in terms of the proposed scale, mass, height, density, layout, materials, impact on architectural or historic features, and junction with the existing Protected Structure.

Objective CH07 Ensure that development within the vicinity of a Recorded Monument or Zone of Archaeological Notification does not seriously detract from the setting of the feature, and is sited and designed appropriately.

In chapter 12 of the Development Plan, with regard to development adjoining or in close proximity to Protected Structures, it is noted that *A sensitive design approach is also required for development that adjoins or is in close proximity to a Protected Structure as it could have a detrimental visual impact on it, adversely affecting its setting and amenity. The scale, height, massing, building line, proportions, alignment and materials of any development proposed within the curtilage, attendant grounds or in close proximity to a Protected Structure need to respect and compliment the structure and its setting.*

The Council has identified a cultural quarter in the vicinity of Swords Castle where it is intended to develop and encourage the clustering of cultural activities. A Swords Castle Cultural Quarter Masterplan (2014) has been adopted. This is included in the Development Plan as Objective CH40 - *Support the cultural development of Swords Castle Cultural Quarter.*

As part of the development of the SCQ, Objective DMS 155 states that *An Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment of the Swords District Court House to be carried out by a Conservation Architect, including measures to be adopted to protect the building for the duration of the works.*

The Swords Castle Conservation Plan, completed in 2014 for Fingal County Council, addresses a range of concerns regarding the preservation, conservation and presentation of above- and below-ground elements of Swords Castle. It sets out policies for protecting aspects of the castle that are of importance for the future, and these are discussed in more detail in Section 4 of this report. The *Your Swords – An Emerging City - Strategic Vision 2035* has also been taken into consideration.

1.2 Scope of Assessment

The following study examines the possible impacts of the proposed development on the historical architectural character of the setting of the proposed development, with particular reference to Swords Castle and Swords Court House.

The following assessment includes an outline history and description of Swords Castle and Swords Court House with reference to the setting in which the building is to be located. The Protected View of the Castle from Main Street and Dublin Street is examined in the context of changes over time.

The significance and character of the setting, and potential risks to this special character, are outlined.

1.3 Assessment Methodology

The site was visited and the existing building on the site were examined.

Once information resulting from the historical analysis and physical inspection of the buildings and site was compiled, the character of the historic setting and potential risks to its character were determined.

This impact assessment entails six stages:

1. A desk-top review of relevant documents relating to the site's history.
2. A field survey of the proposed development area.
3. An evaluation of the architectural heritage significance of the setting.
4. An assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the setting's special heritage significance.
5. The mitigation of any potential negative impacts upon that heritage
6. A prediction of the residual impacts of the proposed development after the mitigation measures have been enacted.

Desktop Study

Fingal County Council's *Swords Castle Conservation Plan* (2014) was a key document in developing an understanding of the setting of the proposed development. The Conservation Plan addresses a range of concerns regarding the preservation, conservation and presentation of above- and below-ground elements of Swords Castle. In seeking to re-affirm its significance and identify issues that hide this significance, it also sets out policies for protecting aspects of the Castle that are of importance for the future. The Conservation Plan has informed JCA's assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the character of the surrounding architectural heritage.

Catherine Keane, Senior Librarian, Fingal Local Studies & Archives, was of great assistance in providing historic photographs of Swords. Bernadette Marks of Swords Heritage kindly provided insights regarding the buildings of North Street. Additional historical aspects of the site's development were ascertained using a range of sources such as Ordnance Survey maps (some of which, from the TCD Map Library, were found in the Swords Castle Conservation Plan), photographs and press cuttings from the Irish Architectural Archive, as well as publications on the architectural history of Ireland.

2. Historical Development

The site for the proposed development is located within an historically very significant area of Fingal in County Dublin. A settlement at Swords has existed from early Christian times, when the monastic settlement dedicated to St. Colmcille was founded on high ground to the west of the Ward river. The Round Tower is the only upstanding element of the original monastic establishment remaining. It is situated to the south west of the Castle, from where it can still be seen.

After the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169, the property of the monastery at Swords formed part of the lands of the See of Dublin, confirmed to Archbishop Laurence O'Toole in 1179. There is some evidence from the late 12th century of there having at that time been an enclosure at Swords, though no explicit reference to a Castle has been found¹. It is known, however, that during this period, the Archbishops of Dublin travelled between their 'manor houses', sited in a ring around the city (Fingal, Cullenswood, Clondalkin and Tallaght) though their principal residence was at St. Sepulchre's, located beside St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin city centre.

There is a detailed account of the known evidence for the buildings and contents of Swords Castle from the 13th to the 17th centuries in the *Swords Castle Conservation Plan*. It is generally accepted that the first development occurred on the site with the construction of structures within a compound occupying the highest part of the site: now the north-east quadrant of the enclosure.

Rocque's 1760 map, below, with the Castle and surroundings circled, appears to be the first reliable map showing the Castle and the surrounding village of Swords during the 18th century. The map indicates the layout of the streets in the post-medieval period, with a single Main Street, extending northwards towards North Street. The Castle is, notably, at the centre of the settlement, rather than the earlier ecclesiastical centre to the West of the river. Though the map is at a small scale, both Main Street and North Street appear to have been developed with street-fronting buildings.



Figure 3: Rocque, 'An Actual Survey of the County of Dublin', 1760

¹ *Swords Castle Conservation Plan*, p. 25

The Court House

The present Swords District Court House, situated on the east side of the south end of North Street, was designed in 1843 by Alexander Tate, Dublin County Surveyor. Tate, an English born engineer, was County surveyor for the northern division of Co. Dublin, 1845-1861, and for Co. Antrim, 1861-1884. In addition to Swords Court House, he also designed Balbriggan Court House in 1846, and later was responsible for the Town Hall in Larne³.

The contractor for Swords Court House, which has a very typical Court House design of a central block and two flanking wings, was John Russborough, for the Board of Works, and it was built between 1846-7 at a cost of £420. The Court House appears to have been initially surrounded on three sides by existing buildings, with one, to the north, indicated as being a Forge. The footprints of the buildings in the surrounding of the Court House suggest more modest structures, those situated at right angles to the street likely to house businesses rather than residential accommodation. The Court House is notable on the OS maps for its scale and civic function in this part of the street.

The 1906 OS map, below, indicates the removal of buildings to the south of the courthouse and also the removal of buildings along the northern boundary of the grounds of Swords House. The eastern side of North Street at this point does not have a uniform grain: plot widths vary, with large gaps between sites and a number of buildings in the context of the courthouse apparently facing lanes running east of North Street. The typically dense urban grain visible to Main Street at this stage is not present on North Street.

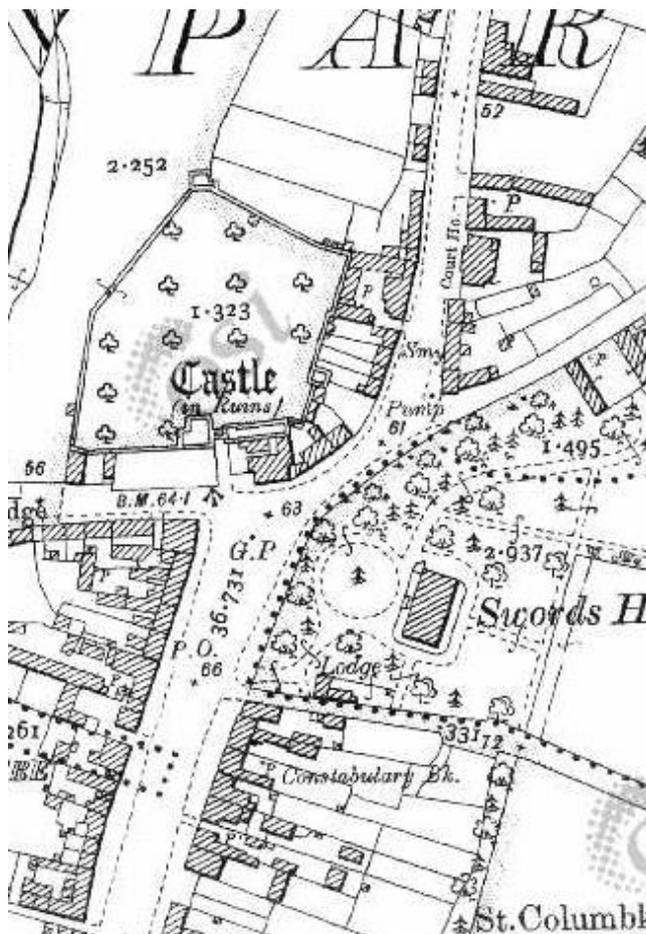


Figure 6: OS 25-inch map, revised in 1906

³ Irish Architectural Archive *Dictionary of Irish Architects* (Alexander Tate)



Figure 7: Undated late 19th century photographs taken by visitors from the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland to Swords Castle (Irish Architectural Archive)

The fabric of Swords Castle appears to have been subject to continuous deterioration following its abandonment by the Archbishops, although the site remained of interest to those studying the antiquities of Ireland. Nineteenth-century map evidence shows that the entrance to the castle had a much more modest impact on the town than it does today, with a substantial thatched building hiding most of what then remained of the chamber block from the view of the Castle from Main Street.

Twentieth Century

Dublin City Council obtained the lands of Swords Castle from the Cobbe family in 1985. Fingal County Council, when established, then assumed ownership and subsequently facilitated a FÁS training scheme to do works to repair and conserve the monument. Ongoing works to the Castle have included the reconstruction of curtain walls, the Chapel and the Constable's Tower.



Figure 8: Photograph of Gatehouse entrance to Swords Castle c. 1880-1914 (NLI)



Figure 9: Photograph of Entrance through Gatehouse (Swords Castle Conservation Plan) & Figure 10: Building in front of Chamber Block, 1987 (Irish Architectural Archive)

The Castle walls to the east and part of the south (as far as the entrance) remained hidden behind later, street-fronting buildings until at least the late 1980's. The photograph below was taken by architect Cathal Crimmins as part of a 1986 study of the site. The gradual removal of the buildings and outbuildings visible in the photograph between the Chamber Block and the north-east corner of the enclosure has taken place in the period between then and the present, with an acceleration of their removal in the last decade. The Chamber Block remained hidden from the view towards the Castle from Main Street until at least the late 1980s.



Figure 11: Aerial view of Swords Castle and surrounds, c. 1986 (Cathal Crimmins, Irish Architectural Archive)

Historic Site Context



Figure 12: Photograph of Main Street, Swords, looking north towards Swords Castle, just visible at centre left of photograph. The demesne wall of Swords House, with dense tree growth behind it, occupies the site of the present Fingal County Hall. ⁴

The view in the c. 1930's photograph above, from the Fingal Local Studies Collection, shows the Main Street in Swords, looking towards the junction with Bridge Street/North Street, and Swords Castle in the background. When compared with a view taken further north towards the Castle, it is striking to note how much more dominant Swords Castle has become in this streetscape.

⁴ The photograph is likely to date from c. 1930: the telegraph poles suggest a date post-electrification of Swords, which was connected to the national Grid in 1929-30.



Figure 13: view towards Castle from Main Street, Swords

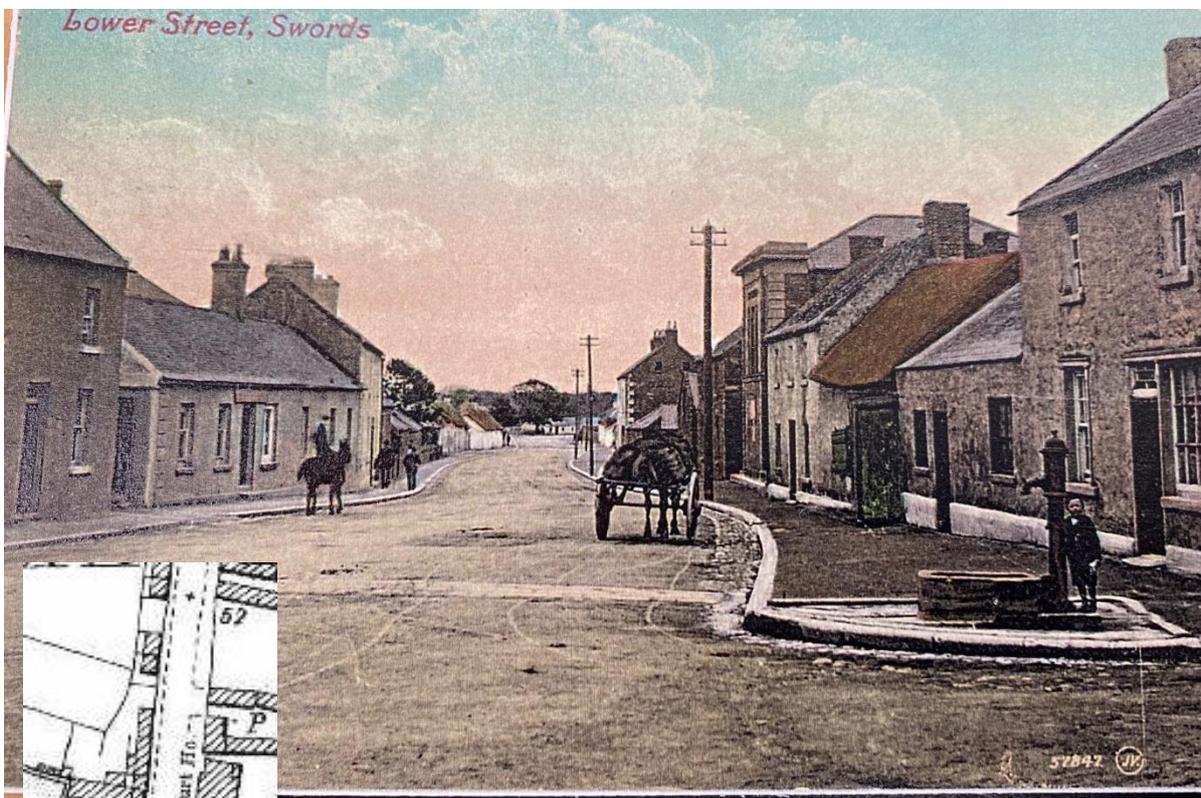


Figure 14: Postcard depicting North Street, Swords, c. 1907: the court house is visible among the buildings on the right hand side of the street, while a number of single and two storey buildings line the eastern side of the street to the left. A pump is located at the southern end on the western side of the street (Fingal Local Studies Collection). Inset: 1906 OS map detail of same

The early 20th-century context of the Court House and the present site on North Street is shown in the coloured post card photograph, above. The limestone quoins and parapet give the Court House a notable presence in the curving streetscape. The surrounding buildings are a mixture of single and two-storey buildings, of modest architectural character in comparison to the Court House. A similar view today is visible in the photograph below. The buildings to the south of the Court House have been removed, and there is a car park in their place. Most of the

buildings on the opposite side, which stood beyond the Castle's eastern boundary wall, have also been removed, with just one single-storey building remaining.



Figure 15: View north towards North Street

3. Site Description



Figure 16: Aerial View of present site context (Geohive)

The site for the proposed SCQ development lies at the corner of North Street, Main Street and Seatown Road in the centre of Swords, Co. Dublin.

At present, the site of the proposed new SCQ building is occupied by a surface car park and a group of apparently early 20th century, two-storey buildings adjoining the Court House to the north.

Swords Castle is located in a prominent position at the North end of Swords Main Street, to the east of the proposed site. At present, there remain a number of structures on the western side of North Street in front of the Castle's Eastern Curtain Wall. To the north of the Castle is an entrance to Swords Town Park. To the south of the site, on lands formerly part of the gardens of Swords House, is Fingal County Hall, designed by Bucholz-McEvoy Architects in 2002 to curve around an oval park.

Swords Castle

Swords Castle is located to the east of the proposed site. The structures presently on the site are described in detail in the Swords Castle Conservation Plan and in the Archaeological Impact Assessment accompanying this application.

The castle is fully enclosed by a high masonry curtain wall – roughly 300m long overall – shaped like an irregular pentagon. The height and thickness of the curtain wall vary significantly along its length. Within the walls, the ground slopes across the site from E-W towards the Ward river, with an overall fall of 4.3 metres. Midway within the enclosure, a bank of about 1M high runs N-S from the Gatehouse, dividing the enclosed area into an Upper and Lower ‘court’.

The ground level inside the walls is higher than outside along the boundaries: the greatest difference is 2.5 metres at the NE corner. Along the eastern boundary, the difference is generally about 1.5 metres.

The surviving upstanding structures are identified on the site layout drawing below. There is no visible evidence of freestanding historic structures within the open interior space, though geophysical surveys have potentially identified the remains of former structures below ground). The renovated structures on the site today include the Constable’s Tower, the Chapel, the Chamber Block, the Gatehouse and the Knight’s and Squire’s chamber.

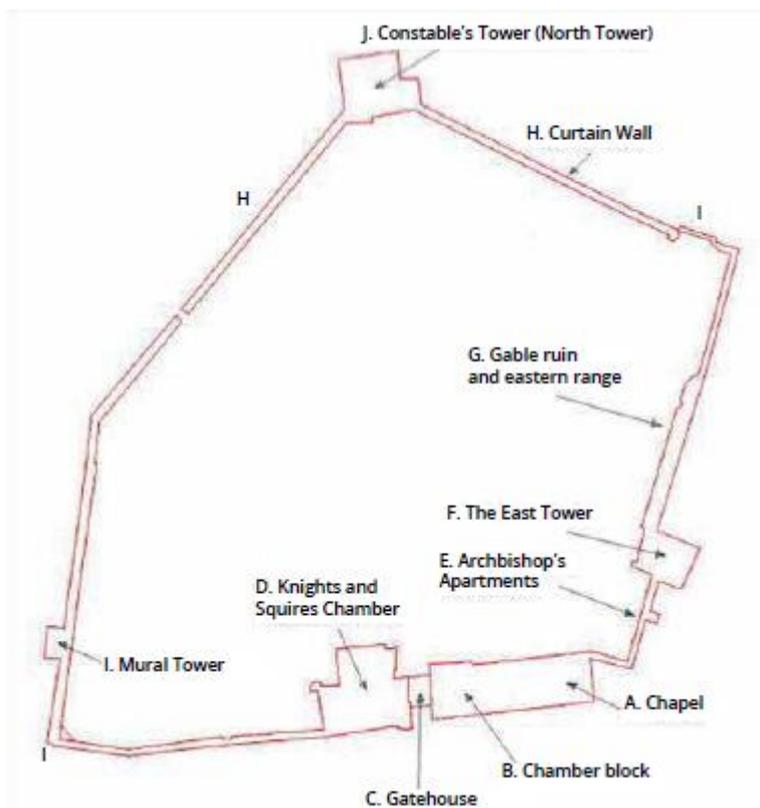


Figure 17: Swords Castle Site layout (Swords castle Conservation Plan)

The presentation of the Castle today includes access to railed wall walks to the North and West ranges, where there has been significant reconstruction to the walls. The Constable’s Tower is also accessible. The Eastern range, which is the closest part of the Castle complex to the site of the proposed development, consists of parts of earlier structures whose form, extent and original use

are not fully understood. Some of the earliest features remaining on the site may be incorporated into the fabric here. The crenellated walls that are such a significant feature of the other sides of the enclosure so not exist along the eastern side, and there is no evidence to suggest that they did in the past. The presentation of the Eastern range is far less uniform than the Northern or Western elevations.

The Swords Castle Conservation Plan indicates a large area along the Eastern boundary of the Castle where archaeological investigations are recommended, and this process has commenced. A number of buildings have been removed from outside the Castle's eastern boundary, towards the south-east corner, and this has made the Castle a great deal more visible in this area.



Figure 18: Internal elevations of the northern and eastern ranges at Swords Castle

The southern range retains the Chamber block, which has undergone significant reconstruction, and the Knight's and Squire's chamber, with the remainder of the southern walls standing much lower than those to the West and North.

There is currently a temporary structure located within the Castle walls to house a tourism office.



Swords District Court House



Figure 19: Swords District Court House

Swords District Court House is a compact, three-bay building with coursed rubble limestone walls. It has recessed, single-storey entrance wings flanking a full height centre block, with an advanced central bay containing a tripartite, square-headed window at first floor level. Below the window is a lugged limestone plaque and there is a terracotta panel above the window which has foliage moulding. There are dressed limestone details including quoins, a broad window surround, lugged door surrounds, a parapet and sill-level stringcourse.

The roof, hidden behind a parapet, is a pitched, slated roof to the main block, with terracotta ridge tiles and tall limestone chimney stacks housing yellow clay pots. The flanking wings have hipped, slated roofs. The building has cast-iron rainwater goods

There are granite steps to the entrance doors in each side bay. The entrances have double-leaf timber doors and there are timber sash windows. The central block contains a double-height courtroom with wooden furnishings.

Swords District Court was abolished in 1982 and the area transferred to the Dublin Metropolitan District. The Court House was damaged by fire in 1998 and subsequently repaired. It remains in use for District Court hearings.

To the south and west of the Court House there is presently a surface car park with metal railings to north Street and Seatown Road.

Figure 20: below: Surface car park to south and west of court house



North Street: Eastern side



Figure 21: Group of four two-storey buildings to north of Court House

It is proposed to demolish a group of terraced, two-storey buildings immediately to the north of the Court house. The date of construction of these buildings has not been determined, though they do not appear to be the single structure depicted on the 1906 OS map. They have been altered externally, with later shopfronts and glazing. They have a cementitious render to external walls, with quoin render details which reference the dressed stone quoins of the Court House next door.

North Street: Western side

There is one remaining single-storey house, formerly a bakery, on this side of North Street, which it is proposed to demolish as part of the public realm works. The building appears likely to be of 19th century construction, though it has been much altered, with later openings, glazing and doors.



Figure 22: house to Western side of North Street, opposite car park

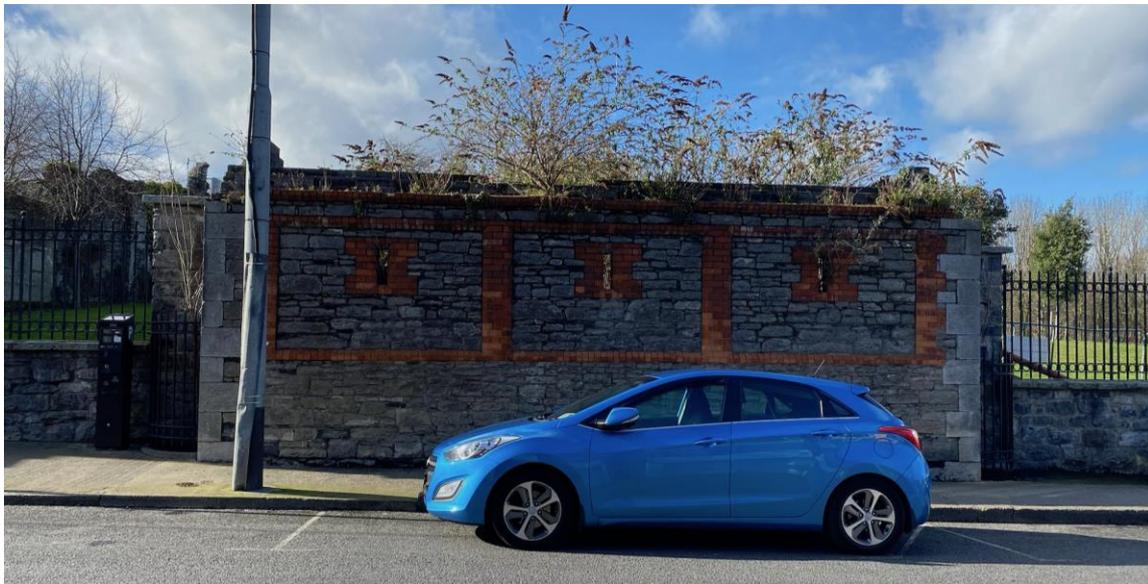


Figure 23: Single-storey building within curtilage of Community Park

It is also proposed to demolish the single -storey structure facing the Court House within the curtilage of the community part. This structure is constructed of coursed rubble limestone, with dressed stone quoins and apparently later brick dressings to three narrow slit openings on its North Street façade. There is a later stone projecting bay to its northern side. The southern elevation, to the park, is also of coursed rubble stone, with earlier brick dressings to two narrow openings and a blocked doorway. The southern elevation is of painted concrete blockwork. The building appears to have been altered (an upper storey is recorded as having been removed in the 1970s) and work begun for a later use, with additional concrete blockwork construction in areas, but it remains unroofed. There is no specific building function noted on OS maps, despite its unusual construction and dressed stone details. It is believed to have served as a stable to a large redbrick house (no longer in existence) nearby on North Street, which may have had a connection to the RIC⁵.

⁵ Information from Bernadette Marks, Swords Heritage

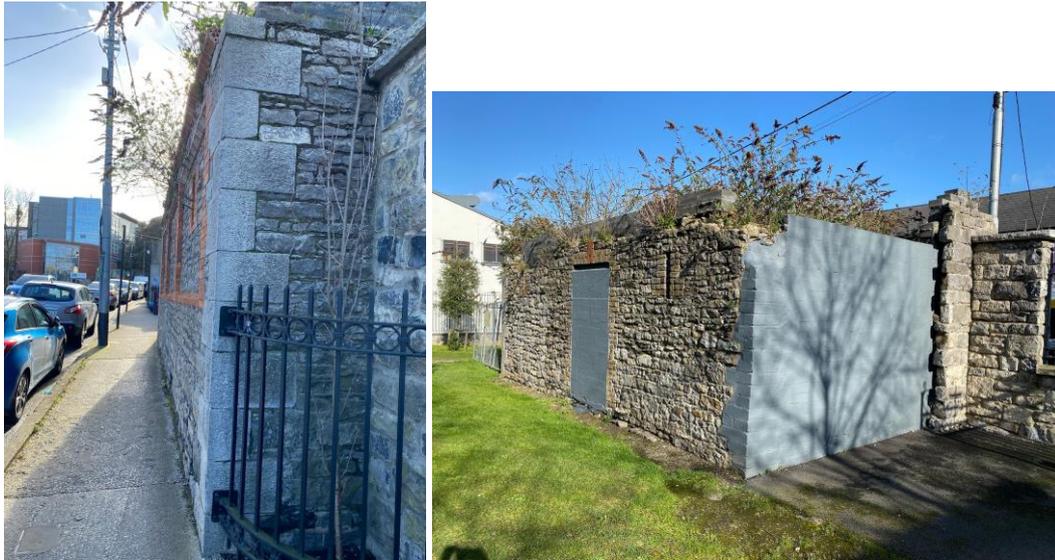


Figure 24: Details of single-storey building within curtilage of Community Park



Figure 25: Cut stone gate piers at entrance to Community Park on North Street

There is a pair of rusticated cut-stone gate piers at the entrance to the Community Park, sited opposite the Court House. It is proposed to take down and store these gate piers as part of the proposed public realm works. There is a building in this location on historic OS maps into the 20th century, so it is assumed that these gate posts were taken from another location and re-erected here when the Community Park was developed. It is possible that they are connected to Swords House, which stood on the site of the Fingal County Hall: the image below shows rusticated stone gate piers to Main Street of a similar scale.

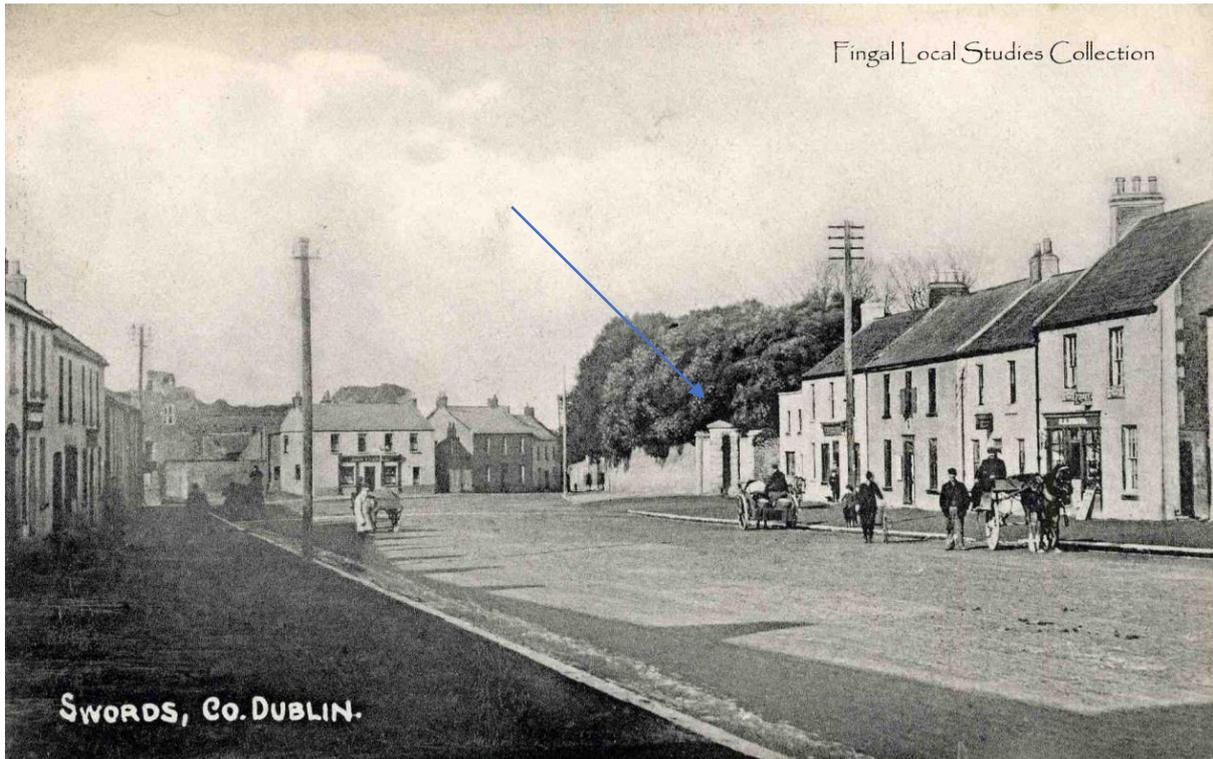


Figure 26: Photograph of Main Street, Swords, with an entrance to Swords House visible to centre

4.0 Assessment of Significance of Surrounding Architectural Heritage

The proposed development site is located in the immediate context of two sites of particular architectural heritage significance: Swords Castle and Swords District Court House. The broader Swords village landscape in which it is located retains its apparently late medieval alignment of a Main Street running N-S, roughly parallel to the Ward River on its Western side, with Swords Castle located centrally closing a vista at the North end of Main Street and the Round Tower surviving from the earlier monastic settlement located to the south-west of the village centre.

The significance of **Swords Castle** has been assessed in detail as part of the Swords Castle Conservation Plan, and this Plan has been adopted by Fingal County Council. Swords Castle is unquestionably of National significance. It is the best surviving Episcopal Manor (Bishop's Palace) in Ireland, setting it apart in terms of significance from surviving contemporary defensive Norman Castles. The following extracts from the Conservation Plan provide a summary assessment of the site's significance:

The significance of the Swords Castle complex is multi-layered and relates to aspects of its architecture, history, and archaeology. The environment within the walls of the Castle and its relationship to the urban and administrative centre of Swords is also of cultural significance.

It is a complex site representing at least 500 years of development, redesign, alteration, re-use and adaptation. It reflects the changing fortunes and lives of Dublin's Archbishops and later owners and the architectural fashions of their times.

Swords District Court House is a building of Regional significance. Designed by a known engineer, who was also responsible for the larger and more elaborate Balbriggan Court House, Swords Court House is a relatively standard late- 1830s -early 1840's petty and quarter sessions Court House. It was intended as a small landmark public building informed by classical architectural principles, and it retains this original character, though its surroundings have altered over time and its present context is at some remove from the administrative centre of the town. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage ascribes categories of architectural and artistic special interest to the building, but does not provide an assessment of its significance. Despite a damaging fire in 1998, the building generally retains its original external materials, historic architectural expression and character.

The other buildings on North Street referred to as part of this report have been included in order to provide a more complete picture of the existing streetscape surrounding the Castle and the Courthouse. None of the buildings or structures are included on the Record of Protected Structures or the NIAH. All have been significantly altered (or, in the case of the Gate Piers, relocated and reconstructed), and are of Local significance only, with no particular known architectural, historic or cultural importance.

5.0 Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment



Figure 27: The proposed development (ODT)

Summary Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

As the historic information within this report illustrates, the architectural context of this site is the product of a number of building phases. The proposed Swords Cultural Centre introduces a new density of use in order to maximise the site's potential for the provision of a range of cultural and educational resources, so is a building of greater scale and height than those previously on the site, but it has been designed with sensitivity to the overall historic context and with consideration for the relationships of each of the proposed elements to existing historic structures. The design intent is to reform the western edge of North Street, in line with the street edge shown on historic maps, while revealing and resetting the Castle wall on the eastern edge.

The impact of the changes needed to accommodate the volume of construction of new buildings on the site on the surrounding historic architectural context is outlined below. While there are material effects on Swords Castle and Swords Court House, the majority of impacts on buildings subject to legislative protection are solely visual. The removal of buildings adjoining the walls of Swords Castle and within the surrounds of the Court House materially affect this National Monument and Protected Structure, but these impacts do not directly physically affect the most important historic fabric of these sites, other than in the changes to the southern steps of the Court House. With the proposed design and material quality of the building and public realm, and the extent of the proposed cultural, educational and social resource for the area taken into consideration, the proposals can reasonably be viewed to have the retention of the site's surrounding historic architectural character as a core principle. This informed approach to the development of the site is appropriate to the national, regional and local historic, architectural, cultural and social significance of the context of the site.

5.1 Assessment of Impact Methodology

An evaluation was made of the likely impacts of the proposed development upon the heritage characteristics of the existing site. Changes to the building's physical attributes could potentially arise from:

- Indirect disturbance to upstanding buildings, e.g. vibrations from construction traffic, stockpiling of earth, and overshadowing by new buildings.
- Direct physical interventions to upstanding buildings, e.g. piecemeal demolitions, new extensions, and the replacement of existing fabric, fixtures and fittings

The magnitude of these impacts can range from 'major' in the case of drastic alterations or demolitions, to 'negligible' or 'none' where little or no change will ensue as a result of the impact. Such impacts can either be 'beneficial' or 'adverse' depending on whether the heritage character of the feature being impacted upon is enhanced or degraded as a result. A 'neutral' impact will be neither beneficial nor adverse.

- Major: *Beneficial* - Large scale or major improvement of resource quality; extensive restoration or enhancement; major improvement of attribute quality. *Adverse* - Loss of resource and/or quality and integrity of resource; severe damage to key attributes.
- Moderate: *Beneficial* - Benefit to, or addition of, key attributes; improvement of attribute quality. *Adverse* - Loss of resource, but not adversely affecting integrity; partial loss of/damage to key attributes.
- Minor: *Beneficial* - Minor benefit to, or addition of, one or several key attributes; some beneficial impact on attribute or a reduced risk of negative impact occurring. *Adverse* - Some measurable change in attributes, quality or vulnerability; minor loss of, or alteration to, one or several key attributes.
- Negligible: *Beneficial* - Very minor benefit to or positive addition of one or more attributes. *Adverse* - Very minor loss or detrimental alteration to one or more attributes.
- None: No loss or alteration of attributes; no observable impact, ie neither beneficial nor adverse.

The *significance* of an impact will depend on its magnitude and the heritage value of the feature being impacted upon. It can range from 'neutral', through 'moderate' to 'very large'. Thus, a major negative impact on a feature of very high heritage value will have a significantly large adverse effect, whereas the same impact on a feature of negligible value will be relatively insignificant. For the purposes of this analysis, the levels of impact significance are defined as follows:

- Very large: Only very adverse effects are normally assigned this level of significance. They are generally, but not exclusively, associated with sites of international, national or regional importance that are likely to suffer a most damaging impact and loss of integrity. However, a major change in a site or feature of local importance is not precluded from this category.
- Large: These beneficial or adverse effects are considered to be very important considerations and are likely to be material in the planning process.
- Moderate: These beneficial or adverse effects may be important, but are not likely to be key factors in the planning process. Their cumulative effects may, however, be relevant if they lead to an increase in the overall adverse effect on a particular feature.
- Slight: These beneficial or adverse effects may be raised as local factors but are unlikely to be critical issues in the planning process.

- Neutral: No effects or those that are beneath levels of perception, within normal bounds of variation or within the margin of forecasting error.

The various permutations of 'magnitude of impact' and 'heritage value' will result in the following impact significances:

Heritage Value	Magnitude of Impact				
	None	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major
Very High	Neutral	Slight	Moderate/ Large	Large/Very Large	Very Large
High	Neutral	Slight	Slight/Moderate	Moderate/Large	Large/Very Large
Medium	Neutral	Neutral/ Slight	Slight	Moderate	Moderate/Large
Low	Neutral	Neutral/Slight	Neutral/ Slight	Slight	Slight/Moderate
Negligible	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral/ Slight	Neutral/ Slight	Slight

The duration of the impact is also of relevance. Short-term impacts upon a site's built heritage may arise during the construction phase of a development. There is likely to be long-term residual impacts as well once the development is completed and the site operational.

5.2 Likely Significant Effects

Potential Demolition and Construction Phase Impacts

The potential construction phase impact on surrounding historic buildings is limited to those in the immediate context of the site. It will be necessary before tender and commencement of works on site for the building contractors to agree measures to avoid any damage to Swords Castle. These measures are set out in the accompanying *JCA Recommendations for the Protection of Swords Castle*. Recommendations have also been set out by JCA for the protection of Swords Court House during the works period.

In addition, measures are to be set out and agreed by the contractor on the appropriate protections to Swords Court House during the construction phase of this project.

The principal impacts, during both Construction and Operation of the proposed development on the wider surrounding historic landscape are discussed in detail in the LVIA to be produced by Dermot Foley Landscape Architects to accompany this application.

The operational phase impacts on specific identified surrounding historic buildings are discussed below. These impacts are all of a visual nature: there will be no physical impacts on the surrounding historic buildings identified.

5.3.1 Operational Phase Impacts on Swords Castle

Swords Castle is a site of exceptional significance. Its potential to contribute to the cultural and community opportunities for Swords has been recognised by many studies, both architectural and archaeological, and clear recommendations for its future protection have been set out in the Swords Castle Conservation Plan. In addition to several decades of conservation and restoration works to the Castle, quite a radical approach to its presentation within the town centre has been taken, with a decision made to gradually remove surrounding buildings on sites where there had been a physical barrier between the town and the Castle walls for centuries.

The present proposal for a new Swords Cultural Centre and its associated public realm has evolved beyond the initial vision for the site presented in the Swords Cultural Quarter Masterplan to create a large new public space outside the Castle walls to the east, connecting the Castle visually to the town, with no physical barrier between the public buildings on the western side of North Street and the Castle. The process of creating this new relationship has already begun: the present proposal is a culmination of the vision for this new relationship.

The architectural heritage impact of the proposed Swords Cultural Centre and associated public realm must be viewed in this context. The approach here is ambitious, bringing change to an urban grain that had, over time, eclipsed the Castle and rendered it visually recessive in the urban context of Swords. The opening up of the southern end of North Street does not have an identified historic precedent, but it makes a significant leap from the gradual erosion since the late 1980's of the 19th century urban grain in this area (see Fig. 11) towards creating a fully considered environment in which the Castle's important physical presence in the town is further amplified. The architectural heritage impact of the proposed building on the Protected View of the view of Swords Castle from Main Street and Dublin Street may be regarded as slight to moderate in the context of the significantly altered historic character of this area.

The impact of the proposed change on the relationship between the exterior of the castle and the present environment on North Street may be regarded overall as being of a moderate beneficial nature. The scale and height of the proposed Swords Cultural Centre is greater than the modest structures remaining on the site, and this scale means that it is visible in views towards the Castle from some viewpoints, but the opening up of the remaining buildings at the Castle's eastern boundary provide substantial mitigation against this loss of dominance. A new visual relationship between the town, the Castle and the Round Tower beyond will be offered from the Swords Cultural Centre terrace, allowing the evolution of Swords to be read. The design and material quality of the proposed building provides further mitigation against any negative impact that may be perceived.



Figure 28: ODT

From within the Castle, the visual impact on the above ground historic structures on the site will be restricted to views towards the East. At present, the eastern elevation of the Castle walls internally has a less uniform appearance than the Northern or Western internal elevations, as work here has focused more on conservation than restoration. The remaining trees add further to this less altered appearance.

At present, the North West corner of the Fingal County Hall is visible beyond the Castle walls to the south east. The drop in level within the walls to the west reduces this visibility from that point.



Figure 29: View towards the Eastern wall from within Swords Castle

The proposed Swords Cultural Centre building will be visible beyond the Eastern Castle wall. The view below is shown from the wall walk at the south-western corner, from where it will be most visible: it will be less visible from the ground.

The magnitude of this impact may be regarded as being of a minor adverse nature. There will be a measurable change to the dominant visual relationship that the Castle presently has over the town beyond it to the east from within the walled enclosure. This dominant relationship, however, has been previously impacted by other buildings, including, to a lesser degree, Fingal County Hall, to the south east, and, to a greater degree, the Care Choice building to the south west. There are also a number of design considerations which are intended to provide mitigation against this impact.

The process undertaken by the design team, including conservation architects and archaeological consultants, during the progression of the proposed design, was led by the determination of the design architects to provide a new building which offers spaces of the highest quality and considered new visual relationships with its historic context. This ambition has throughout the process had to be balanced against the mitigation of the impact of the scale of the new building on its historic setting, particularly the Court House and Castle. The design process has been fully informed and appropriate to the sensitivity of the setting, and that the outcome achieved is intended to bring a new building of a quality which will enhance the collective architectural experience of Swords and the surrounding area.

5.3.2 Operational Phase Impacts on Swords Court House

The arrangement of the proposed Swords Cultural Centre around three sides of Swords Court House was central to the design brief for this project. While a building of greater height and scale than the compact Court House was required by the brief, respect for the form, independence and continuing functionality of the court House was central to the design process.

The visual impact on the architectural heritage qualities of the Court House from the proposed Swords Cultural Centre may be regarded as of a slight to moderate adverse nature. The Court House is of less significance than the Castle from an architectural heritage perspective. While the design of the Court House is relatively modest, substantial effort has been made in the design of the new building to mitigating any negative visual impacts upon the Court House. The new building has been held back on all three sides so that the Court House remains an entirely independent structure. The planes of the new building where they visually most closely meet the Court House respond to and respect its own simple geometry. The new building does not attempt to imitate or replicate any element of the Court House, allowing it to remain clearly legible. The quality of design and material finish of the proposed new building is such that it provides very substantial additional mitigation against the moderate negative visual impact resulting from its location and scale.



Figure 30: The proposed building



Figure 31: Plan of the Court House showing its independence

The historical research undertaken by JCA, both cartographic and photographic, indicates that while the Court House was a public building of political and social significance when built, its visual presence was more modest than some similar buildings due to its scale and setting on a recessed site some distance from the Main Street. The site chosen by Fingal County Council for an ambitious building in terms of scale and provision of services to Swords and the wider area has necessitated a design approach to the proposed building's expression that creates a sophisticated new building that responds creatively to its setting. The site available for this project is constricted and sensitive, but from the outset of the present project, the proposed building has been very fundamentally informed by and designed in response to its location, which has resulted in a proposal with an acceptable impact on its historic setting.

A minor removal of historic building fabric from the Court House is proposed in order to create universal access for users of the Court House. This has been requested by the Courts Service. The set of two granite steps to the southern entrance door to the Court House are to be removed and the pavement in this area sloped to meet the entrance threshold. This intervention will have a moderately negative impact on the historic fabric architectural heritage character of the Court House. The decision to create the accessible entrance to the southern door, rather than the northern door, where there are more steps, owing to the sloping nature of the site, is intended to mitigate against a more extensive loss of building fabric.

The proposed project does not place any restrictions or demands on the present internal form of the Court House, permitting a conservation-led approach to be taken to its re-use should that opportunity arise in future.

To the north of the Court House, it is proposed to remove an area of rubble stone wall and adjoining latrine which form the boundary with adjoining properties to the north. While this boundary line is consistent with the site boundary when the Court House was first constructed, there are no details to suggest that the existing wall was built at the same time as the Court House and it is not presently integral to the context of the Court House as it is hidden from view, and this is likely to have always been the case. To the rear of the Court House, there is a small shed of concrete construction, containing electrical meters, which does not appear on early maps of the Court House. It is proposed to remove this structure. The impact of the removal of the boundary wall and later shed on the historic character of the Court House may be regarded as neutral.

Cumulative Heritage Impact

Following completion of the proposed building, the potential impact of most significance is that of the new building on the existing setting of Swords Court House and Swords Castle. In addition to the factors of scale and height, materials used on the exterior of the proposed building have the potential to impact on the character of the area.

All effects are permanent and long-term (with the exception of the construction phase). The predicted impacts of the proposed development have been discussed above and can be summarised as follows:

The site of the proposed development is visible in a number of views of the existing buildings in the immediate vicinity, and the increase in height proposed for the new building will increase the visual impact of the development on the surrounding historic setting.

Mitigation Measures

The mitigation of visual impacts to the Court House and Swords Castle has been integral to the design of the development.

Mitigation against the impact of the scale of the new development is provided by the use of setbacks and changes in parapet line and materials of construction in the new building elements, which visually subdivide the elevations into a series of separate elements more appropriate to the surrounding streetscapes.

All new elements have been designed in a contemporary manner and will allow the existing historic building to be easily read within the new development.

While the proposed materials for the new building do not attempt to reproduce any architectural details of the historic buildings, allowing the historic Court House to retain its own character and significance, the massing of the west elevation of the North Block mimics the proportions of the courthouse's central section to allow the two to read as a pair.

Construction Mitigation

The proposed scheme has been developed in consultation with JCA Architects, who are acting as conservation architects. The following mitigation measures are attainable outcomes of the scheme.

The historic building elements immediately adjoining the site will be protected during demolition works. Method statements for this protection have been prepared by the conservation architect and accompany this application.

Protection or Conservation repair work to historic fabric to be retained should be carried out by specialist contractors with relevant experience of working with historic buildings.

It is noted that Bernadette Goslin's 1987 *Swords Heritage Project's Architectural Inventory of Swords* (Irish Architectural Archive) shows the buildings to be demolished located on the Eastern side of North Street in very poor condition or undergoing very substantial internal works at that time. It is unlikely that there remains significant historic building fabric that would be apparent from external or internal visual inspection here. However, the enabling works period does offer an opportunity for archaeological supervision of demolition and site clearance during which earlier fabric or remains of structures on the site could be identified. It is recommended that the structures proposed for demolition are fully assessed for underlying significance and properly recorded as part of an archaeological brief to record and monitor the demolition of these structures as part of enabling works.

Bibliography

Several on-line resources also proved useful, notably National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (www.buildingsofireland.ie), the Dictionary of Irish Architects (www.dia.ie) National Library photographic collection (www.nli.ie/digital-photographs.aspx), and University College Dublin map archive (<http://digital.ucd.ie/maps/explorer>).

Other specific sources include:

Goslin, Bernadette, *Swords Heritage Project Architectural Inventory of Swords*, Irish Architectural Archive, 1987

Reeners, Roberta (ed.), *Swords Castle Conservation Plan*, Fingal County Council, 2014.

Burns, O'Connor, O'Riordan (eds.) *Ireland's Court Houses*, Irish Architectural Archive, 2019.