

Part One:

Health Check

July 2021





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Executive Summary

This Health Check for Swords is the first element of the analysis undertaken as part of the wider Sustainable Swords project. The purpose of Sustainable Swords is to produce a place-making strategy focused on the strategic regeneration and compact, sustainable development of Swords. The goals are to increase the resilience of the local economy, and to provide for an enhanced, accessible, inclusive, child-friendly, and healthy urban environment. The ambition for Sustainable Swords is to form a coordinating device that will establish a package of measures and projects that are prioritised, programmed, and impactful. The aim is to identify a coordinated range of ‘pipeline’ projects that can be funded as part of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF).

Swords is a dynamic town that has rapidly grown in recent decades. This growth is anticipated to continue. This strategy focuses specifically on placemaking within the town centre; aiming to reverse the historic shift away from Main Street that commenced in the early 2000s to facilitate better placemaking and a more resilient town centre. The Sustainable Swords project aims to facilitate a sustainable approach to development and placemaking in Swords. This is about making a better place to live, work and visit; positioning Swords for the future as a more attractive, vibrant, and resilient town.

The health check of Swords town centre is based in-depth analysis by a range of consultant teams. This includes:

- **Socio-economic profile:** detailed analysis was undertaken to form a baseline for the town against a range of key metrics (2.1).
- **Town Character and Urban Realm:** an assessment of the public realm quality, town centre uses and vacancy with and associated issues and opportunities for enhancement was undertaken to inform both this health check and the Public Realm Strategy (2.2).
- **Permeability, Accessibility, and Transport:** here the focus was on existing provision and opportunities for enhancement. This includes a detailed walking and cycling audit of the town centre, a summary of existing and proposed public transport infrastructure, and traffic and parking with a separate study undertaken to inform understanding. (2.3).
- **Community Infrastructure:** the focus of research was upon education, community facilities, social capital, activity and partnerships, and community enterprise with the strong Swords community role highlighted (2.4).
- **Natural Environment and Built Heritage:** detailed analysis of the natural environment is based on a preliminary ecological appraisal of Swords. Built heritage assessment is based on an audit of heritage assets in the town centre, as a well as an overview of the history of the evolution of Swords. An Archaeological, Architectural and Cultural Heritage Constraints Study provided valuable detail on this aspect (2.5).
- **Economy and Retail:** this area examined business support and promotion as well as the wider economic ecosystem for the town including rents, representation, and the evening economy (2.6).
- **Tourism:** This is an economic opportunity for Swords and research focuses on existing attractions and activities, accommodation, as well as promotion and marketing (2.7).
- **Leisure and Recreation:** associated infrastructure plays an important role in strengthening communities and research focuses on open space, town centre amenities, and sports facilities (2.8).

The health check provides a summary of the research undertaken for each of these areas. Detailed findings are provided in an associated Technical Appendix. Further detailed research is being undertaken by project teams in relation to public realm and transportation, with separate strategies for each of these areas to be produced as part of this project.

The health check has been further informed by extensive stakeholder engagement including an online public and business survey, and a wide range of one to one strategic conversations, with a summary provided in section 3.0. The project team would like to sincerely thank all those who took part for your involvement and time.

The aim of this plan is to increase the resilience of the local economy and to provide for an enhanced, accessible, inclusive, child-friendly, and healthy urban environment. The strategic priorities outlined hereafter identify new opportunities for Swords to achieve this plans goals. By carefully considering the combined qualitative analysis of the physical assets and condition of the town and, the quantitative baseline data, the opinions and advice provided by consultees, as well as national and international good practice in placemaking and the future role of town centres the project team have developed a list of strategic priorities that are based on solid evidence, voices from the community and that are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

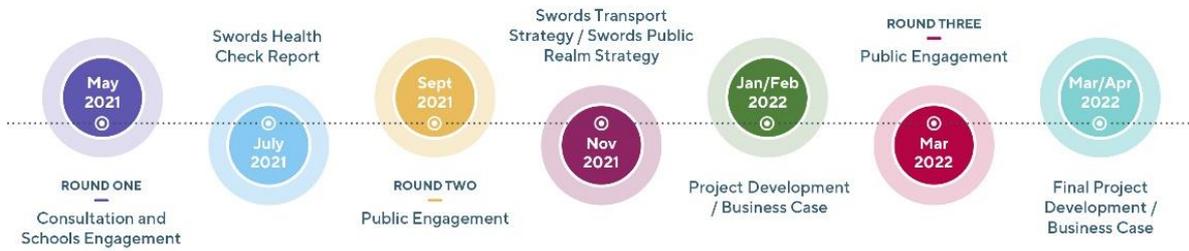
Strategic Priorities are framed by 6 themes.



Recommendations outlined in this report are suggestions informed by professional experience, best practice examples and by engagement with key stakeholders. It is hoped that they can inspire more people and businesses to get involved with Sustainable Swords to bring real and tangible changes for Swords and its community.

This Health Check forms Part 1 of the work programme. A Public Realm Strategy and Transport Strategy will form Parts 2 and 3 and will be completed by November 2021. The fourth element will include a business case evaluation of key transformative projects identified during the study. The project will conclude by March 2022.

Sustainable Swords Timeline



A town is never complete and its never stops changing, Swords will experience a lot of change as it aims to accommodate 100,000 people by 2035. The challenge is to ensure that the change that happens within Swords is a positive process that will make Swords a better place to live, work and visit, a more vibrant town for all and a good practice example of a sustainable approach to urban development.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Sustainable Swords project

This Health Check for Swords is the **first element of the analysis undertaken as part of the wider Sustainable Swords project**. The purpose of Sustainable Swords is to produce a place-making strategy focused on the strategic regeneration and compact, sustainable development of Swords. The goals are to **increase the resilience of the local economy** and to **provide for an enhanced, accessible, inclusive, child-friendly and healthy urban environment**.

The experienced project team, led by KPMG Future Analytics and Turner & Townsend, include Nicholas De Jong Associates, DBFL Consulting Engineers, Howley Hayes Conservation Architects, Irish Archaeological Consultancy (IAC), An Taisce's Environmental Education Unit's Green School's Travel Officers, and leading engineering consultancy Systra.

The Sustainable Swords initiative is an output of strategic documents, including '*Your Swords – An Emerging City - Strategic Vision 2035*' and the current *Fingal Development Plan 2017-2023*. The vision of the former is to consolidate and strengthen the historic town centre of Swords; whilst the latter describes several specific objectives for the town centre within the context of a plan-led development strategy. The Health Check is informed by further relevant strategic policy including: *Swords Castle Conservation Plan; Swords Castle Cultural Quarter Masterplan; South Fingal Transport Study; Swords Masterplans Part A: Masterplans for Barrysparks & Crowscastle; Fosterstown; & Estuary West May 2019; and SWORDS Masterplan Jan 2009*.

The ambition for Sustainable Swords is to form a coordinating device that will establish a package of measures and projects that are prioritised, programmed and impactful, and that critically will enable the coordination of investment and decision-making across multiple stakeholders, maximising private sector engagement and identifying synergies and opportunities. This strategy must not only be grounded in thorough evidential research, of which this Health Check forms part, but also to build upon and be cognisant of previous work undertaken for Swords, and research and consultation undertaken to inform previous plans and strategies. This includes the Swords Castle Cultural Quarter (SCQ) project as well as wider town centre objectives outlined in *Your Swords Strategic Vision*. **The aim is to identify a coordinated range of 'pipeline' projects that can be funded as part of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)**.

Swords is a dynamic town that has rapidly grown in recent decades due to its proximity to Dublin Airport, the city centre and major local investment and growth of employment hubs such as nearby Dublin Airport, the Pavilions Shopping Centre and business parks along the R132 (including Airside, Swords Business Park and Swords Business Campus). This growth is anticipated to continue, albeit there is currently a heavy reliance on the implementation of MetroLink to catalyse development opportunities within the 'Metro Economic Corridor'.

This strategy focuses specifically on placemaking within the town centre and aims to reverse the historic shift away from Main Street that commenced in the early 2000s (as demonstrated the relatively high turnover and vacancy rates and movement of smaller premises from North Street-Main Street towards the Pavilions and business parks along the R132 corridor) to facilitate better placemaking and a more resilient town centre. Sustainable Swords will facilitate an accessible, inviting public realm that links with the natural and historic context of the Ward River Valley Park and Swords

Castle and will aim to improve permeability and enhance the opportunities for local innovation and economic development.

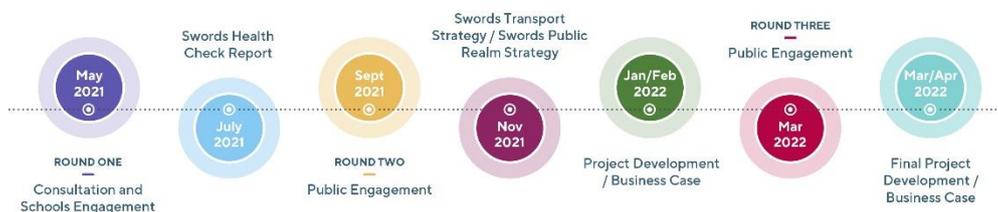
1.2 Approach

The Sustainable Swords project aims to facilitate a sustainable approach to development and placemaking in Swords. The project team have drawn on the local context such as social cohesion and facilitate nature-based solutions that would leverage off existing assets such as the Ward River and adjacent ecological corridor in the nearby green spaces to improve the public realm. Sustainable communities are economically, environmentally, and socially healthy and resilient.

Challenges to sustainability are met through integrated solutions rather than through a fragmented approach and as such we envisage that this project is needed to formulate a comprehensive review of the current status of Swords in terms of sustainability (by way of the Town Centre Health Check), to understand local aspirations and preferences in order to develop a coordinated strategy for prioritising sustainable development and placemaking in Swords town centre.

The project team have undertaken and will continue to undertake extensive consultation to inform the Sustainable Swords project. This Health Check forms Part 1 of the work programme. A Public Realm Strategy and Transport Strategy will form Parts 2 and 3 and will be completed by November 2021. The fourth element will include a business case evaluation of key transformative projects identified during the study. The project will conclude by March 2022.

Sustainable Swords Timeline



1.3 Study Area

The strategic vision focuses on the creation of a coherent and legible spatial structure to meet the needs of economic development and population growth in an environmentally and socially sound way. Given the critical role that Swords as the County Town plays in the local community and the wider region, it is imperative that the study area, particularly Main Street and associated pedestrian linkages, contributes towards the quality of life of the local residents whilst respecting the natural environment and historic context of the area. **This is about making a better place to live, work and visit; positioning Swords for the future as a more attractive, vibrant, and resilient town.**

The study area for Sustainable Swords, as shown in Figure 1-1, encompasses Swords Town centre and is bound by the R132 to the East of the town going North as far as the roundabout for the R125 and going South down to the Dublin Road roundabout. To the west the study area extends out to parts of Forest Road and includes parts of the Ward River Valley Park and the SK Biotek Factory.

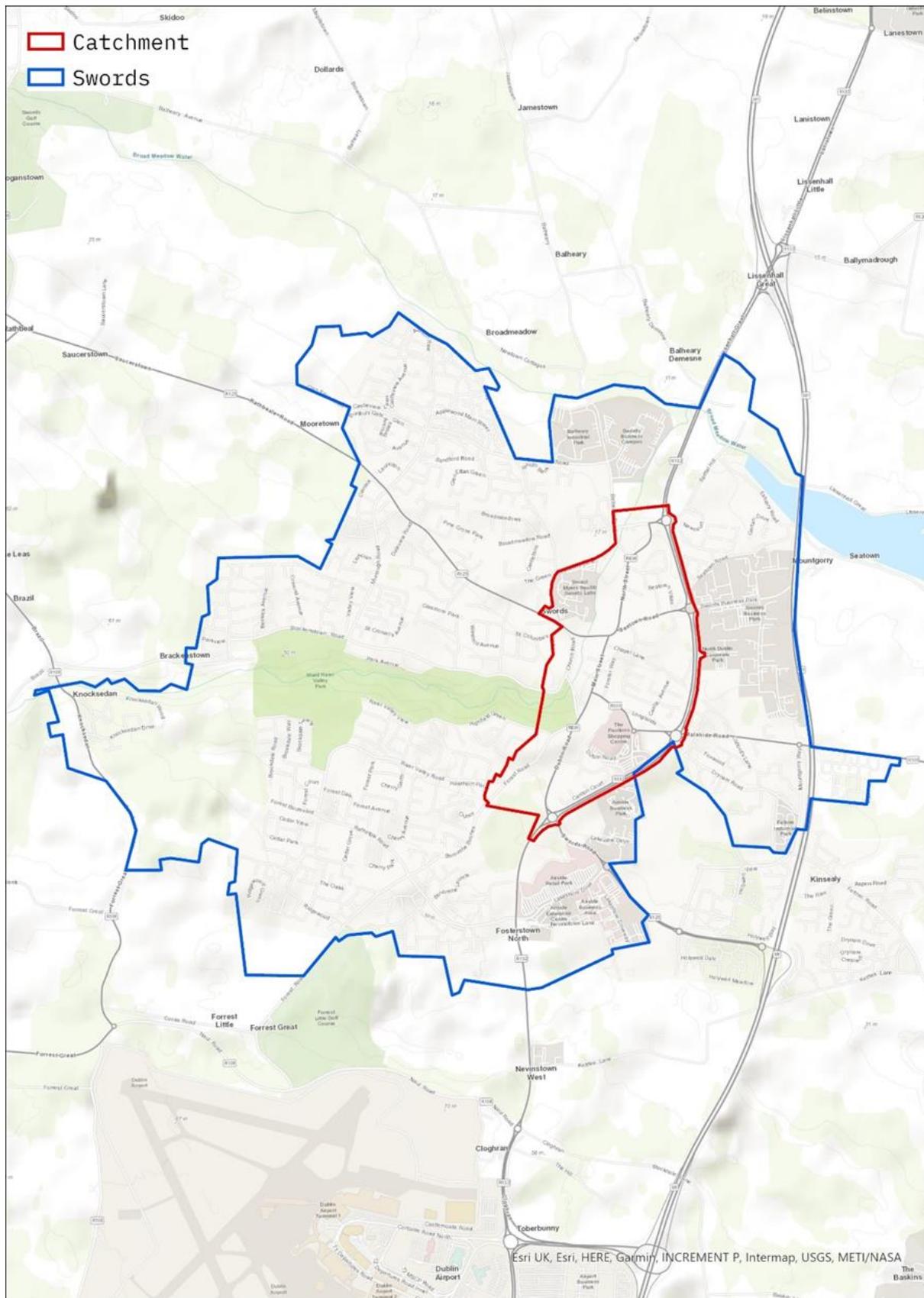


Figure 1-1 Swords Settlement and Town Centre Catchment

1.4 The SDGs – framework for analysis

Sustainable development means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were published by the United Nations in 2015 are the most comprehensive call for action and pathway towards achieving sustainable development by 2030. There are 17 goals as illustrated in figure 1-2, each of which are interrelated and underlaid by a comprehensive list of targets (169 in total) that are measured by specific indicators. Ireland has also published a Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018-2020 to provide a whole-of-government approach to implementation these goals.



Figure 1-2 Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Swords is aligned with the SDG's and seeks to achieve lasting outcomes for the society and the planet (i.e. environment within Swords and people who visit and are within Swords) whilst recognising the symbiotic relationship between physical and ecological systems, human activities and social capital (particularly within the Swords Castle – Ward River Valley Park corridor and along Main Street). We have undertaken a benchmarking exercise to compare against the SDGs and seek to deliver outcomes that align with the SDG's, with particular attention given to SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals to ensure a people-friendly and partnership-driven approach to deliver 'Sustainable Swords'.

This alignment with the SDGs and the benchmarking exercise as part of the Town Centre Health Check is particularly important given the important and creative recent local efforts that align with the SDGs and support a Sustainable Swords. For example, environmental initiatives by local businesses have

been promoted by the Tidy Towns Committee¹, energy efficiency, plastic-free and waste reduction efforts from local sports club have identified through the Swords Club Sustainability Competition that was run by Fingal County Council². Much great work has also been promoted by and facilitated through Fingal County Council including delivery of the Swords Castle Cultural Quarter and associated events including the Christmas Market, the Fingal Fleadh and Summer Festivals, the recent €340,000 investment into electrical vehicles for the Council fleet, the audits of Walkability and age friendly streets (in December 2017) and open space and recreation facilities (work ongoing) along with the recently launched #RestartFingal initiative to improve the public realm and 'See Something, Say Something' text service in relation to antisocial behaviour. Most recently some of the parking spaces along Main Street were converted and used by local businesses to accommodate outdoor diners in response to the COVID-19 public health restrictions.

Further, major businesses have also demonstrated their capacity to contribute towards Sustainable Swords, the Community Fund from Dublin Airport³ has provided funding to many local clubs and organisations and the owners of the Pavilions Shopping Centre have committed to becoming net positive in carbon emissions, water, resource use and socio-economic impacts by 2030⁴. There are also a range of relevant recent and upcoming transport and social infrastructure projects including BusConnects, MetroLink, the R132 upgrade, the recently approved Broadmeadows Greenway and recently completed social housing at Holymount, new nursing home between Bridge Street and Church Road and opening and expansion of Swords Community College since 2017.



¹ <https://swordstidytowns.com/sustainable-swords/>

² <https://www.fingal.ie/sports-club-sustainabilitycompetition-2020>

³ <https://www.dublinairport.com/corporate/community-and-sustainability/community-fund>

⁴ <http://sustainability.hammerson.com/347/our-netpositive-targets.html>

2 Health Check Analysis

2.1 Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile Summary

Limitations and Assumptions

All relevant assumptions and limitations in relation to data have been documented herein and the assessment has been undertaken using primarily secondary data (i.e. Census and POWSCAR 2016, Geodirectory etc.). Unless otherwise stated, it can be assumed that all data herein relates to April 2016 (i.e. the date of the latest Census).

This section consists of a summary of the demographic and socio-economic profile of Swords based on the collation of a sound, evidence-based foundation upon which this health check reports findings and recommendations are based on. It incorporates a comprehensive data analysis of the socio-economic character of the town, which is subject of this health check; and a review of the existing planning and policy framework which may influence each of the recommendations.

For the purposes of this report KPMG Future Analytics used the Swords Specific Object Area Boundary from the Development Plan 2017 – 2023. The CSO Small Areas were used for the socio-economic profiles and some assumptions were made in this process (i.e. Small Areas that overlapped the boundary but with most of the green space or agricultural land omitted.) For the 2011 - 2016 comparison, the Small Areas were not comparable, due to changes made by the CSO but the closest match available was chosen. All references to Swords will be in relation this study area boundary, illustrated in Figure 2-1.

The baseline analysis for this summary can be found in the associated Technical Appendix.

Data has been collected and analysed on the following:

- Population (current and future)
- Socio-economic profile (economy, employment, education etc.)
- Health and well being
- Commuting and Transport
- Households and Accommodation
- Settlement size (existing and potential)

We have utilised established and reliable data sources including for example, CSO, POWSCAR, GeoDirectory, Pobal, SICAP data, Rates data, Pobal Deprivation Index, and any specialist studies carried out by or on behalf of Fingal County Council, relevant NGOs, or key industry stakeholder groups provided. Key components include population and age composition, household types, population catchment, analysis of the structure and character of the local economy, principal socio-economic activities and sectoral strengths, workforce / employment characteristics, retail diversification, vacancy rates, and tourism and recreation assets. As part of this health check, a review of Sword's historical background has been undertaken. This has facilitated a greater understanding of the settlement and assisted in identifying important cultural and heritage components.



Figure 2-1 Socio-economic analysis study area

Population

- In 2016 Fingal was the third most populous local authority in Ireland
- Swords increased its population by 5.9% between 2011 and 2016 to 44,446 in 2016
- Swords is identified as a Key Metropolitan Town in the EMRA RSES with Fingal County Council's Growth Strategy aiming to accommodate 100,000 people in Swords by 2035.

Age

- Swords has a relatively young population, in the context of Fingal which has the youngest population of any local authority in Ireland
- The average age of Swords was 32.8 years in 2016, below the state average of 37.4 years
- Approx. 69.7% (30,972 persons) are aged between 15-64 (working age) which broadly represents the labour force in Swords.

Nationality

- Swords has a diverse population with 24% of its residents born outside Ireland in 2016, higher than the national average of 17% (2016)
- Non-Irish nationals equated to 20.3% of residents in Swords which is significantly higher than the national average of 11.3%

Education

- The population of Swords has a very high level of education with 41.5% of the population having a level 6 qualification or more.
- 41.5% of Swords population have attained up to the leaving certificate.

Employment and Socio-economic Status

- The socio-economic group with the largest share of the total population in Swords was those identified as non-manual workers which comprised 25.7% of the population in 2016.
- In terms of industry stated work, 26.7% of those in employment listed 'Commerce and Trade' as their sector, followed by 'Professional Services' with 20.9%.
- Within the Study Area, there are important employment hubs such as Fingal County Council Offices, Pavilions Shopping Centre, SK Biotek and various social infrastructure, offices and retail establishments.
- There are 805 NACE coded businesses identified in Swords as of 2020 Q4 (GeoDirectory) with the primary industry being 'Wholesale and Retail Trade; Vehicle repairs' with 209 businesses (26%).

Health and Wellbeing

- In 2016, 88.9% of residents identified as being in either 'Very good' or 'Good' health status, while 1.2% identified as being in 'bad' health status.
- The disability rate for Swords in 2016 was 10.1%, which is below the national average of 13.5%.

Commuting and Transport

- In 2016, CSO data shows that there is a high reliance on private transport within Swords with 54% of people using a car to commute, either as a driver or passenger
- 15.2% of people in Swords travel by foot while only 2% of commuter's cycle
- The average commute time in Swords in 2016 was 30.3 minutes
- Swords has the second highest concentration of workers commuting to the settlement for work in the county.

Households and Accommodation

- There 14,765 private households in Swords as of 2016 with an average household size of 3.0 which aligns to that of Fingal County (3.03).
- Households in Swords are predominantly comprised of 3 persons or more with 58.2% of households containing at least 3 persons.
- Housing in Swords is predominantly units associated with family living such as houses and bungalows with 80.7% of households living in these types of units.
- In 2016, Swords had a low vacancy rate with only 4.3% of dwellings within the area classed as vacant.

Settlement Size/Catchment (Existing/Potential)

- Swords has 10.3% of all lands zoned for industrial activity within Fingal County Council equating to 470 hectares.
- Swords has the single largest residential capacity of any settlement in Fingal.

2.2 Town Character and Urban Realm

Public realm enhancements can facilitate inward investment and generate attractive environments for those that live locally. By catalysing these local opportunities and minimising outflow, a more resilient local economy will be harnessed. Sustainable Swords would help identify and provide such opportunities whilst balancing the environmental needs to facilitate future development.

Measures identified through this work will seek to support the SDGs, be prioritised in accordance with the obligations of the relevant policy and serve the needs of the local community to ensure a **thriving, vibrant consolidated town centre** and attractive urban environment that maximises the potential of the local context without exploiting the natural resources. The aim is to enhance the town centre for all, without negatively impacting upon the character and heritage of the town.

2.2.1 Swords Town Character and Urban Realm Context

The review of Townscape Character and Urban Realm largely focusses on the existing conditions along the historic Main Street and North Street, forming the main commercial/retail core of Swords, and the key links from here to adjacent residential, educational and employment areas. This central spine of Swords Town Centre comprises several core areas that contribute to differences in character and use.

The Retail Core of Main Street and its associated side streets contain most of the small-scale retail/services functions, with large scale comparison and convenience retail extending to the Pavilions Shopping Centre site to the south-east. The built form of Main Street varies considerably along its length and along each side of the street. The western edge is mostly low-rise in scale and characterised by historic narrow frontage two-storey terraced buildings with a variation in heights and roofscape, providing a continuous building line of townscape interest. The eastern edge of Main Street is more loosely defined by numerous recent infill buildings, on larger amalgamated plots and with building heights increasing to 3-5 storeys. This creates a denser built form, particularly at the northern and southern ends, which detracts from the overall character of the street.

The mixture of shops and commercial activities along Main Street ensures a vibrant but congested area, with heavy traffic flows and on-street parking dominating the public realm. **The associated clutter from vehicle requirements detract from the townscape character and form barriers to safe and accessible pedestrian (and cycle) movement.**

North Street is characterised by a more commercial focus, with offices and small-scale retail outlets interspersed with a mix of terraced housing, public houses, apartments and a hotel. Medium size offices are increasingly attracted to locate here. Similarly, Dublin Street accommodates a range of small-scale commercial units, as well as residential uses.

The Civic Core of Swords Town Centre is located at the junction of Main Street and North Street, and contains the dominant uses of the Courthouse, Fingal County Council offices, and the historic administrative centre of Swords Castle. **The settings to these key heritage buildings are presently undermined** by car parking, traffic paraphernalia and a dense stand of evergreen oak trees. The associated public realm is also poor.

To the west and one block back from Main Street, the Ward River provides a currently underutilised recreational spine to Swords Town Centre, linking into the Town Park at the northern end of the street, close to the Civic Core, and ultimately terminating in the Broadmeadow Estuary. **The Ward River**

Valley Park extends westwards to form an important open space resource near the Town Centre.

There are **considerable opportunities for creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment throughout the area** through the development of comprehensive public realm strategy that reinforces the different character zones and will facilitate better placemaking and a more resilient town centre, such as traffic calming and the widening of pavements along Main Street and North Street; improved public realm around Swords Castle to reinforce its function as a Civic Quarter; improvements to the junction of Main Street and Malahide Road; improved connectivity between the Metro, the Pavilions Shopping Centre and Main Street through up-graded surfaces and the use of well signed pedestrian routes; enhanced links to provide a safer, more permeable network to schools, shopping areas, cultural and community facilities; up-grading of the Ward River spine; and providing for a consistently high standard of landscaping (both hard and soft) of the public realm including significant tree planting and biodiversity features.

2.2.2 [Public Realm Quality](#)

Footpaths

Currently, approximately 55% of the total area of Main Street is dedicated to vehicle use and the remaining 45% for pedestrian use. Along the length of North Street the vehicle dominance increases to around 60% of the area. Pedestrian activity is generally highest along Main Street between the junction with North Street (the Civic Core) and the entrance to Pavilions Shopping Centre, and then decreases beyond the retail/commercial core. In accordance with DMURS guidelines relating to 'Pedestrian Activity and Footway Widths', a minimum 3m wide footpath space is required for small groups to pass comfortably within areas of moderate to high pedestrian activity, and minimum 4m width space is required for larger groups to pass comfortably within areas of high pedestrian activity.

On applying the 3m recommended minimum standard to North Street, the footpaths along the eastern side of the street are currently adequate in width, while footpaths to the west side are currently inadequate in the vicinity of Swords Community Park and at the junction with Main Street. Given the higher pedestrian activity along Main Street, a minimum 4m wide footpath is desired, and achieved along most of the length of the street with a few exceptions such as footpaths on both sides near Town Centre Mall and outside Cooldriona Court south of Main Street. In both locations, the space available is limited for outdoor sitting/dining opportunities and other spill-out activities that could otherwise help animate the street.

Despite availability of appropriate widths for pedestrians, the quality of walking experience is less than enjoyable. Large parts of town centre footpaths need surface upgrade since the paving material has deteriorated over the years and mars the visual quality of the space. Moreover, **clutter due to location of street furniture, light poles and other obstructions creates unpleasant user experience.** It is further exacerbated because bus stops in two locations (Forest Road & Seatown Villas stops) are located on narrow footpath, with poles & street furniture obstructing pedestrian movement. There are multiple pedestrian crossing locations, but location of parking, street furniture and general visual clutter can sometimes lead to blocking views and create unsafe conditions for pedestrians.

Many locations in the Town centre have surface finish as concrete, patchy in some locations and can be improved with high quality materials that respond to the character of the town. Further, the street

lacks any type of high quality or feature paving outside important locations such as Castle, Courthouse, Carnegie Library which can help with wayfinding and adding visual interest. **Creating a pleasant foreground to the Castle would also be beneficial as a space for visitors to stop, observe and experience the heritage of Swords.**



Figure 2-2 Variable finishes to Main Street and Laneways

On the Main Street, businesses with spill-over type frontages often benefit from extra footpath space that can be used to create a designated 'strip' zone. In the case of Swords, despite opportunities, **the existing public realm does not cater for outdoor sitting/ dining outside many spill-over type businesses.**

In addition to the Main Street/ North Street footpaths, there are multiple laneways connecting the Centre with Ward Riverfront on west and car parks on both east and west of the town. Even though these laneways help in making Swords a more permeable town, these spaces are also dominated by cars, leaving either narrow or no footpath for pedestrians. Additionally, the surface treatment for most of these lanes is designed for cars, and hence are not used with interest by pedestrians.

Shopfronts

The shops in Town Centre are a mix of heritage buildings and modern structures. **Most of the older buildings in Town Centre are distinctive with local and traditional construction material and methods** such as exposed limestone, brick and stucco. Some recent buildings also use primarily brick for the façade. There are numerous examples of such architecture on Main Street & North Street that have been altered and obscured with poor shopfronts, signage and paint. Additionally, **poor shopfront designs, advertising banners and the street furniture configuration add to the visual clutter in the public realm.** Shopfront details are mostly inconsistent and contribute little to the vitality of the streets. There are few examples of spill-out spaces that could otherwise help to animate the general character of the area.



Figure 2-3 Mixed style shopfronts on Main Street

Street Furniture

In terms of quantity, there is a **general lack of seating opportunities in Town Centre**. There are multiple designs of benches on the Main Street and they are few and far between. Bins and bollards seem to be sufficiently located, in fact multiple pedestrian crossing locations have barriers that add to visual clutter and create spaces for businesses to park their bins permanently. Most street furniture is concentrated on north of Main Street. The south of Main Street and the North Street lack in provision of seats but have well distributed bins.



Figure 2-4 Bins and Poles

There is no overall theme for street furniture, both for design and locations. The material is not consistent as stainless steel, timber and painted finish are observed for different items. In some locations the bins, poles and signage are located in the middle of walking paths, obstructing pedestrians and creating safety hazards.

Part of Main Street close to Castle has good heritage style streetlights, with the rest of the Town Centre lit using utilitarian streetlights with overhead cables that further add to visual clutter.

Vegetation

The Town centre in Swords has a good overall provision of street trees, primarily in the north of Main Street close to the Castle. Most of the trees in this location are moderate to good quality and help in creating framed views towards the Castle. However, **the south of Main Street lacks vegetation despite having some areas with wide footpaths**. Further, the trees are limited to one side of the road, hence fail to create avenues for the street. On North Street, most trees are located on east side of the road and are of low to moderate quality.

There are multiple instances of asphalt being used in root protection area, taking over majority of walking surface. **The streetscape would benefit from better solutions to address this surface balancing the tree safety and public space requirement.**



Figure 2-5 Asphalt Surface above root zones

Apart from trees, not many instances of other type of planting are observed. A few isolated concrete planters are observed outside Community Park entrance, and in some locations south of Main Street. These planters are not coherent in design and do not contribute much to soften the streetscape.

Infrastructure including services

Within the Town Centre, there are **multiple instances where the ESB mini pillars and other utility cabinets are in the footpath area and may cause obstruction to movement of pedestrians.**

Further, these add to visual clutter. Except the north part of Main Street, there are overhead cables criss-crossing the streets across the town.

Signage

Most signage for visitors in cars is a standard design with clear black lettering on white background. In addition, there are street name signs in green and white that are clearly seen.



Figure 2-6 Signage

On the other hand, two types of signage are observed for pedestrians. The signs directing towards Fingal Tourism Centre are on standard heritage brown colour. However, the text and design is not seen as consistent across various signboards. Further, the last sign at the Mainscourt lane marking direction is completely different from standard signage.



Figure 2-7 Three different designs for Tourism Centre Signage

Finger post signage seen for names of lanes add to the existing clutter on footpaths and are not very legible due to lack of contrast. A plaque with clear lettering in contrasting colour installed on laneway wall could improve visibility.

2.2.3 [Vibrancy](#)

The public realm contributes to 'liveability' by providing space for social interaction and activities, as well as a desirable place for living and visiting. **The quality of the public realm is recognised as a**

significant factor in generating business confidence, local community pride and as a catalyst for private sector investment in urban areas.

In addition to the businesses on Main Street, the Pavilions Shopping Centre attracts many people to the Town Centre. Further, **most popular cafes and restaurants are in the south part of Main Street making it the busiest part of the town.**

The north part, closer to the Castle, is dominated by retail and other businesses with few restaurants/pubs. In this area, despite availability of wide footpaths, they are not utilised in an efficient way to animate the public realm. **The proximity of Castle & Swords Community Park does attract visitors to this area. However, the footpaths seem ill equipped to cater to the footfall.**

There is potential to create a foreground plaza for Castle as part of Cultural Quarter which will create an attractive urban public space for all, bringing in more people.

2.2.4 Town Centre Uses and Vacancy/Dereliction

Building on the latest Geodirectory land use and vacancy data, we compiled a comprehensive survey of land uses, vacancy and dereliction within the Swords town centre study area.

Swords Town Centre uses can be seen in Figure 2-8, the primary use is 'M2 – City/Town/Village Centre, Central Area' and is surrounded by 'R2 – Existing residential'. The study area has 5 areas designated as 'S5 – Mixed/General community services/facilities uses' There are also a large number of 'G4-Active open space' within the study area.

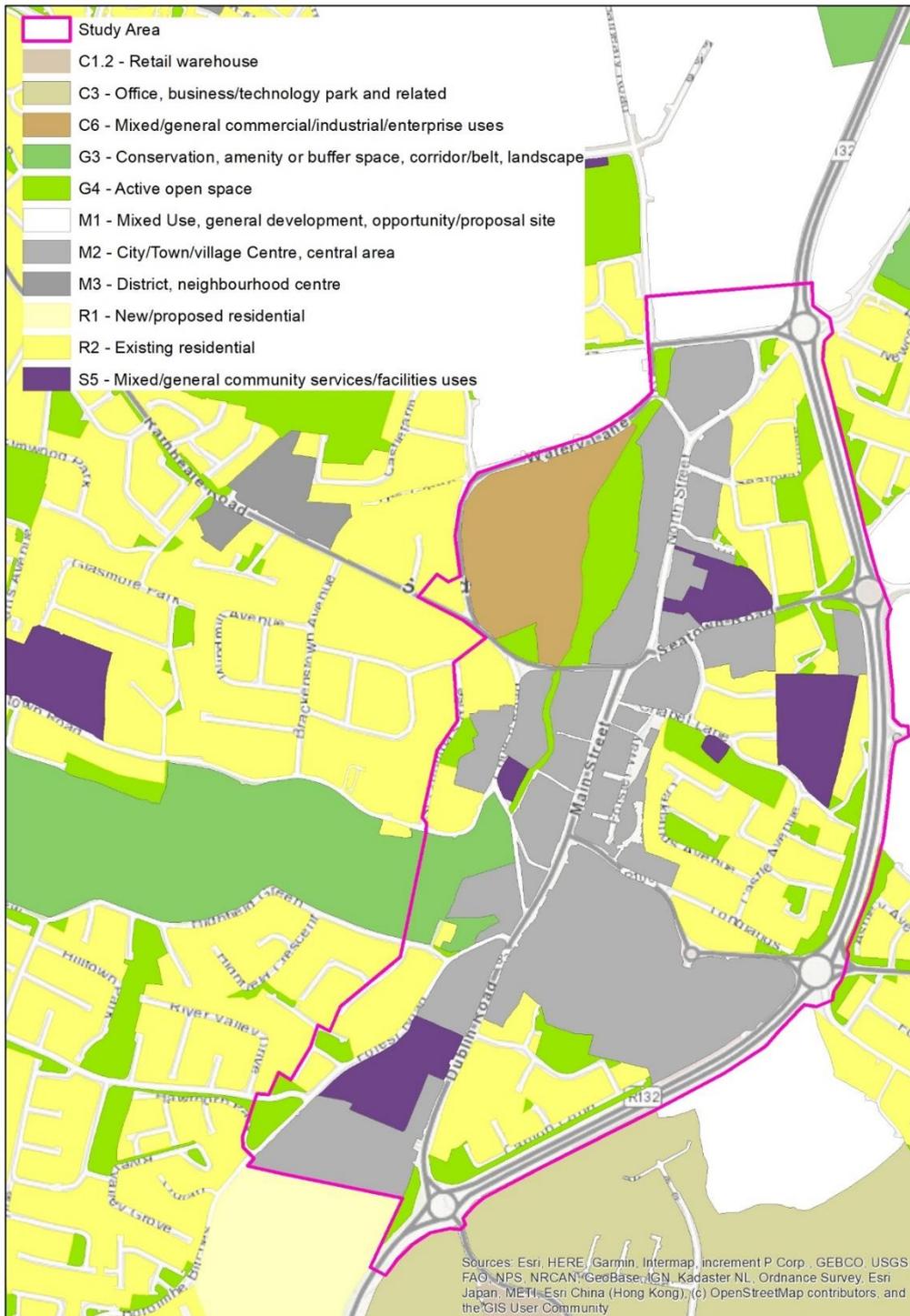


Figure 2-8 Swords Town Centre Uses

Figure 2-9 represents the vacant building / vacant site survey undertaken as part of this project, Swords **Main street has very little vacancy at the time of this study**. North street and to the South of Main street near Forester Road has pockets of vacancy in some buildings. The **only vacant site identified within Swords was the site on Malahide Road** beside the Pavilions Shopping Centre.



Figure 2-9 Swords Vacant Buildings and Vacant Sites

2.3 Permeability, Accessibility, and Transport

The strategic vision for Swords to grow into a sustainable new city with a population of 100,000 (“Your Swords, An Emerging City, Strategic Vision 2035, Fingal County Council 2008) poses many challenges from a movement and accessibility perspective. The town’s population was 43,000 according to the most recent 2016 Census; 6,000 more than the Census of 2011, making Swords one of the largest and fastest growing towns in Ireland. **The current daily generation of approximately 21,000 work trips and 10,500 school trips places a significant burden on existing transportation infrastructure and services such as bus services, the existing road network and nearby Dublin Airport.**

The **significant proposals to enhance the public transport network** through delivery of major schemes such as Metrolink and BusConnects as well as road network proposals such as the Western Distributor Road, Fosterstown Link Road and Forest Road upgrade **will deliver substantial capacity to the transport network serving Swords** but in particular those travelling external to Swords.

Current infrastructure within Swords is deficient, particularly regarding sustainable modes such as walking and cycling. Historically transit movement in the Swords area has been concentrated along the north south corridors of Main Street/Dublin Road and the R132 with the outdated layout of these roads prioritising travel via motorised vehicles. At present approximately 25% of work trips and 60% of school trips remain within Swords which could be served by the modes of walking, cycling and transport. The historic layout of Swords Village, with Main Street bisecting the residential catchments to the west from the existing and future proposed commercial and employment focussed lands to the east **poses a challenge in providing the necessary linkages that could serve this internal movement sustainably.**

The South Fingal Transport Study identifies recommendations to address these deficiencies. The design development and impacts of these movement-based recommendations are to be progressed as part of the subject study.

This includes the various primary and secondary schools (Colaiste Choilm, Fingal Community College, the Old Borough and St Colmcille’s), childcare and healthcare facilities (various locations along and adjacent to Main street) as well as the aged care and community health hubs (particularly along Bridge Street) and essential services including the Fire Station on Balheary Road, District Court on North Street and the Garda Station on the junction of the Malahide Road and Main Street. The accessibility of these establishments is therefore critical in improving placemaking and transitioning towards Sustainable Swords.

The South Fingal Transport Study identified the following in relation to the movement of the population in and around Swords:

- The population of Swords generates total work and school trips of around 21,000 and 10,500 respectively.
- Of the 21,000 work trips, nearly 5,000 stay within Swords. Over 9,000 travel to within the M50, and around 2,000 travel to the Airport (i.e. the Airport is the single largest trip attractor with 75% travelling there via car and 21% via transport).
- Of the 10,500 school trips, 6,000 stay within Swords, 2,000 travel to within the M50, and 1,600 travel to Malahide or Portmarnock.
- Of the 11,000 work and school trips that stay within Swords, 43% are active modes, 49% car, and 8% public transport.

2.3.1 [Access and Permeability](#)

Existing town centre experience

Despite being home to rich built heritage and natural amenity in the form of Ward River Valley, on a visit to the town, the wide variety of visitor attractions do not become apparent instantly. This is due to multiple factors. Firstly, **the town lacks an overall signage scheme that directs visitors to places of interest**. Many key places of tourist interest have no direction signage at all. The existing signage is not consistent in design and is sometimes located where it's not seen immediately. Secondly, **some parts of town lack distinctive character in the public realm** that can help visitors navigate easily. Creating unique experience using paving material, vegetation, street furniture leading up to landmarks would help create a visual experience journey through the town.

There is a **general lack of safe and accessible east-west permeability** between the more residential areas to the west of Main Street and the more employment-led uses to the east. To the west of Main Street, there are several areas currently used as surface car parking that could be better used to provide safe, green and traffic-free north-south alternative.

An initial Healthy Streets checklist of conditions on the Main Street found that the street was traffic dominated and cluttered providing barriers to safe and accessible pedestrian (and cycle) movement. There are several areas throughout the Study Area where footpaths are discontinuous or too narrow to support the safe movement of people. There are several instances of natural and man-made barriers including cul-de-sac residential development, lack of river crossings and community severance that must be addressed as part of this Study to provide a safer, more permeable network to schools, shopping areas, cultural and community facilities.

Whilst the recent upgrade to the riverfront between Church Road and the Castle Shopping Centre has improved connectivity and reduced antisocial behaviour, this remains somewhat fragmented from the Main Street. Further, integration and place-making in this area is particularly important in the context of the Ward River Valley Park and Swords Castle Park. Both of these areas are local destinations for recreation and amenity including organised sports such tennis (i.e. Swords Tennis Club at the back of the Castle and North Street), field sports (including St. Finians' GAA club and Swords Manor Football Club in the Ward River Valley Park) as well as the playgrounds and walking along the network of existing paths.

Walkability and Cyclability

Green-Schools is Ireland's leading environmental management and education programme for schools. Since 2008 the programme has aimed to increase the number of students and teachers who actively travel to school (walk, cycle, scoot) as well as promoting other sustainable modes of travel such as Park n' Stride, carpool and public transport. Green-Schools were engaged to work with schools in Swords to ensure that school children have a voice when it comes to developing a Sustainable Swords. It is critical to consult with children and the school community so that a holistic approach is taken when developing solutions for the town.

The school community of Swords has immense potential to make a huge difference and determine how Swords is shaped and re-designed for the benefit of current and future students. Swords has a population of 43,000 people, within that, nine schools, both Primary and Secondary, volunteered to take part in this project, which comprises approximately 4,500 students. Engaging with these schools and the wider school community is critical to ensure that the young

citizens of Swords have a chance to inform how their town develops, whilst improving community health, transforming active travel opportunities and enhancing the air quality in Swords.

Primary schools who took part in the study were Broadmeadow Community School, Holy Family Senior National School, Holywell ETNS, St. Cronan's Junior National School and Swords ETNS.

Secondary schools who took part were Fingal Community College, Loreto College, St. Finian's Community College and Swords Community College.

Green-Schools carried out walkability and cyclability audits of the most popular routes to school at the nine participating schools. A walkability audit is a methodical examination of how pedestrian friendly a route may or may not be. The word 'walkability' means 'the ability to walk'. To conduct these audits an ArcGIS app was used. When photographs of an issue are taken, example 'uneven footpath', the issue location is pinned on GoogleMaps. A report from the audit can be created which includes the type of issue, a detailed description of the issue, photographic evidence of the issue, and the GoogleMap pin location.

From a broad analysis of these reports, the survey feedback and conversations with the schools, the items below have been identified as the main infrastructural issues which need to be addressed in order to encourage active travel and increase safety on the routes.

Issue 1: Junctions & roundabouts

Crossing junctions and roundabout exits as a pedestrian and cyclist, in some areas of Swords, can be a challenge. There are a lot of roundabouts in Swords, particularly around the Airside and Hollywell area and in the newer developments along the Ashbourne Road (R125) at Applewood. There are often no official crossing points i.e. Pedestrian Crossings or Zebra crossings (just dropped kerbs) and junctions are often very wide with no island to break up the crossing. **These crossings can be a particular obstacle for children to navigate.** If these junctions exist on a child's route to school, parents are less inclined to allow their children to travel to school independently in an active way. Motorists are often quite distracted at these junctions and roundabouts and are focused on the other traffic rather than preparing to give way to pedestrians crossing.



Figure 2-10 Wide busy junctions, such as the one where the Forest Road and L2300 meet, do not feel safe to pedestrians.

Another type of junction that poses an issue to pedestrians is one where a number of busy roads intersect. An example of one can be seen at the junction at Forest Road and the L2300, by the

Supervalu in Boroimhe estate. It is a very busy, wide junction with multiple lanes of traffic. Students often cross on the diagonal instead of waiting to cross the two lanes. Both these junctions mentioned above are used by a large number of students walking to and from school. It is the fast-flowing nature of the traffic and the dominance of the cars which do not make these crossings feel safe. When designing these junctions, **consideration must be given to cyclists and pedestrians too as to how they use the road.**

Issue 2: Permeability

Swords benefits from some lovely green belts and parks. However, these green spaces often serve to divide up an area. Segregated greenway infrastructure is vital for the continuing improvement and development of safe sustainable journeys to school. This was a point that featured heavily in survey responses from the school community with people commenting that **if there was increased connectivity and permeability it would enable them to choose an active travel option over the car** that would also get them to school quicker over a shorter distance.

The main green space of the Ward River Valley Park and a green area referred to locally as 'The Jacko', while being an asset also serves to divide the eastern part of Swords. Many housing estates (e.g. Knocksedan Demesne) back onto these parks with families having to travel to the other side of the park to school. **Lack of pedestrian routes into the park from the town and various housing estates, mean that the park does not act to link and provide permeability to the wider area.** Safety concerns such as secluded areas, lack of lighting and antisocial behaviour also deter people from using the park.

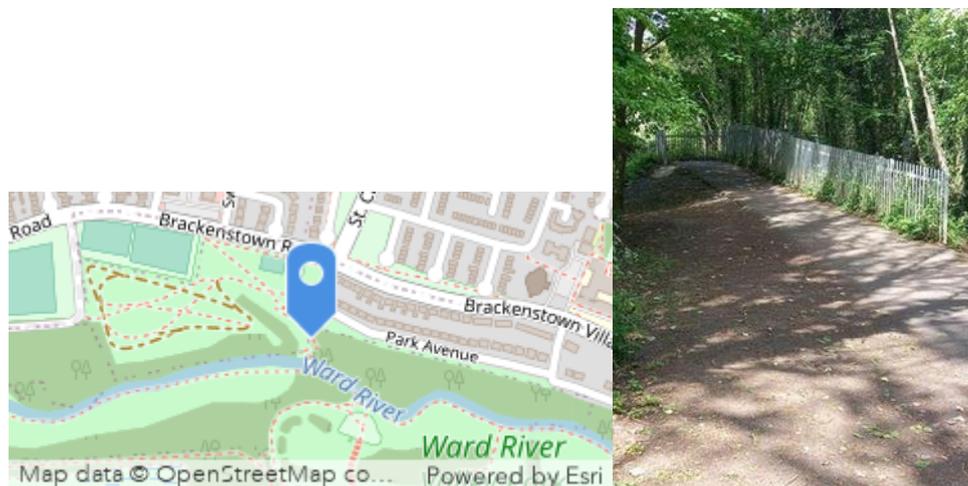


Figure 2-11 Areas of the park where it is dark and enclosed, such as the bridge that is near to St. Cronan's Avenue, would benefit from lighting to improve the feeling of safety.

Issue 3: Pedestrian Crossings

Having suitable pedestrian crossings where students and the community want to cross the road is key in making routes through the area safer. There are a few common themes with several crossings near schools. Unsignalised desire lines are used by students as crossing points. Several roads by the schools are busy routes which cut through estates and the pedestrian crossings which would benefit from being more visible with additional signage.



Figure 2-12 Two Unmarked Crossings on the Rathingle Road (left), and River Valley Road (right). Both these crossings link from nearby schools to parks.

Another issue that occurred at some of the pedestrian crossings is the width of the road coupled with fast moving traffic. At Holywell ETNS, though there is a signalled pedestrian crossing, families do not feel safe crossing the very busy two laned R125. Part of the issue is that this road connects to the entrance and exit to the M1 motorway. Motorists are entering and exiting at high speed and are often not aware that there is a pedestrian crossing ahead and a school nearby, therefore more children on foot.

Another permeability issue in the Swords area concerns two schools currently accessed off the Ashbourne Road (R125)- Swords Community College and Broadmeadow Community National School. The site where these schools are located is in the middle of farmland. Connectivity between the area of Swords Manor estate and these schools is currently via a long almost circular route along the main road. **If there was a connection to walk or cycle to the school directly from this housing estate through one field the journey would be far shorter and would allow more active travel.** Whilst it appears that plans to link the two areas are potentially being developed, it is of note that if the project was prioritised it could potentially reduce traffic in the area considerably.

Issue 4: Public Transport

Public transport was raised by the school community as an issue of concern. The provision of public buses as an option to travel to school would provide an alternative to car transport.

Schools stated that travelling by bus was a popular option for secondary school students, especially those schools which were located near Main Street. It was noted that there was a lack of private school buses for schools. Considering that Swords schools tend to have a very large student population, ranging from 300 up to 700 students' private buses would be a viable option also. **As Swords continues to expand, public bus routes need to service these new communities on the outer edges of the town** to allow students the option to travel in a sustainable manner on routes where the distance is too great, or the roads do not support walking or cycling.

Issue 5: Barriers to Cycling

It is an asset to Swords that so many of the newer developed estates have had cycle lanes built in. There has been considerable retrofitting of older roads to now include a cycle lane too. These improvements have helped to make Swords a more cycle friendly town. However, there are a few issues that if considered could help the further development of cycling facilities and improve safety for

cyclists. **An overall feeling of safety is key for encouraging and making primary and secondary students feel cycling is an option for them.**

The most popular journeys that cyclists may take must be considered in their entirety as to how cyclable they are. **Connectivity to the town centre is a key issue.** Within the housing estates the dominance of roundabouts along the route can be a safety concern. The cycle lane is usually separate, alongside on the footpath and not on the road. Suddenly joining the road at junctions is not ideal as drivers are not as aware of a cyclist's presence. Another issue which can make the estates harder for cyclists is navigating across the roads which often bisect the bicycle lanes.



Figure 2-13 Cycling infrastructure.

Though cycling infrastructure exists on the towns' suburbs when it reaches the town it often disappears with many of the link roads becoming less convenient for cycling. This can be seen at old bridges on the R125 connecting into the south of Swords, at Swords Castle, as well as where the Forest Road meets the Dublin Road, at the Lord Mayors Pub in Swords. **The town centre would benefit from improvements to cycle infrastructure.** The cyclability of the town centre is explored in more detail below in the dedicated section on the town centre. **A point that could help improve this issue would be the development of cycle lanes through the River Valley Park.** This would provide a safe cycling option into the town centre. Other points raised in the survey that families felt would help make the town centre more bike friendly are **more bike hire schemes and cycle parking at strategic locations.**

In addition, the **roads leading to Swords and around the town are often very busy, with considerable volume of traffic on them.** The speed and volume of traffic impacts upon the safety of cyclists and the ability of cyclists to navigate through the town especially when turning right. Very wide junctions often can act as a deterrent to cyclists as they can be difficult to traverse. Provision should be made for cyclists when designing these so as they feel safe to cross, particularly so if they are along routes that connect to schools so they are able to be an option for students to feel comfortable that they can use.

Issue 6: Insufficient /Lack of Footpaths

Often the difference between allowing a child to walk/scoot to school or taking the car comes down to access to footpaths. Not only do the footpaths need to be present, they also need to be maintained. Issues that were present on the footpaths at a variety of schools included paths which were too narrow, large cracks often caused by tree roots (also present on Main Street), and uneven

surfaces. Alternatively, there was the absence of any footpath present on Jugback Lane, which many students at St. Finian’s NS would use regularly. **Improving existing footpaths in conjunction with the addition of new footpaths where they are currently absent can play an important role in parents feeling it is safe to travel to school in an active way and can result in an overall uptake.**



Figure 2-14 Footpaths.

Issue 7: Front of School

Road safety around the school gates and on the journey to school is a real barrier when it comes to promoting active travel. The front of school should be an area which is free from cars, free from congestion and child focused. The reality is that at most schools in Ireland it is the opposite with poorly parked cars, congestion, poor air quality and a generally unsafe space for children. In addition to safety concerns outside the school gate there is also a lack of respect for the rules of the road. **This leads to unsafe behaviour and as a result less parents are willing to allow their children to travel to school actively and independently.** All these aims could be met by implementing a School Zone at the front of each individual school. **A School Zone** is an initiative designed to give priority to students at the school gate by freeing up footpaths and reducing vehicle drop off, pick-ups and idling.



Figure 2-15 Congested front of school at Holy Family SNS (left), aerial view of School Zone at Greenlanes NS, Seafield Avenue (right).

Issue 8: Development and Construction

With so much development going on in Swords students often must navigate construction site entrances on their journey to school. Issues they face are increased volume of heavy machinery on the road, entrances and exits to construction sites crossing footpaths and cycle lanes, mud/ loose gravel making footpath surfaces slippery, construction/ building material obstacles, temporary road closures and route changes. These issues alter driver behaviour too as motorists are often disorientated so this increases the pedestrian's safety concerns.



Figure 2-16 Construction at Swords Community College and Broadmeadow CNS (left) often means large construction vehicles cutting through the route to school and obstructions which block pathways and cycle lanes. There is a similar issue at Swords ETNS(right).

Issue 9: Speed Limits

Green-Schools is a strong advocate for the Love 30 campaign, which advocates for Local Authorities to introduce 30km/h zones in urban areas, residential estates, places of public assembly, and in relation to this project in the vicinity of schools and town centres. Not only can the speed limit reduce severity of injuries caused by collisions and improve safety in and around schools, but it can also greatly reduce air and noise pollution as well. Having the 30km/h speed limit would improve safety for pedestrians, and we believe all schools and the town centre would greatly benefit from implementation.

Issue 10: Town Centre

Main Street is the heart of Swords, and because of the numerous business, restaurants, and even historical sights it is the perfect place to gather for all ages. There are several infrastructural items that are encouraging to see. Currently there are several benches, some solar and others with lovely foliage placed around them, which is aesthetically pleasing. **Having benches present along the street makes it more accessible for those with mobility issues.** There are also numerous bus stops on both sides of the street with transport being fairly frequent. **The modern and traditional architecture intertwines nicely, and is a true indication that Swords has sustainable development at the forefront to meet the changing needs of the community.**

However, there are several obstacles that pedestrians would face while accessing Main Street. Pedestrians must be vigilant walking along Main Street because of the many entrances and exits to carparks. Vehicles frequently dart out and show little regard for pedestrians. Implementing infrastructure that would prioritise the pedestrian would be essential to address this safety concern.

When walking down the street it is important to look at the footpath, because there are several cracks that create unevenness and could result in tripping or making it difficult to navigate for

those with mobility issues. In addition, there are few pedestrian crossings along Main Street, this forces pedestrians to run across the already chaotic and busy road. This is particularly an issue by Fingal Community College near the Fingal County Council office.

The street itself is a safety hazard for cyclists with no cycle lanes, vehicles backing up abruptly, and lack of cycle racks.



Figure 2-17 Main Street Swords

Whether travelling by foot, bicycle, or car all face the issue of air pollution which is a concern along Main Street. This is caused by vehicles idling, and general traffic congestion. By implementing infrastructure on Main Street that would encourage active travel whether it be **relocating carparks to the end of Main Street or reducing the amount of parking spots on the main street**, it could decrease the amount of air pollution everyone visiting the street is being exposed to and promote a healthy lifestyle. **Main street already has diverse features that make it unique and where people want to be, by making these improvements that increase safety and encourage active travel modes the community as whole will benefit.**

Summary

Swords has a lot to offer such as green spaces, a vibrant main street, proximity to Dublin city centre and the coast and a rich cultural heritage. However, **traffic is a serious issue in Swords that needs to be addressed. Development of the area needs to prioritise and put the pedestrian/ cyclist at the centre.** This will serve to promote and encourage active travel modes which will in turn reduce congestion, improve air quality and safety and make the area more pleasant for everyone to use.

Through Green-School's methods of engagement with schools, including travel surveys, conversations with schools, mapping exercises and audits, it is apparent that consulting the public is vital. This has enabled a very valuable data set to be compiled which will go a long way in informing the Sustainable Swords Project and future development plans for the Swords area.

2.3.2 [Public Transport](#)

Access to affordable public transport is a pillar of sustainable mobility. Given Swords' strategic location close to Dublin City, its projected population growth and proximity to several major transport arteries, the future needs for the communities of Swords to have access to affordable and efficient public transport is growing.

The Study Area is not currently directly served by rail with the nearest train station being in Malahide, 5.4km to the east of the town centre. **Swords is however relatively well served by bus provision.** Currently, there are four bus transit companies and twenty bus routes which operate in Swords. Dublin Bus operates six routes which serve Swords and Go Ahead operate four routes. Swords Express, a division of Eirebus, operate as both a scheduled public transport service and private coach hire, and provide transport services from Swords to City Centre. They operate nine routes which serve Swords.

Dublin Bus operates several routes connecting Swords with the wider Metropolitan Area including Dublin City Centre, Dublin Airport, Rush, Balbriggan and Malahide. These include route numbers 33, 41, 141b, 41x. Go Ahead Ireland operates route number 102 connecting Swords with other destinations across Fingal such as Dublin Airport, Malahide, Portmarnock and Sutton. The Swords Express also operates in this area. This service connects Swords with Dublin City Centre in a more direct fashion through the Port Tunnel. The bus stop at Dublin is located on Eden Quay. Local Links Louth Meath Fingal operate a door-to-door and scheduled bus service within Swords and operate one bus route within Swords.

The existing bus provision is however unlikely to satisfactorily underpin the future growth of Swords. There are significant delays on the network with limited bus priority and several pinch points throughout the Study Area. **Enhancing the accessibility of the public transport network to better connect with its residential areas and town centre will be a key element to the Study.**



Figure 2-18 Public transport routes in Swords (NAPTAN, OSI)

2.3.3 Proposed Infrastructure – Bus Connects, Metro

To maximise public transport investment, key roads, streets and public space within the Study Area will need to reallocate more space to support more walking and cycling trips. The Council has begun this process in partnership with the NTA through the reshaping to the R132 to provide dedicated footpaths, cycle tracks and bus priority but more will be needed to maximise the opportunity to reimagine Sustainable Swords as an exemplar vibrant, healthy and low-carbon compact urban settlement.

There are numerous strategic infrastructure developments and forthcoming local infrastructure interventions in the pipeline for Fingal and locally for Swords. Such developments will impact the movement of people and help Fingal transition towards sustainable mobility. Among these infrastructure developments is the dedicated metro under MetroLink+ and a restructured bus network under BusConnects. At a local level, the delivery of the **metropolitan cycle network** among other local improvements are targeted in Swords town centre and neighbouring settlements.

The transformational level of public investment in BusConnects Dublin and Metrolink will enable Swords to **become one of the most accessible towns by public transport in the State by 2027.**

MetroLink

MetroLink is a planned high-frequency metro railway line that is being progressed by Transport Infrastructure Ireland. It is planned to run 19km in length, connecting Swords Dublin Airport, Glasnevin, the city centre and onwards to Charlemont in the south of the city. MetroLink will also be served by some Park and Ride destinations including one at Estuary (to the north of Swords). This network will interconnect Dublin Airport, Irish Rail, DART, Dublin Bus and future developments. The planned development route is illustrated in Figure 2-19.

The proposed MetroLink route identifies four stations located in close proximity to the Study Area.

- **Swords Central** - adjacent to the Pavilion Shopping Centre and Airside Retail Park, is less than 600 metres from the town centre.
- **Seatown** - beside the junction of Seatown Road and R132, is less than 500 metres from Fingal County Hall.
- **Estuary Park-and-Ride** - lies south of the proposed Swords Western Ring Road and north of the Lissenhall Masterplan Area and lies 1.75km from the town centre.
- **Fostertown** – to the south of the Study Area is located directly adjacent to Airside Retail Park along the R132 and is 1.1km from the town centre.

MetroLink will offer attractive connectivity to key destinations across the Greater Dublin Area including Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport – a key employment centre for Swords.



Figure 2-19 MetroLink planned route (Transport Infrastructure Ireland)

BusConnects

A further development to enhance bus services in Ireland and Dublin is the National Transport Authorities BusConnects network. This network will provide next generation bus corridors to increase the reliability of routing and enhance speed through reconfiguration of the entire network. This new network includes high frequency spines, orbital routes and increased bus services. Dublin BusConnects will significantly improve multi-modal connectivity including an upgrade of the public realm and dedicated cycle provision as well as ancillary improvements to bus stop and Real Time Information. The objective is to develop bus priority to remove private traffic from town centres and corridors and to improve journey time reliability by minimising bus delays.

Proposed Core Bus Corridor A2 and A4 – will provide Swords town centre and residential areas like the Brackenstown Road and Rathbeale Road with high-frequency direct links to Dublin City Centre and key destinations such as the Airport, Airside, hospitals and third level institutions throughout Dublin. It is anticipated that the application for BusConnects will be submitted to An Bord Pleanála in 2021 and it will be implemented on a phased basis across Dublin. The provisional route plan for Swords is set out in Figure 2-20.

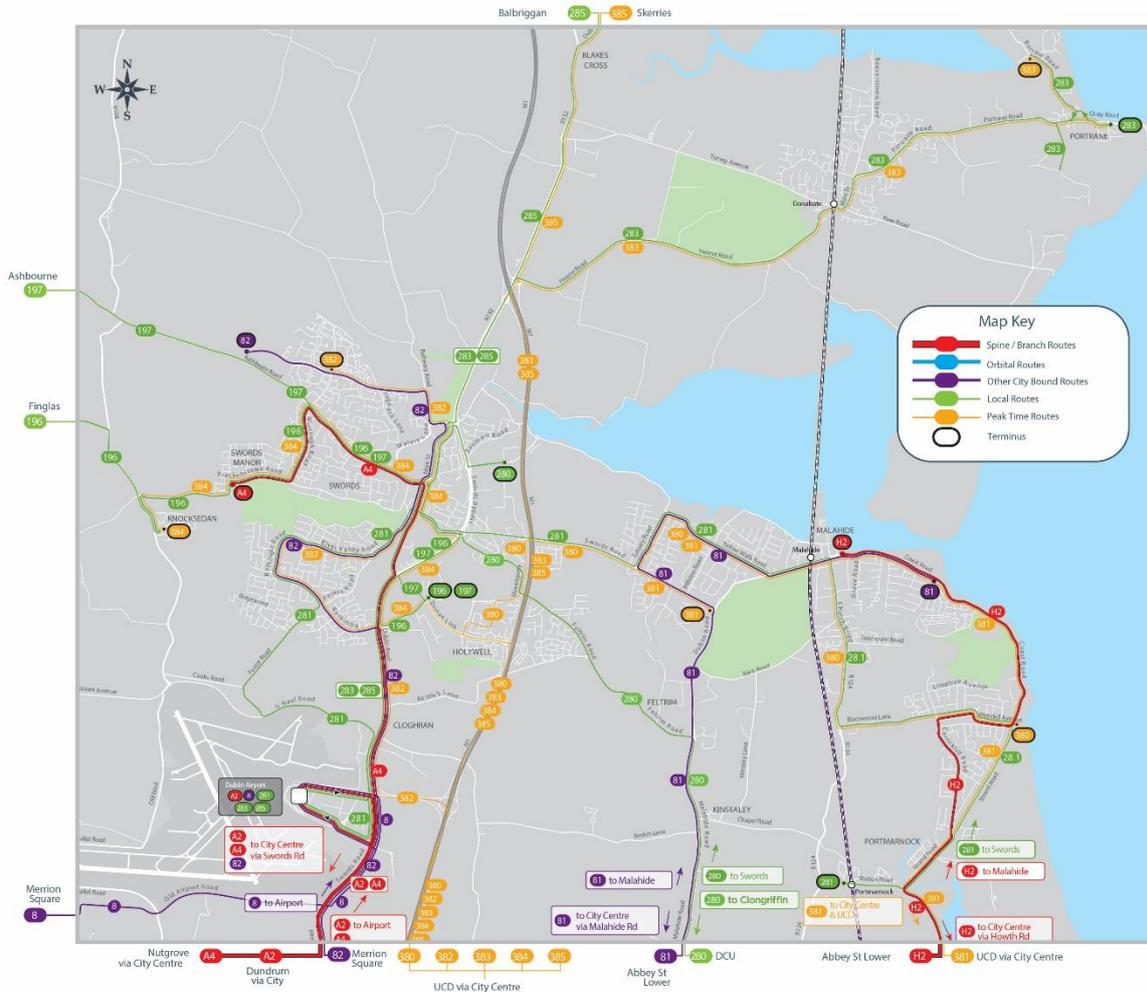


Figure 2-20 BusConnects routes in Swords (NTA)

2.3.4 Traffic and Parking

Much of the Study Area is dominated by car movement and storage. On Main Street up to 75% of the available public space is currently allocated to either the movement of traffic or parking. Public space here is often cluttered by traditional traffic engineering methods to prevent illegal parking and movements including bollards, signage and pedestrian guardrail that are now generally considered superfluous to a high, quality public realm and town centre environment.

The reallocation of existing road space to support greater levels of walking, cycling and public transport use and vibrant public space both within the town centre and its adjoining residential streets is required.

There are several areas of both public and private parking areas in and around Main Street that draw traffic into the town centre, approach roads and adjacent streets. The redistribution of long-stay on-street and private parking to more appropriate, dedicated facilities outside of the Swords Town Centre and Cultural Quarter areas will form a key part of the Study.

2.4 Community Infrastructure

2.4.1 Education

Social infrastructure plays a fundamental role in stimulating the growth potential of regions and localities. The provision and capacity of schools and childcare is a key component of this and can serve as key 'magnet' or 'attractor' for businesses looking for new locations or site second opportunities. According to the Department of Education, there are twelve primary schools in Swords, both senior and junior. The total enrolment in all schools is 5,338. All these schools cater for both boys and girls, apart from St. Colmcille's Boys National School and St. Colmcille's Girls National School, which cater exclusively for boys and girls respectively.

There are five post-primary schools in Swords according to the Department of Education: Fingal Community College; Coláiste Choilm; Loreto College; Swords Community College and; St. Finian's Community College. All post-primary schools cater for both boys and girls, with the exception of Coláiste Choilm, which is a Christian Brothers school, catering exclusively for boys.

According to Tusla's Register of Early Years Services there is a total of forty-two childcare services in the Swords area.

The abundance of childcare, primary and post-primary services for both boys and girls in Swords reduces the likelihood of students travelling outside of Swords to enrol in education centres and schools. This abundance also increases the likelihood of students traveling into Swords from neighbouring areas for their education, which could increase competition in securing enrolment spaces in these centres and schools.

2.4.2 Community Facilities

The provision of accessible community facilities such as these in Swords are vital to the competitive offering of Swords as a place to live and work. Providing spaces for communities to gather and collaborate offer opportunities for community cohesion and inclusion. Each of these facilities offer residents essential services that are often overlooked but are integral to healthy communities.

Given the catchment area of Swords and its residential areas, there are several community centres within the area of Swords - River Valley Community Centre in the River Valley residential area; Applewood Community Centre in the areas of Applewood and newly developed Meadowbank; Holywell Community Centre and; Liam Rodgers Community Centre. Within Swords town centre, Swords Senior Citizens Club and St. Colmcille's Catholic Church and Swords Men's Shed are also centres for community activities.

2.4.3 Social Capital, Activity and Partnerships

Social Capital refers to the network of relationships between people and groups of a wider community and the effective functioning of this wider community through the functioning of these groups and people. In this way, **communities which experience positive social capital can help leverage civic engagement.** Social Capital can also act as a metric to measure communal and social health.

Given Swords high demographic diversity, both in its diversity of population age and its diversity of ethnicity and culture, as outlined in the socio-economic analysis of Section 3 of this report, **Swords can be seen to have high and positive social capital**, with 24% of Swords residents being born outside of Ireland and Swords having one of the youngest average ages in both Fingal and the state at 33.3 years.

Employment rates, health status and academic and educational performance can also be used as metrics to infer high social capital within communities. In Swords, **unemployment levels are lower than the national average and labour force participation rates in Swords are higher than both the national average and Fingal County average as of 2016. Health status within Swords is also very high**, as indicated in Section 3 of this report. **These positive figures can be attributed and linked to the high levels of educational performance in Swords.**

Social partnerships are also well-established in Swords. Social partnerships provide the platform for the many groups and communities within Swords to converse and collaborate in a positive way where they may not otherwise have opportunities to. These social partnerships come in many different forms and are supported by the Fingal Public Participation Network. Such partnerships include the Swords Tidy Towns team, which has seen growing support and participation from community members and the council alike. Initiatives such the See It Say It initiative between Fingal County Council and An Garda Síochána allow members of the public in Swords to confidentially report incidents that might need Garda intervention. Online networking mediums such as social media are also new methods of establishing social partnerships which don't necessarily need the support of local authorities. These social media groups are often established and operate as community open forums and residents' associations. Swords have several residents' associations with an online presence, such as the areas of River Valley Rathingle, Swords Manor, Ridgewood and Castlevew.

The 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index⁵ provides a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area using data compiled from various censuses. It is a recognised resource for identifying affluence and disadvantage, by providing local analysis of relevant metrics (i.e. the proportion of skilled professionals, education levels, employment levels, and single-parent households found in an area). Using these metrics, a series of relative index scores have been generated at small area level enabling mapping analysis. These small areas have been mapped and graded by index score as identified in Figure 2-21.

Most of the town is above average affluence to some degree with general areas marginally above average. There are pockets of affluence to the north at bridge street and north street, in Highfield, St. Andrews Park and Glen Ellan. There are further affluent areas identified in the northwest at Bunbury Gate, Oldtown and Saucerstown. There are affluent areas to the south at Brackenstown, Ashfield and Fosterstown.

There is a concentration of areas below average affluence in the areas of Elmwood, Windmill Avenue, Oakwood avenue, Brackenstown avenue and Rathbeale. There are neighbouring areas identified as disadvantaged in the Saint Cronans, Abbeylea and Mooretown areas.

⁵ <http://trutzhaase.eu/deprivation-index/the-2016-pobal-hp-deprivation-index-for-small-areas/>

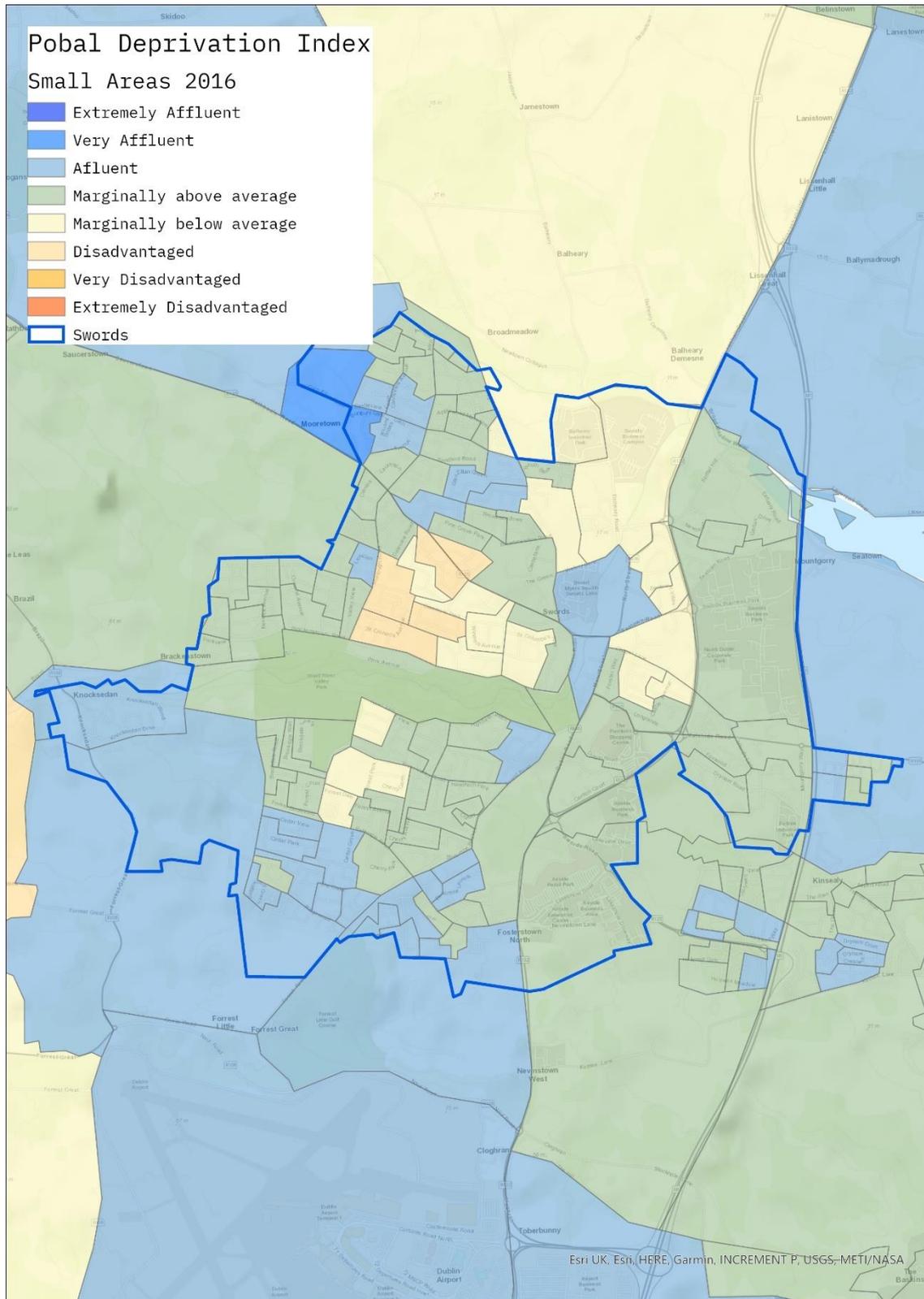


Figure 2-21 Pobal Deprivation Index - Swords (Source: Haase, T. and Pratschke, J. (2017))

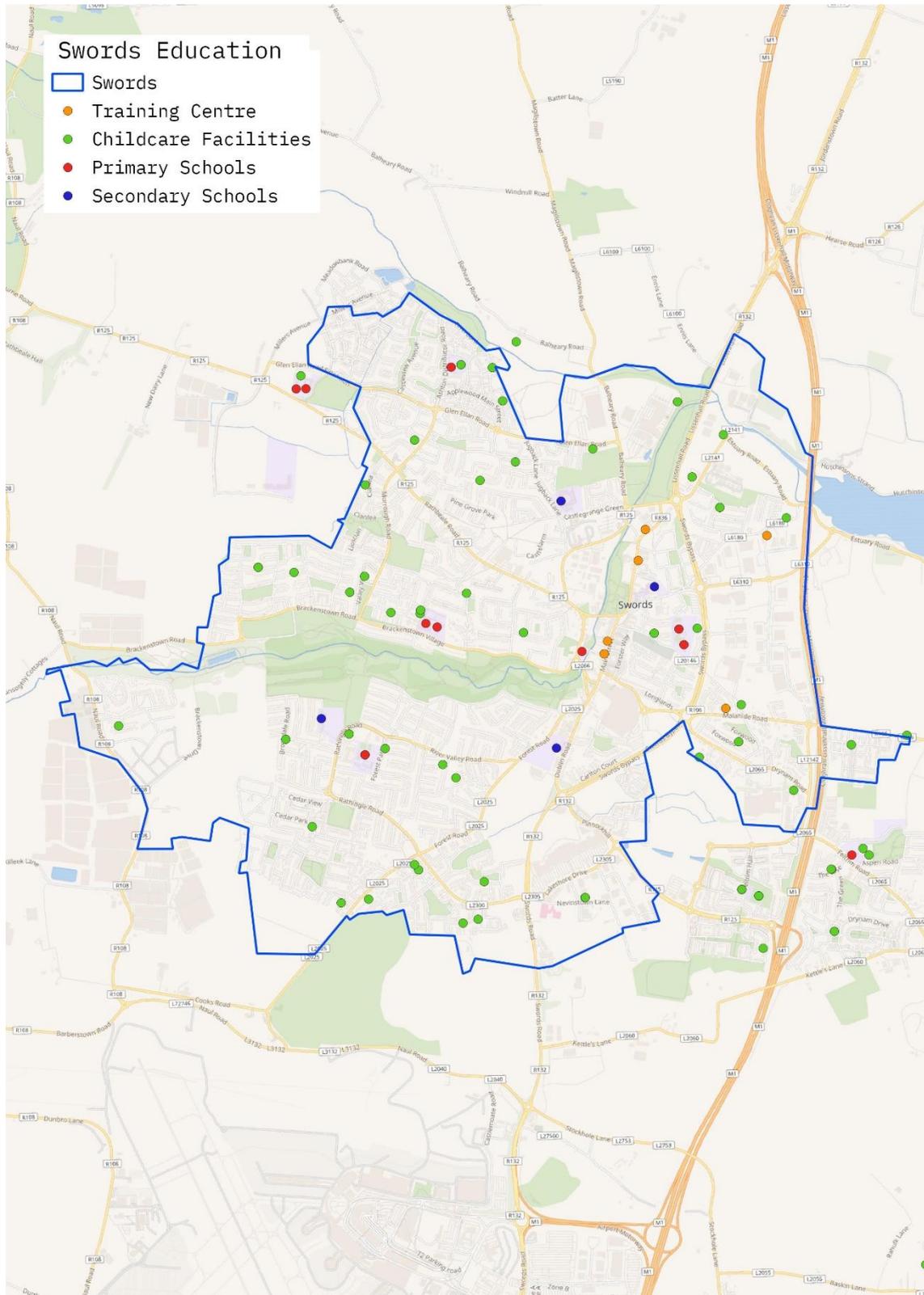


Figure 2-22 Education in Swords (TUSLA, KPMG FA)

2.4.4 Community Enterprise

Community or social enterprise use business to improve the life of a community. Their business activity is undertaken as a means of achieving community benefit as opposed to private gain. These community benefits can include providing community employment opportunities, funding for community projects, and creating and supplying goods for local consumption. As Swords is the county town of Fingal, the Fingal Local Enterprise Office (LEO) is in Swords. The role of the LEO is to stimulate and support the development of both community and micro-enterprise in Fingal and foster an entrepreneurial culture in Fingal, leading to the creation of sustainable local employment and vibrant business environments.

Given the creation and operation of indigenous and local enterprise is outlined as a key constraint and challenge within the country, **efforts to support the development of community-based enterprise in our towns and villages in strengthening both social and economic resilience is of paramount importance.**

Community and social enterprise in Swords, given its large catchment area, is a well-established facet of the town. Though many of the occupied commercial units within Swords operate under conventional retail functions, there has several social enterprises operating within the town centre. The town contains several credit unions, over forty creches, community centres and various other businesses focused on the betterment of the wider community. The location of Fingal's flagship incubation hub, Drinan Enterprise Centre, in Swords Enterprise Park provides both the space and platform for local entrepreneurs and innovators. However, due to the physical barriers of both the R132 and M1 motorway between Swords town centre and the business park, **the locating of a new hub within Swords town centre would increase the potential for community and local enterprise growth.**

The resilience of our towns and villages is increasingly faced with new challenges as urban development accelerates, the ability for town and village communities to successfully implement circular economic activity is key to the success of this resilience. Given Swords prime location at the interface between the rapidly developing suburbs of Dublin City and the agricultural hotbeds of North Fingal, **the opportunity for the creation of a culture of community and urban gardens and farming is immense.**

As outlined in the Government of Ireland's 'A Framework for Town Centre Renewal', **artisan foods and crafts are identified as key opportunities.** Local indigenous artisan food and crafts provide a unique experience in our town centres. They are often led by energetic, passionate champions that in and of themselves can be the **unique selling point that can help brand a town centre.** Efforts should be made to support start-up artisan food and craft shops to enhance the visitor experience within town centres. Swords contains the Broadmeadow Community Garden, which provides a space for the community to both enjoy, learn and partake in activities relating to biodiversity and flora planting and growing. **Social enterprises such as this offer huge potential within the community for the benefit all groups and persons of Swords, in both age, ethnicity and culture.**

2.5 Natural Environment and Built Heritage

2.5.1 [Natural Environment](#)

Altamar, Marine and Environmental Consultants undertook a preliminary ecological appraisal report to assess the environmental considerations for the Sustainable Swords project. A detailed report has been provided to Fingal County Council, with a summary included here.

Designated sites

The study area is not within a designated site. However, the site is proximate to a number of designated conservation sites located within Malahide Estuary (Figures 2-23). Specifically, the area of study is proximate to the Malahide Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (440m) and Malahide Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA)(625m). These are Natura 2000 sites with National and international protection and there is a direct pathway from the study area to these sites, via the Ward River. In addition, the Malahide Estuary proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) (440m) and Broadmeadow Estuary Ramsar site (700m) are also downstream of the proposed area, so if there are significant works there is potential for impact on designated sites, in the absence of mitigation measures.

Careful consideration should be made in relation to projects and potential direct and indirect pathways to the Natura 2000 sites. **Screening for Appropriate Assessment will be carried out and a Natura Impact Statement prepared as necessary.**

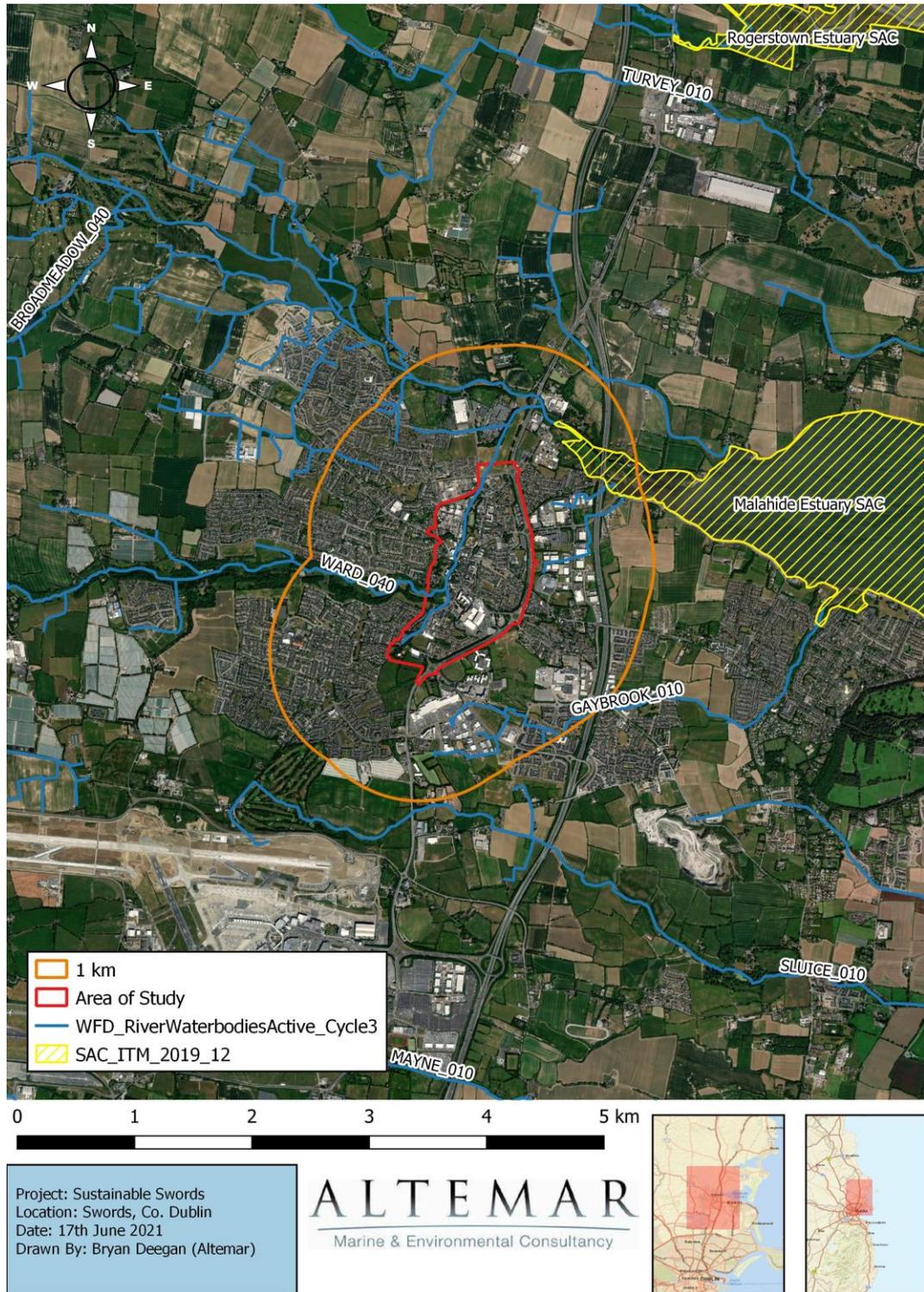


Figure 2-23. SACs and watercourses (rivers and streams) within 1km of the Area of Study.

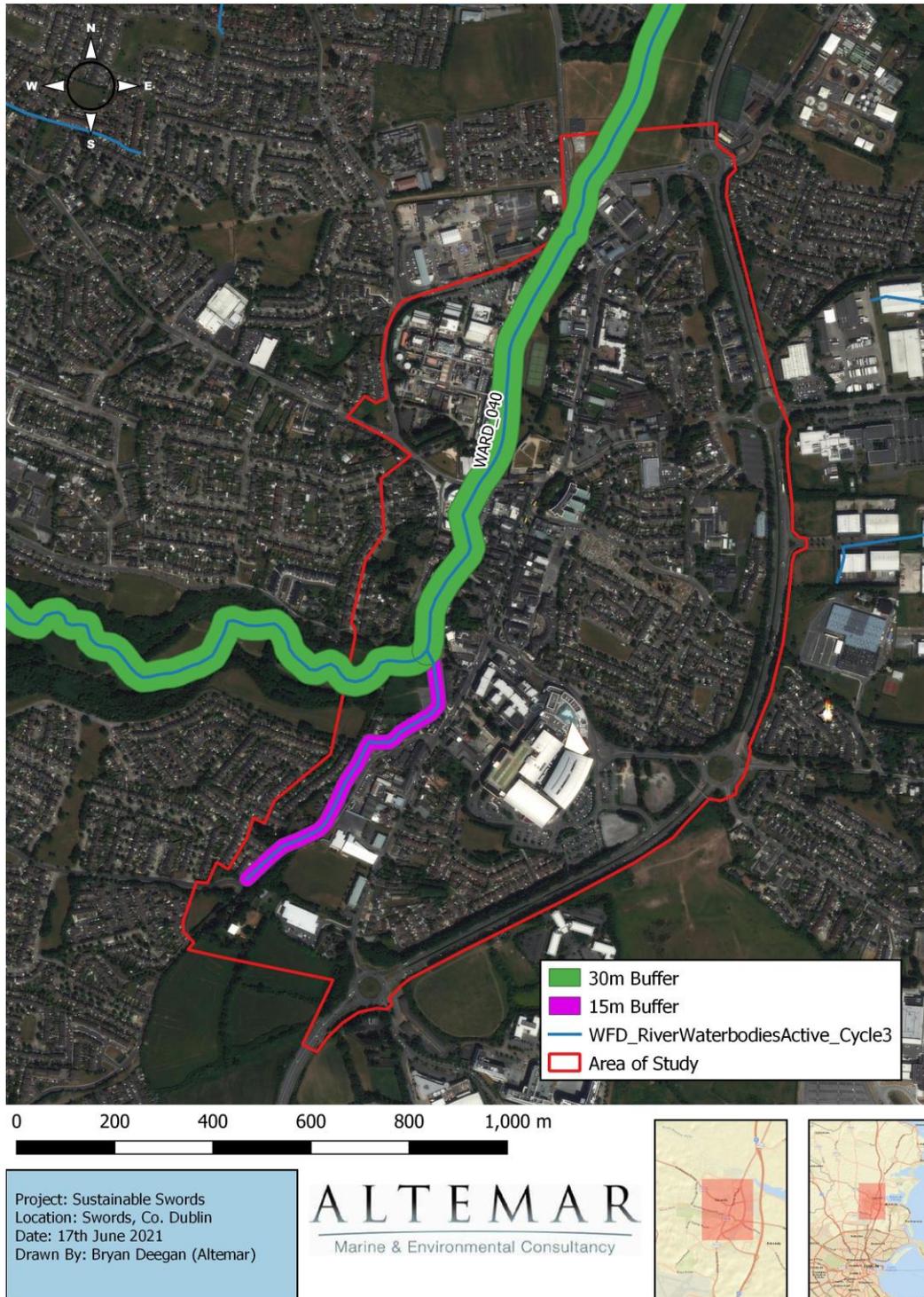


Figure 2-24 Watercourses within Area of Study with designated ecological corridors

Watercourses

Watercourses in the vicinity of the site (as identified by EPA GIS data) are seen in Figure 2-24. The Ward River passes through the area of study, connecting with the Broadmeadow River further downstream, and eventually enters Malahide Estuary. As there are several designated conservation sites located within Malahide Estuary, there is the potential for a direct hydrological connection between the area of study and the aforementioned conservation sites via the Ward River. Further, this pathway opens the potential for an indirect hydrological connection to marine-based conservation sites located within the Irish Sea.

DMS170 of the Fingal Development Plan states 'Protect and enhance the ecological corridors along the following rivers in the County by ensuring that no development takes place, outside urban centres, within a minimum distance of 30m from each riverbank: Liffey, Tolka, Pinkeen, Mayne, Sluice, Ward, Broadmeadow, Ballyboghil, Corduff, Matt and Delvin (see Green Infrastructure Maps)⁶.

It should be noted that Fingal County Council has commenced its review of the current Development Plan and the Draft Fingal Development Plan 2023-2029 will be published in Q1 2022.

Recommendations

Based on recent legal cases and the hydrological link to Natura 2000 sites an AA screening will be required for developments in this area. However, a Natura Impact Statement may be required if for example if there a direct hydrological link from this the project to the SAC and SPA in Malahide Estuary.

As outlined earlier the biodiversity plan states "A 30m wide bufferzone on either side of the river will extend the length of the river corridor of the Liffey, Tolka, Pinkeen, Mayne, Sluice, **Ward**, Broadmeadow, Ballyboghil, Corduff, Matt and the Delvin." It is critical that the project reviews this element of the project and takes into account the implications of this objective.

Further detailed assessment would be required to fully understand the potential impact of the proposal including further surveys as necessary.

Landscaping of the Sustainable Swords project should include species that could be used to encourage and maintain biodiversity. The proposed mixes of plants should include minimal ornamental non- native species to a more dominantly native landscape strategy leaning towards species selection to promote and enhance biodiversity (native seeds fruits and pollinator friendly species). In relation to species it would be beneficial if there was a heavy reliance on native species that provide an ecological function, and these are detailed within the Pollinator Friendly Planting Code⁷ . In addition to the pollinator friendly plants additional planting and species were selected to encourage and sustain birds and bats on site. This included predominantly native but some non-native planting to provide and encourage foraging on site. In addition, invasives such as Fuchsia, Cherry Laurel, Rhododendron, Sycamore, snowberry & *Allium triquetrum* should not be included within planting lists.

Conclusions

There are several designated conservation sites within 1km of the area of study, including Malahide Estuary SAC, SPA, and pNHA (440m, 625m, and 440m respectively), and Broadmeadow Ramsar site (700m). **As such, Screening for Appropriate Assessment and the preparation of a Natura Impact Statement as necessary (NIS) will be examined.** The Ward River connects to Broadmeadow River located further downstream and eventually outfalls to Malahide Estuary. This pathway also opens the

⁶https://www.fingal.ie/sites/default/files/2019-03/Fingal%20Development%20Plan%202017-2023%20-%20Written%20Statement_compressed_compressed.pdf

⁷ <https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Pollinator-Council-Guide-Planting-Code-FINAL.pdf>

potential for an indirect hydrological connection to marine-based conservation sites located within the Irish Sea.

It is important that appropriate buffers are provided to existing watercourses in line with Development Plan objectives.

2.5.2 [Built Heritage](#)

Howley Hayes Conservation Architects undertook an audit of heritage assets for the Sustainable Swords project. A detailed report has been provided to Fingal County Council, with a summary included here.

History of the Development of Swords

Swords' proximity to Dublin and strategically fortuitous situation made it a natural location for the creation of both ecclesiastical and defensive settlements, which were largely responsible for the subsequent evolution and development of the town. **The exact origins of the medieval town remain unverified by documentary evidence and is the subject of scholarly debate.** It appears to have originated from the foundation of a monastery here, in 512, by St. Columbkille. Local folk tradition records that when St. Colmcille established his monastery, he took possession of the pre-Christian well and blessed it. Sord Colmcille is from the Irish word sord meaning 'pure'.

The **subsequent development of the town was hugely influenced by the transfer of the monastery to the Archbishop of Dublin**, who built the castle at the northern end of the town in the early-thirteenth century, which at that time sheltered the entire population.

Throughout the medieval period Swords consisted principally of one long wide street, known as High Street - the alignment of which corresponds with the present Main Street. **The most prominent surviving feature is the tenth-century coursed limestone round tower.**

Though Swords appears on Rocque's 1757 map of County Dublin, it first appears with any clarity on Taylor and Skinner's map of 1777, which shows the principal arterial route from Dublin north to Donaghadee. Though not detailed, the Main Street is clearly discernible as is the castle enclosure with several streets running east to west (Figure 2-25).

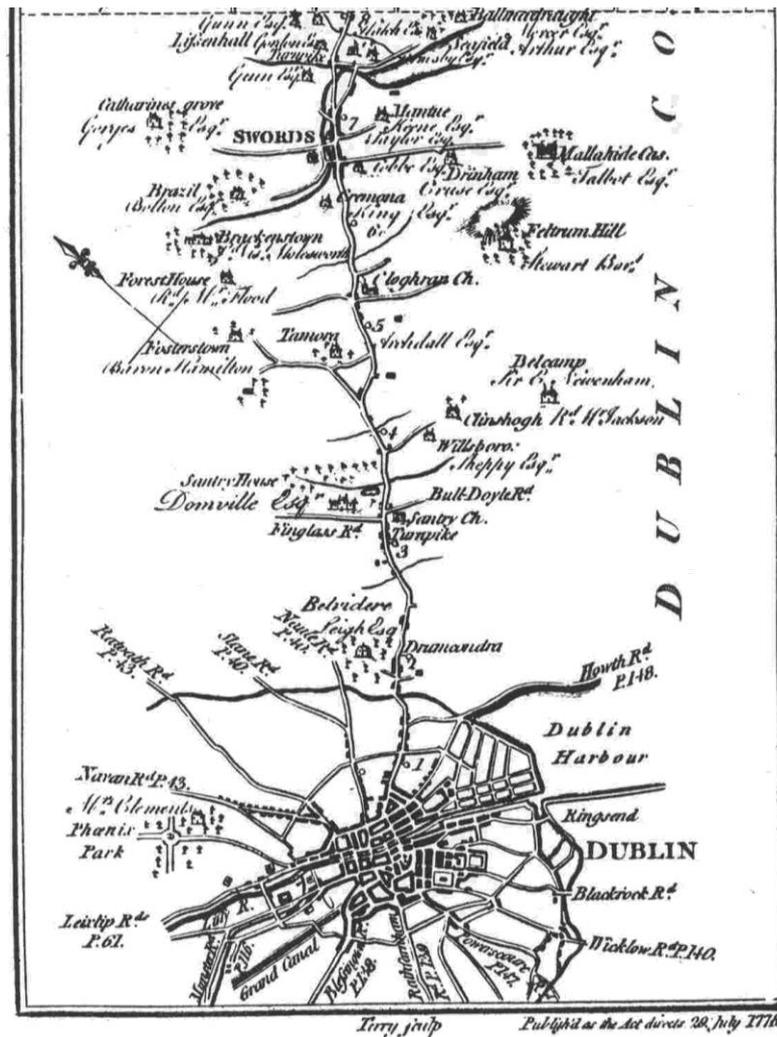


Figure 2-25 Taylor & Skinner's Map of 1777

Though not exact, Samuel Lewis's 1837 map depicts development as existing either side of Main Street and along smaller streets that branched out to the east and west at that time. Writing in 1837, Lewis somewhat harshly describes Swords as follows:

The town occupies a pleasing situation on the steep banks of a small but rapid stream, which discharges itself northwards into the inner extremity of the creek or pill of Malahide...It consists chiefly of one wide street, a mile in length, formed of houses which, with but few exceptions, are of mean appearance.

The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1837 is the first to show in precise detail how developed Swords had become. Running from north to south buildings lined either side of the road, contiguously, from around Scotchstone Bridge. These linear property plots (having evolved from medieval burgage plots) align either side of Main Street forming a nucleated settlement core. The extent of these land divisions is clearly discernible to the east and south and the boundary to the west is defined by the Ward River, while the castle dominates the northern extent of the settlement and the remains of the ecclesiastical settlement which overlook the town from the west;

There is little change to the urban morphology of Swords between the 1860 OS map and the 1888 map (revised 1913). What is noticeable is the changes in and around Swords House and demesne,

particularly, the ancillary ranges to the south and east of the house, which had by this time been demolished, and the large formal garden to the east turned into arable land;

By the mid-twentieth century the two historic elements, the castle and ecclesiastical enclosure were clearly definable. The orientation of Main Street in Swords continued to respect the medieval burgage plot alignment, with properties extending in a perpendicular direction from the Main Street creating a strong linear identity (Figure 2-26).

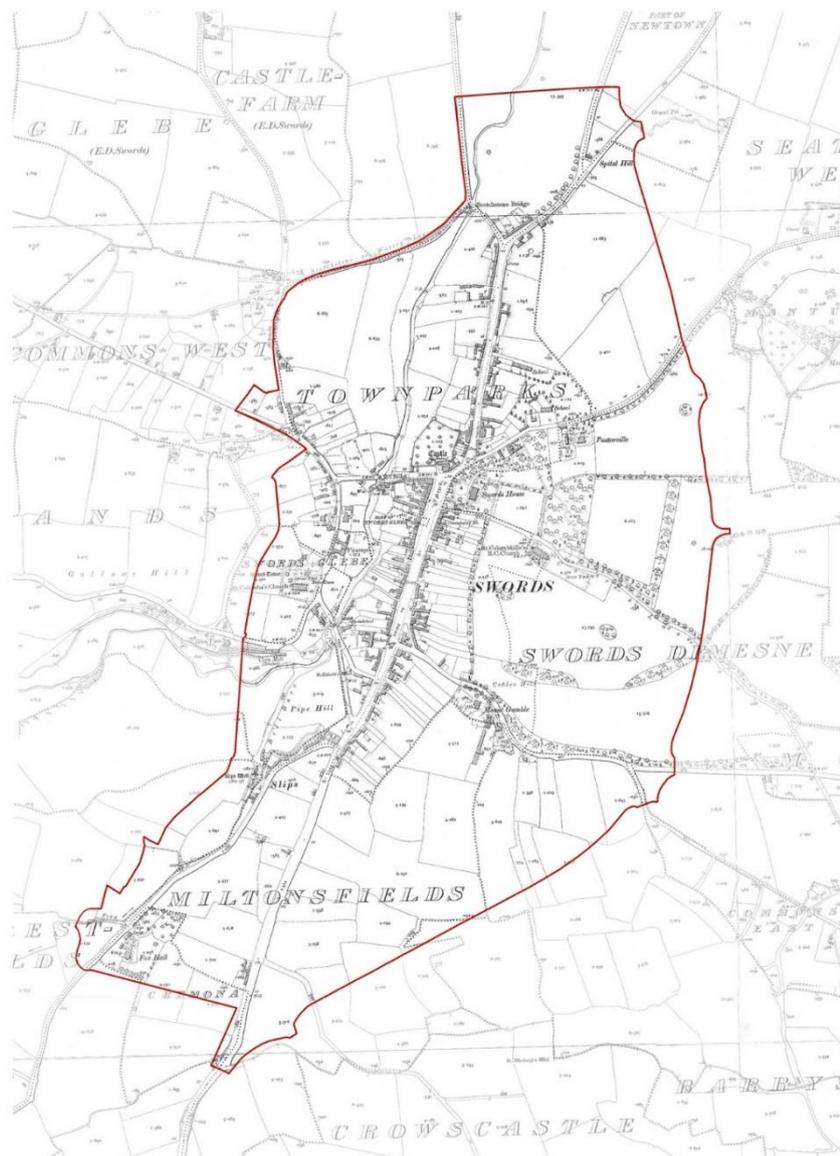


Figure 2-26 1888-1913 OS Map

During the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Swords underwent wholesale changes to its character and identity with a significant increase in traffic brought about by the creation of new roads and associated car parking. This was compounded by the building of large-scale shopping centres, multi-storey car parking and, notably, the demolition of Swords House to build County Hall, opposite the castle.

The Built Heritage of Swords

The designated built heritage of Swords is better known and more immediately identifiable (cf. Table of Designated Heritage Assets in the Technical Appendix) and includes the following notable protected structures: Swords Castle; the Court House; the Carnegie Library; the Old Borough School ; the Sexton's House; the Old Vicarage, St. Columba's Church and St. Columcille's Church; the old School House, the National Irish Bank; the Parochial House; the Mill Bridge; Accord; and Swords Youth and Resource Centre. These structures define and provide character to the town and streetscape of Swords. The location of these is indicated on Figure 2-27.

- KEY:**
- Recorded monuments (Fingal planning map & NIAH Historic Viewer)
22 within study area, 5 adjacent.
 - Protected structures (Fingal planning map & NIAH Historic Viewer)
21 within study area, 1 adjacent.
 - + NIAH Sites & Buildings (NIAH Historic Viewer only)
5 within study area in addition to green dots.
Note: All protected structures marked in green are also noted as NIAH sites on NIAH Historic Viewer.
 - Recorded Monuments Constraints Area

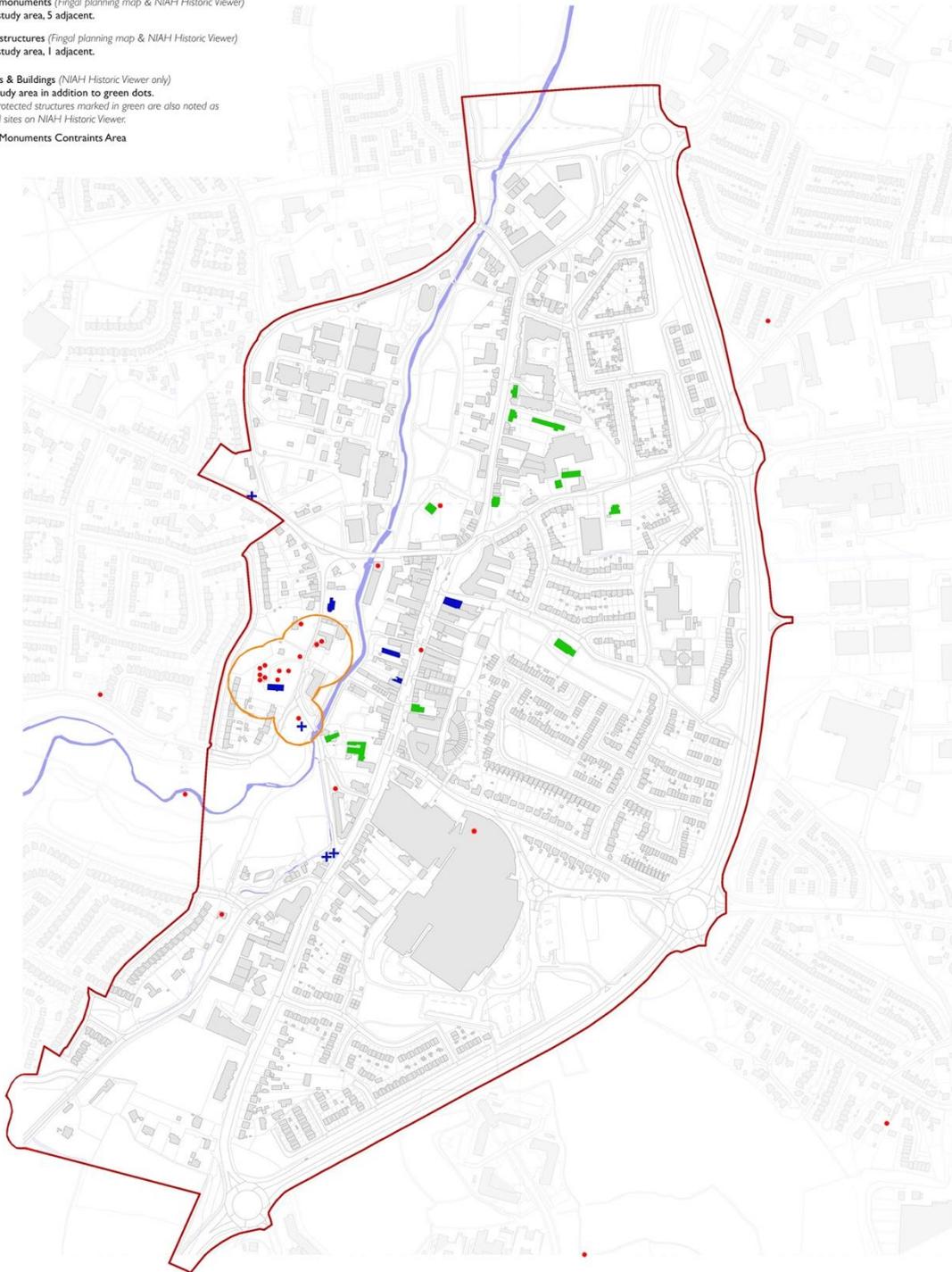


Figure 2-27 Designated Heritage Assets

Local distinctiveness is characterised predominantly by plain forms and a simple palette of construction materials consisting of exposed calp limestone with brick dressings, and also stucco covered calp as the most commonly used local materials. There are also some former thatched cottages – typical of north county Dublin - that have been re-roofed, while brick was subsequently used in the construction of more recent buildings.

Undesignated Heritage of Merit

There is, however, more heritage of merit than first meets the eye, and much of this is currently, neglected, poorly maintained and as a result underappreciated. Many of these structures are not designated or protected as a result being obscured behind poor signage, later accretions or simply boarded up altogether (cf. Undesignated Built Heritage of Merit). Historic photographs attest to the character and appearance of the town and quality of what lies beneath the more recent surface treatments.



Figure 2-28 Calp limestone & brick detailing to No.68 Seatown Road West



Figure 2-29 North Street – a fine c.late-19th century terrace



Figure 2-30 Interesting boarded up double-fronted 19th Century House with unused long outbuilding adjacent.



Figure 2-31 1920s former council houses with art deco-like porches



Figure 2-32 Fingal Community College, North Street (c.1960s/'70s).



Figure 2-33 Interesting if much altered 19th century cottages, North Street, opposite the courthouse.



Figure 2-34 County Hall, Main Street. Completed in 2000 to the designs of Bucholz McEvoy with BDP, and at a cost of £13.3 million, the impressive and highly regarded Fingal County Hall was designed to be an 'open and transparent expression of local government' and to accommodate 450 staff. The architects deliberately curved their building to respond to / define one side of an oval embracing 150 year old Himalayan Cedar and mature holm oaks on the site that had belonged the former Swords House, the ground of which it stands on. In February 2001, the Architectural Review described the office as '...having great civic presence.'



Figure 2-35 and 2-36 19th century houses at the junction of Main Street & Bridge Street viewed from the good quality but poorly laid paved area outside County Hall. Late-19th century photo on right is view up Main Street from outside what was then Swords House, the future site of County Hall.



Figure3-2 Late-19th century view down Main Street towards the castle, at centre, and the tree-lined front of Swords House to the right.



Figure 2-37 Surviving 19th century fanlight above door in the row of much altered 19th century houses on Main Street, opposite County Hall and across from the castle.



Figure 2-38 Terrace of houses at 59 Main Street that have been altered.



Figure 2-39 Mudwalled former thatched cottage, probably early 19th century Church Road

The Settings of Buildings, Public Realm & Opportunities

One of the biggest problems is that of the poor settings of three of the best buildings – the castle, the court house and County Hall, the latter of which was deliberately designed to be open and transparent, but is in fact shielded from the town by a dense stand of veteran, evergreen oak trees, which are very beautiful but also a problem as they are a complete visual barrier to the castle and the rest of the town. **Some judicious thinning might improve visual connectivity between these key public buildings.**

Car parking dominates the setting of the courthouse, as well as impinging negatively on the setting of the castle and County Hall. **It would be highly desirable to remove this parking to improve the public realm.** Visual clutter abounds in the town, with poor quality street signage, fascia boards and lighting. Generally, pavements are wide, and some are laid with good materials, but where they are failing, it is mainly because they have been laid poorly. Bus shelters block views to the castle from Main Street. **There are very few seats on Main Street or elsewhere, so there is little to encourage you to stop and sit.**

There are therefore **many opportunities for simple improvements to settings of historic buildings and public realm**, along with the imaginative adaptation and the reuse of buildings currently unused or boarded up.

A **reappraisal of the Record of Protected Structures** would be worthwhile.

2.5.3 [Archaeology](#)

Irish Archaeological Company (IAC) undertook an Archaeological, Architectural and Cultural Heritage Constraints Study for the Sustainable Swords project. A detailed report has been provided to Fingal County Council, with a summary included here.

The Archaeological, Architectural and Cultural Heritage Constraints Study area comprises the majority of Swords town centre and is centred on ITM 716037, 747604. The area is bounded by the Swords Bypass (R132) to the east and by sections of Watery Lane (R125), St Columbas Rise, Highfield Downs, Ballintrane Wood and Hawthorne Park to the west. North to south the study area spans the area from the Estuary Roundabout to the Pinnock Hill Roundabout and measures c. 2km north-south by c. 0.9

km east-west (Figure 2-40). The constraints area encompasses all or parts of 17 townlands, all located within the civil parish of Swords, in the barony of Nethercross.

The site incorporates approximately three quarters of the zone of archaeological potential for the historic town of Swords, which is a recorded monument (DU011-035). There are a further 21 recorded archaeological sites within the constraints area, including the multiple recorded archaeological sites within the historic town, the majority of which are part of a cluster associated with St Columba’s Church. In the wider vicinity, there is one further site within 50m of the boundaries of the constraints area, a burial (DU011-090) recorded in Ward River Valley Park, c. 30m to the west. One site within the town, Swords Castle, is a National Monument in state guardianship (Ref.: 340).

There are 25 structures within the constraints area that are recorded on the NIAH (Figure 2-41), 16 of which are also recorded as Protected Structures (Figures 2-42). A further four structures are recorded as Protected Structures, although not recorded on the NIAH, a notable example being Swords Castle (RPS 351), which is also a National Monument (Ref.: 340).

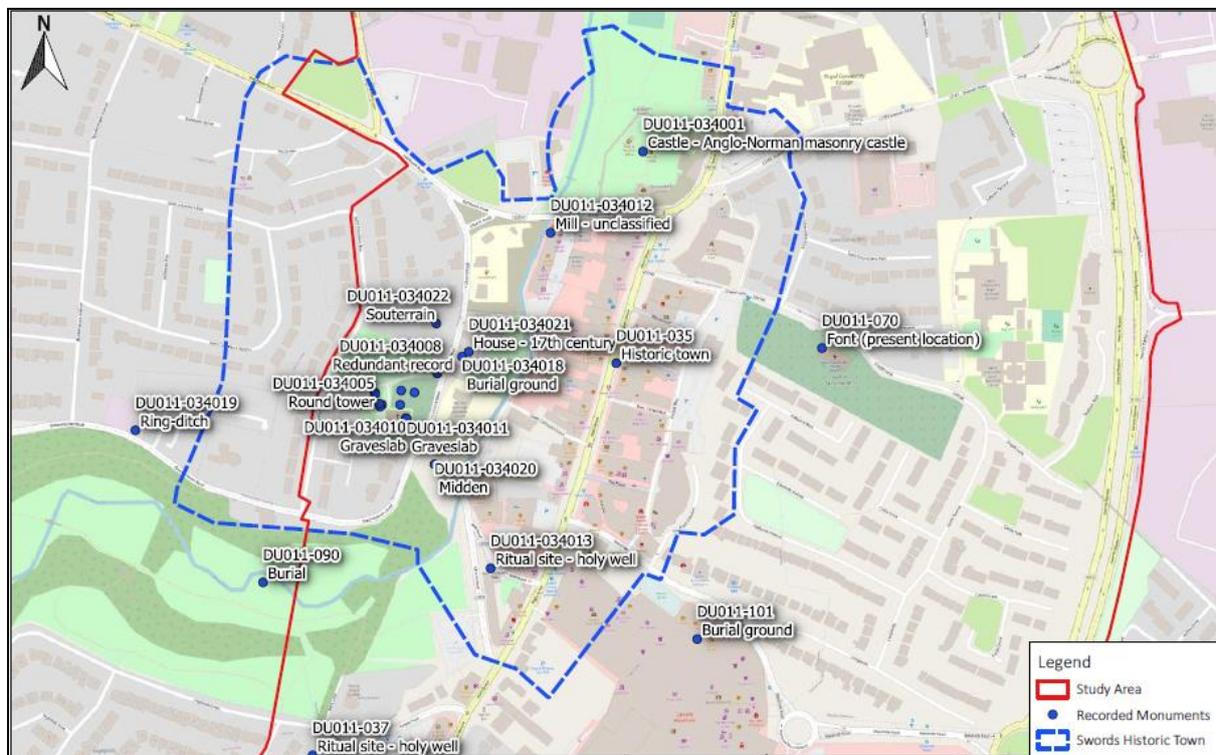


Figure 2-40: Recorded monuments located within the study area

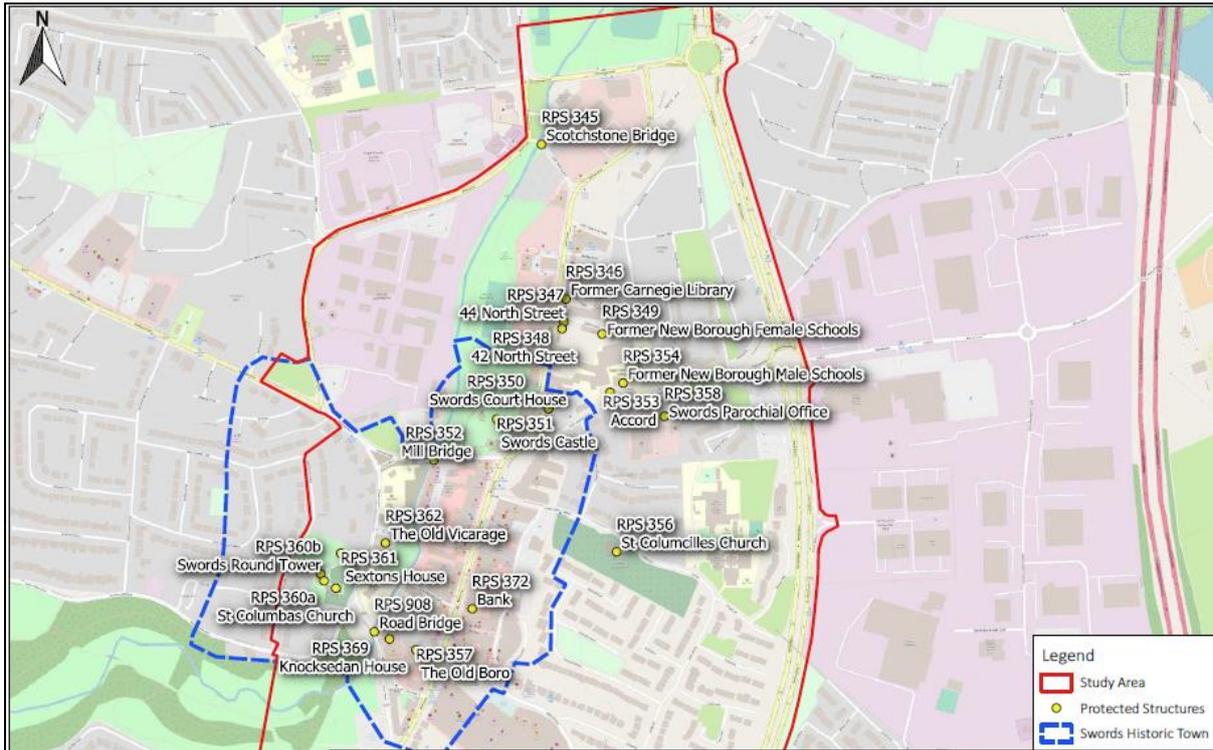


Figure 2-41: Protected Structures located within the study area

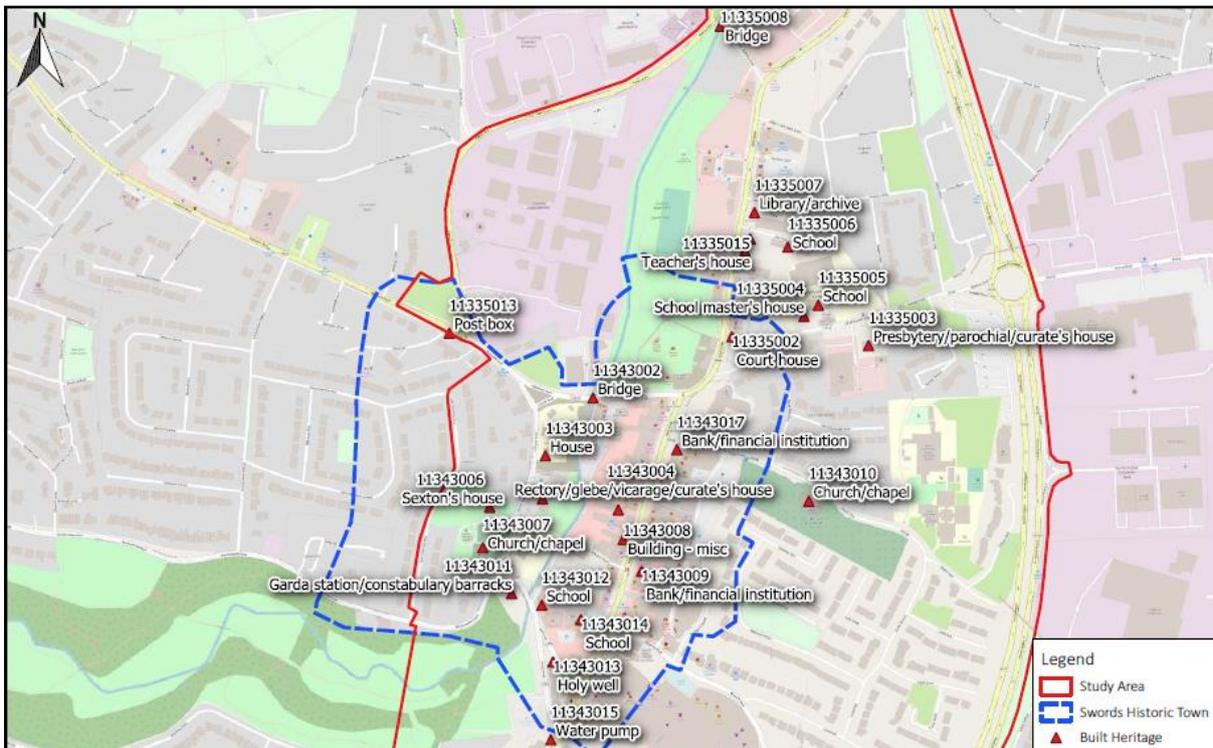


Figure 2-42: NIAH Structures located within the study area

A review of the Excavation Bulletin (1970–2020) has shown that 44 archaeological investigations have been carried out to date within the constraints area, 27 of which revealed nothing of archaeological significance. **Those excavations that did identify archaeological remains, include an early medieval cemetery (DU011-101), early medieval burials predating the construction of Swords**

Castle, a probable medieval cemetery that has been subject to erosion by the River Ward (DU011-090) and scattered medieval and post medieval remains throughout the core of the historic centre of Swords.

A total of three designed landscapes have been identified from the desktop resource wholly or partially within the constraints area. Of the three landscapes, two retain their principal structures one of which, Cremona House, lies within the Constraints area, although neither structure is listed on the RPS or NIAH.

Apart from the demesne landscapes, archaeological and architectural constraints within the study area are largely confined to its north-western half, particularly the townlands of Townparks and Swords Glebe.

All recorded archaeological sites should be considered as key cultural heritage constraints and avoided where possible. Any works that may affect Swords Castle will require ministerial consent and should also be informed by the Swords Castle Conservation Plan carried out for Fingal Council in 2013. **All Areas of Archaeological Potential, such as watercourses, should also be considered as archaeological constraints and avoided where possible.** Where avoidance is not possible, potential impacts should be minimised through design. This includes the use of clear span structures across water ways, for example. Any works that may affect recorded monuments, or the zone of archaeological potential for the historic town of Swords, will require detailed archaeological impact assessments with a suite of mitigation measures designed to reduce or remove any potential impacts upon the archaeological resource.

A total of 21 individual or groups of Protected Structures are located within the constraints area. **Protected structures should be considered as key cultural heritage constraints during the design of the upgraded infrastructure with direct impacts and impacts on settings avoided where possible.**

There are no Architectural Conservation Areas located within the study area.

Designed landscapes should be considered as cultural heritage constraints during the design of any future projects. It is possible that original features, such as demesne walls that border the existing road network, survive and it should be noted that analysis undertaken to date is desk based, field inspection will be required to assess the exact nature and extent of the designed landscapes within the constraints area.

2.6 Economy and Retail

2.6.1 [Business Support and Promotion](#)

The Swords area is within the Fingal Chamber region. Retailers and businesses in the area would be eligible for membership. The Fingal Chamber is the accredited chamber for the entire of Fingal and is the region's largest business organisation. The Fingal Chamber provides advice, support, referrals, and representation to help business grow and develop.

The Fingal Local Enterprise Office (LEO) is located within Swords and serves the entire of Fingal, North County Dublin by offering advice to entrepreneurs on starting and growing a small business and providing high quality business training and financial support. The Fingal LEO aim is 'to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high-quality supports for business ideas'.

The Fingal LEO offers a range of financial support to qualifying small businesses, with up to 10 employees that are based in Fingal. These financial supports assist new and existing small business and help them reach their full potential. There is a set criterion for Financial Assistance from the Fingal LEO. Some of these criteria are the person applying must be an EU citizen, the business must have less than 10 employees and cannot be a business that deals in professional services, consultancy, retail, or distribution. The full list of eligible and ineligible projects can be found the Fingal LEO website. See Table 1-9 in the technical appendix for an overview of some of the grants and supports offered by the Fingal LEO:

On top of the funds available to small businesses through the Fingal Local Enterprise office, Enterprise Ireland also provide a range of supports to business tailored to suit the businesses stage of development and its specific funding needs. Enterprise Ireland offer supports to companies at four different stages of development, these are: Have a Start-up Idea, High Potential Start-up (HPSU) funding, Established SME Funding (> 10 Employees) and Large Company Funding (>250 Employees). (see table 1-10 in the technical appendix for a list of supports and funds offered by Enterprise Ireland).

Fingal County Council support local businesses in several ways, Fingal County Council operates three Enterprise Centres across the county, supporting 69 businesses and 342 jobs. One of these is located within Swords at Drinan.

The Council also has a dedicated Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) that is responsible for coordinating, planning, and overseeing local development initiatives including the implementation of the Fingal Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP). The most recent LECP ran from 2016-2020 and it set out objectives and actions needed to promote and support economic, local and community development.

2.6.2 [Business Development](#)

Fingal County Councils Economic, Enterprise, Tourism and Cultural Development Department have launched a Sustainable Business initiative aimed at supporting the SME sector, using practical tools and resources to help SME's to embrace more sustainable measures within their business. This initiative lists four major benefits of introducing sustainable thinking to a business These are Cost Saving; Build a Positive Reputation; Increase Competitiveness; Attracts a Conscientious Team.

There are three key headings under this initiative, Energy, Water and Waste, each heading is supported with its own **digital brochure with ideas on how businesses can become more sustainable and the benefits they can expect in incorporating sustainability into the day to day running of their business.** The Sustainable Business Energy heading aims to inform businesses of energy wastage and the benefits of focusing on energy usage for small businesses, the water heading aims to inform businesses of unconscious water wastage and promotes focusing on water usage and actions to reduce waste, and the waste heading aims to get businesses to look at the different aspects of waste production and plan a course of action using the 'Waste Hierarchy' of; Eliminate, Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle and Dispose.

Some businesses within Swords have taken steps of their own to move towards a more sustainable method of operation. One of these businesses is the **Pavilions Shopping Centre**, the Pavilions shopping centre is leading by example and is aiming to be a carbon natural business by 2030. It has made significant impacts in all three of the Sustainable Business headings. In 2019, energy consumption was reduced by 9%, water consumption was reduced by 8% and they recycled 87% of their waste which amounted to 3,428 tonnes of waste recycled. (Source: www.pavilions.ie)

The Fingal Local Enterprise Office are taking part of the new initiative from Local Enterprise Offices to help prepare small businesses for the low carbon, more resource efficient economy of the future called '**Green for Micro**'. This programme is free and is available to companies with up to ten employees. LEO's will offer advice and technical support to small businesses on wide range of topics such as resource efficiency, understanding your carbon footprint and implementing an environmental management system. This initiative aims to give small business the assistance and ability to develop 'greener' policy that can offer a range of benefits to small businesses such as Increased cost saving, improved resource efficiency, reduced environmental footprint and greenhouse gas emissions.

2.6.3 Retailer Representation

Swords does not have a dedicated retailer representation such as a local business association. A lot of the retail offering comes from the Pavilions Shopping Centre and as such the shopping centre management would be its representation. Swords benefits from having Fingal County Council's County office in the town and there is an established Fingal Chamber of commerce for the county however Swords would benefit from a dedicated business association for retailers and businesses within Swords town and its environs.

The main street in Swords Town has cafés and restaurants located on it but there is a limited retail offering. These businesses do not have a business association or retailer representative organisation to act as a single voice for the business. As the population within Swords and its surrounding area grows, more and more retailers and business will look to locate within Swords. **A local business association would be a single representation for the retailers and business of Swords town and could help promote Swords, provide a forum for networking by its members and provide a channel for information flow to members. In this regard there is an opportunity for a Business Improvement District (BID) mechanism for Swords town centre. Alternatively a town team could be established comprising members from the community and business owners that can act as a collective voice for Swords.**

2.6.4 [Retail Rents and Commercial Demand](#)

Retail trends:

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic can be seen on retailers across the country. Some high profile retailers will not be re-opening, with bank branch closures expected cross the country, high levels of vacancy in high streets will be seen and with Retail schemes increasing in due course, we will likely see an impact on rental values in the retail sector. According to CBRE's Ireland Bi-monthly research report, May 2021 it is expected that retail trade will bounce back significantly from the impacts of Covid-19, however until office workers and students return to their places of work / study and some tourism and business activity resumes, trading conditions will remain somewhat compromised.

Commercial Trends:

Most office workers have been working remotely for over a year, although movement towards office workers returning is being made with the vaccination programme, the office leasing market remains stagnant and is expected to stay this way until office workers can safely return to the office and inspections of properties can begin again. Despite this trend of stagnant leasing, CBRE Ireland has highlighted that the effects of the Covid-19 lockdowns on the Irish construction industry has seen the anticipated delivery of many office schemes delayed by up to 6 months or longer in some cases. According to CBRE's research *'only 56% of the office accommodation that was due for delivery in 2020 completed by year-end'* ⁸

According to CBRE's Ireland Bi-monthly research report, May 2021, prime headline office rents in North Suburbs of Dublin average out at €221.00 per m² while city centre rents averaged at €630.00 per m². This huge difference in rent could encourage some businesses to re-locate their offices to the less expensive suburbs.

Retail and Commercial Rents in Swords:

Field research was conducted on the current state of Swords retail and commercial offering, this included reviewing current retail and commercial listings for sale and rent in Swords and contacting local letting agents. The conclusions from this field research are as follows.

Retail rents in Swords change significantly depending on the area, the closer the premises is to the Pavilions shopping centre, generally the more expensive the rent per Sqm will be likely due to the large amount of footfall the Pavilions Shopping Centre attract. Local letting agents believe although retail has suffered recently nationwide, retail in towns and villages such as Swords have not been as impacted as more and more people look to the local towns and villages for their retail needs. The supply of retail space in Swords has been quite good according to local letting agents, especially up on North Street and generally the demand for retail and commercial space is quite high in Swords. **Local letting agents believe this demand for retail and commercial space will only get higher as the population of Swords grows.**

2.6.5 [Evening Economy](#)

The evening economy in Swords consists of pubs, restaurants, and a few late-night bars with the majority of these being located to the south of main street near the Pavilions shopping centre.

⁸ CBRE, Ireland Bi-Monthly Research Report, May 2021

There are many restaurants located within the Pavilions shopping centre however they would not be open late into the evening.

Swords evening economy has a very large catchment area, with a lot of people traveling from the more north Fingal towns. As Swords grows the evening economy has a lot of potential to grow with the town and make Swords a destination town for people to visit not only during the day but at night as well. Swords biggest competitor in terms of an evening economy would be Malahide, a town with established restaurants and bars. The public realm improvements on New Street in Malahide have shown the benefits to local businesses since outdoor dining has re-commenced, a trend Swords should follow suit to.

The main street in Swords could benefit from a high number of evening attractors to increase the footfall in the area in the evening. The Swords Cultural Quarter (SCQ) coming to fruition, the north end of Main Street is presented with a unique opportunity to grow its evening economy as the SCQ will likely increase footfall in the area both during the day and evening.

2.7 Tourism

2.7.1 [Visitor Attractions and Activities](#)

Heritage Attractions

The prime heritage asset of Swords town is Swords Castle, built in the thirteenth century by the Archbishop of Dublin, standing at the north end of Main Street opposite the Fingal County Council offices. Just a five-minute walk from Swords Castle on Church Road is **St. Columba's Church and Belfry**, founded by St Columba in the year 560 A.D. The structure has been described as Sword's hidden gem due to its location.

Since the publishing of *Your Swords an Emerging City Strategic Vision 2035* in 2008 by Fingal County Council, there have been propositions and plans to highlight the hidden heritage withheld in the town. For many years now Swords Castle has been the talk of future development for the benefit of both the local community and potential visitors. The site has been referred to as Sword's 'Sleeping Giant' from its unexploited potential. Swords Castle Cultural Quarter was published in 2015 outlining details of propositions for development.

The Swords Castle Conservation Plan recognises Swords Castle as an important heritage asset that requires promotion, preservation, and reconstruction to reach its full potential. The plan lays out a set of policies for any future development plans for proposals for the monument for Swords town. The plan contains six policies for the future of the castle. The policies aim to protect the castle's identity and significance, commit to the conservation of the castle, allow for the development of the monument that allows for physical and intellectual access, and secure recordings of archaeological investigations and research for educational purposes. Dublin County Council obtained ownership of Swords Castle from the Cobbe Family in 1985. Since 1990 reconstruction work has been underway, including the Curtain Walls, the Constable's Tower and the Chapel. There is currently a programme of repair underway for the Castle's Gatehouse.

The Swords Cultural Quarter (SCQ) project provides a significant opportunity for Swords and the wider north County Dublin area. Redevelopment of this key part of Swords town centre will provide a focus and hub for the town, which will not only provide a hub for local residents, but also provide an attraction that can encourage increased numbers of national and international visitors to

Swords. Creation of a plaza as part of this project will provide opportunity for markets and events that will animate the town centre.

Parks

Ward River Valley Regional Park lies on the banks of the Ward River. The Park is backing on to Main St Swords dividing Estates and the Main St. Facilities in the park include viewing points, picnic sites and sports pitches. **Swords Town Park** forms part of the wider Ward River park. Facilities in the park include a playground and tennis courts. There are opportunities to provide enhanced linkages between Ward River Regional Park, Swords Town Park, and the Broadmeadow River as part of an integrated walking and cycling network.

Golf

St. Margaret's Golf & Country Club hosts an 18-hole golf course along with the award winning Lír Restaurant. **Roganstown Hotel** has two acclaimed 18-hole golf courses for visitors, set along the banks of the Broadmeadow river. Swords Open Golf Course for one, for moderate difficulty, and the Roganstown Golf Course for a more challenging experience.

Food and Craft

Dublin Food School is situated on Swords Main St. in the Town Centre Mall. Here visitors can participate in a range of cookery classes. The courses provided are all unique in their offering. North County Dublin is home to many food producers with a long history of producing fruit and vegetables for the Dublin market. This includes many near Swords such as **Keelings**. There is an opportunity to create an artisan food market in Swords which could be located at the Swords Cultural Quarter.

Retail

The **Pavilions Shopping Centre** which hosts over 90 retail outlets as well as a multiplex cinema, **Movies @ Swords** attracts many north County Dublin residents. Swords main street is another popular destination amongst locals for its night life. With multiple pubs, bars/ late bars and nightclubs such as Wrights's Café Bar, The Old Schoolhouse, The Old Borough, Gilbert & Wright Wine Bar.

Seasonal Events

Effective methods of increasing the leisure and recreational offerings of communities is through civic engagement. These engagements often come in the form of public participation events, such as social activities and partnerships. As Swords is the county town of Fingal, there is a strong and well-established culture of public participation in events held by both Fingal County Council and private events organisations. The town plays host to several public events and activities throughout the year, such as **Fingal Inclusion Week, the Halloween Animations, Swords Summer Festival and St. Patrick's Day parade** are all examples of events hosted for public engagement and participation.

2.7.2 [Visitor Accommodation](#)

The supply of accommodation for visitors in Swords Town is made up of B&B's, hotels, guesthouses, and self-catering accommodation. Fifty percent of accommodation providers in Swords are B&B owners. After that, hotels are the second highest provider. There are currently nine B&B's, five hotels, and two guesthouses and self-caterings respectively.

2.7.3 [Promotion and Marketing](#)

Discover Ireland

Discover Ireland promote the activities and accommodation available in Swords as part of the Dublin offer. The activities include Swords Museum and Fingal Genealogy, Swords Castle, Swords Round Tower and Belfry underpinned by 'Free things to do'. Discover Ireland are actively promoting Balheary Shooting as a visitor activity however, their website states it is a members' only club. Saleable experiences include the Dublin Food School situated on Swords Main St. Discover Ireland also have a comprehensive accommodation listing in Swords Town available on their website.

Fingal County Council

Fingal County Council's web page *Discover Swords* promotes Swords Castle & Town Park and The Pavilions Shopping Centre on the Welcome to Swords web page. Furthermore, Swords Castle is promoted on the Fingal County Council main page of the Visitor tab on their website. Activities promoted by the council include *Heritage from Home: Swords Heritage Trail*, a free audio guide available to download on the Fingal County Council website. Facilities in the area including playgrounds, games areas and skate park are listed on the Fingal website when looking up Swords.

Visit Swords

The Visit Dublin brand developed unique web sites for its major towns, including Swords, www.visitswords.ie. The website provides general information on access, amenities, accommodation, and attractions in Swords.

Instagram

Individual units have their own pages i.e. Swords Pavilions, Café Bar Swords, the Cocktavern and the Betsy Swords are the top suggested pages by Instagram when searching Swords. There is no one page dedicated to Swords Tourism.

2.8 **Leisure and Recreation**

Recreation, leisure, and sports activities play an important role in our lives and in strengthening local communities. Their many benefits include improving health and well-being, promoting social inclusivity, and contributing to the economic fabric of our communities. These activities may involve and bring together individuals, families, small groups, teams, or whole communities and are relevant to people of all ages, abilities, and levels of skill. The types of activities people participate in vary greatly and correlate strongly to the provision and accessibility of recreation, leisure and/or sports facilities near to their homes, workplaces or schools.

2.8.1 [Quantity and Quality of Open Space](#)

Ward River Valley Regional Park

Much of the open space in Swords is open for public access and use. The Ward River Valley Regional Park represents a key current and future location for leisure and recreation in both Swords and the greater Fingal South area. The park covers an area of 89 hectares (220 acres). The park contains viewing points, picnic sites and sports pitches, Swords Town Park which includes a playground and tennis courts, with Swords Castle also adjoining the park. Most defined uses within the park such as

playing pitches and playgrounds are located towards the western sections of the park. The eastern section of the park which adjoins both the town centre and Swords Castle narrows considerably.

Accessibility of park entrances is sporadic along its eastern boundaries, with poor legibility of park access. Entrances provided are predominantly found along the western and southern boundaries of the park, with many not inclusive of wheelchair, buggy or bicycle access with many access points consisting of kissing and swing gates. Given demographic aspects of Swords, such as a higher disability rate within the town centre (greater than 13.7%) and the high percentage of households with young children in the Swords area, **the future needs of the population for inclusive access of the park is a key aspect of the future sustainability and resilience of Swords and its recreation and leisure facilities.**

Undefined Green Spaces

Within the residential areas of Swords are undefined open green spaces. While these are defined open spaces, often being land leftover from residential development, they provide valuable pockets of open green space for use by residents. These green spaces can also host informal events and community activities such as school sports days, community barbeques, boot camps among others. However, conversely these open green spaces can also be the location of anti-social behaviour.

Some areas such as the former mill site near the Ward River at Church Road/Brackenstown Road provide an opportunity for development of more formal open space close to the town centre.

2.8.2 [Town Centre Amenities](#)

Within the Swords area, there are several leisure and recreational amenities, such community centres, scout dens, libraries, and leisure facilities. However, much of the town centre is comprised of commercial retail activity. Many leisure and retail amenities are located outside of the town centre and village area of Swords, such as playing pitches, public parks, and playgrounds, as well as indoor facilities such as leisure centres, libraries and community centres. As stated previously, the most prominent town centre amenities in Swords is the eastern section of the Ward River Valley Regional Park, Swords Castle (including Swords Community Park) and Town Park. Sites which informally act as places for leisure and recreation such as Plaza Village and Pavilions Shopping Centre also play a role in the community as informal amenity assets.

There are several examples of future need for amenities within the town centre. Currently there is no parish centre located in the town centre as part of St. Colmcille's Church and Parish. However, Swords Senior Citizen's Club features as functioning like a parish centre. Carnegie Free Library, located on North Street, is now resident to **Swords Historical Society and Museum** and acts as an important town centre heritage amenity alongside Swords Castle. **There is an opportunity to develop this further as a visitor attraction, telling the stories and history of Swords in an immersive and engaging way.**

2.8.3 [Sports Facilities](#)

Pitch sports currently have the highest provision within the Swords LEA, with 56 pitch sports facilities. Pitch sports are well represented within this area of the LEA, although they are mainly grouped on the western and north-eastern sides of the settlement with not many facilities located to the east towards the town centre. Most pitch sports facilities in Swords are located to the west and north. **The availability of open space within and closer to the town centre is limited** (apart from

sections of open space along the Ward River Valley) due to urban settlement patterns associated with the town centre. Proximate to Swords town centre are pitch facilities towards the southern section of the LEA that borders Dublin Airport and Santry. For many of these pitch facilities to the south, they are generally used by airport employees, colleges and/or universities located outside the Swords LEA.

As identified in the Fingal Recreation and Leisure Facilities Audit (2019) undertaken by KPMG Future Analytics, there was a total of 132 facilities in the Swords LEA of the 324 facilities in Fingal in total. This equates to over 40% of all Fingal facilities being in the Swords LEA. These facilities include number of sports centres, multi-sports facilities, playing pitches, clubs, playgrounds, swimming pools, gyms, sailing and water activities, golf clubs, equestrian centres, shooting clubs as well as a concentration of parks and small open spaces in addition to publicly accessible playgrounds and sports pitches.

There are 82 sports and recreation facilities in Swords and its immediate environs as identified in the Fingal Sports and Recreation Audit (data collection 2019). These facilities provide for a diverse range of activity from martial arts to equestrian activity and outdoor pitches. A breakdown of facilities by activity and count is set out in Table 2-1 and mapped in Figure 2-43.

Table 2-1 Sports and recreation facilities in Swords (KPMG FA 2019)

Facility Type	No. Facilities
All Weather Pitch	3
Community Centre	2
Equestrian	4
Football Club	3
GAA Club	5
Golf Club	1
Heritage Site Which Caters for Sport	1
Indoor Facility	1
Library	1
Martial Arts	2
Multi-Use Games Areas	2
Outdoor Gym Equipment	2
Outdoor Pitch	27
Outdoor Tennis Courts	4
Play Area	9
Private Leisure Facility	12
Scouts	2
Skate Park	1
Total	82

Sport and Recreation Facilities

- All Weather Pitch
- Community Centre
- Equestrian
- Football Club
- Gaa Club
- Golf Club
- Gun Club
- Heritage Site Which Caters For Sport
- Indoor Facility
- Library
- Martial Arts
- Multi-Use Games Areas
- Outdoor Gym Equipment
- Outdoor Pitch
- Outdoor Tennis Courts
- Play Area
- Private Leisure Facility
- Scouts
- Skate Park
- Swords

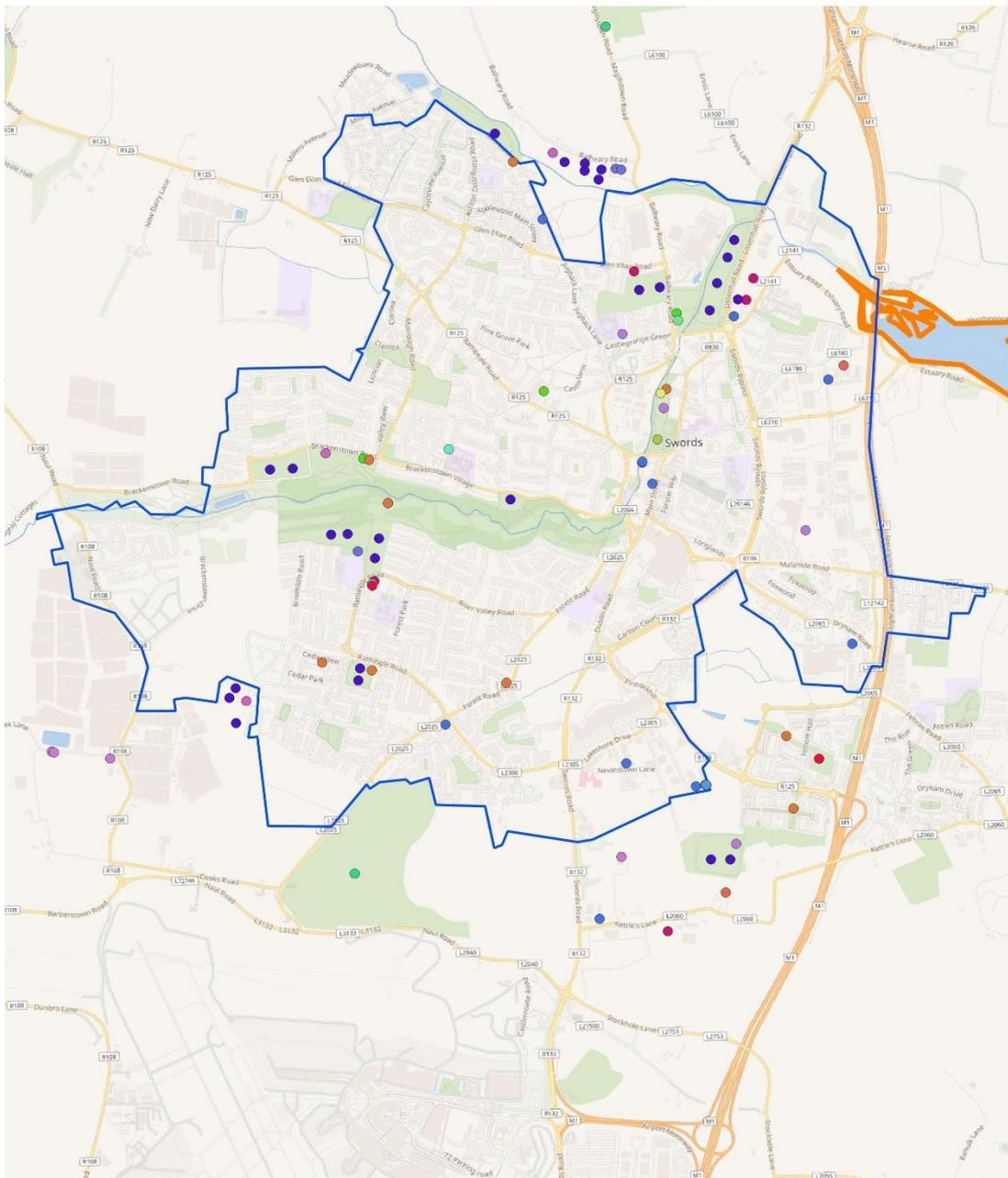


Figure 2-43 Sports and recreation facilities in Swords (KPMG FA 2019)

3 Consultation

3.1 Overview of Approach

Sustainable communities are those that optimise social capital to provide for an enhanced, accessible, inclusive, child friendly and healthy urban environment whilst serving the needs of the local population. There is therefore a critical role for collaboration with the client and consultation with the local communities in order to understand the benefits that can be attributed to this project and stakeholder participation will be a critical factor in the delivery of the project outcomes and improved liveability through Sustainable Swords.

The project team have engaged, within the restrictions of Covid, in a range of engagement measures. This has included one-to-one interviews, an online business and community survey, written submissions, and a survey with school children.

We would like to sincerely thank all of those who have participated so far, and we welcome your involvement.

3.2 Online Survey Summary

The Sustainable Swords project **held two surveys open to the public** on Fingal County Councils Consultation webpage. A **public survey was held that received a total of 325 responses** and a **business survey was held that received 10 responses**. This section is a brief summary of the survey responses received.

Public Survey:

- 93.2% of people who answered the survey live within the area with almost 80% living in Swords for more than 10 years
- The main reasons people moved to Swords was for good housing and affordability.
- Out of the respondents, 56% use a private car as their primary mode of travel to Swords Town Centre, 36% walk and only 4% cycle
- When asked what would make you want to walk / cycle instead, 33% stated a new footpath or cycle way would and 17% better / safer crossing en route to school/work
- 88% of people think Swords is a safe place to live but when asked '*what are your safety concerns*' 56% responded with traffic. Other safety concerns are also Anti-social behaviour and policing, and footpath Quality and access.
- The top three strengths respondents identified for Swords were retail offering, amenities and services and strategic location.
- The top three opportunities respondents identified for Swords over the next 10 years were Improved Public Realm and Pedestrianisation, Better Public Facilities, Events and Activities and Improvements to Traffic, Transport and Parking.
- When asked to describe Swords in three words, Vibrant, Historic, Beautiful was the most common response.

Business Survey:

- 80% of respondents have their business located within Swords and the most common sector was Information and Communication with 30%
- 60% of respondents had a business of less than 5 employees and 50% of businesses have been operating for more than 10 years.
- In terms of facilities, 30% of business owned a retail unit while 0% stated they rented a retail unit and 30% use rented office space while only 20% of businesses owned office space. 20% of businesses stated they worked from home.
- Swords top three strengths as a place to do businesses were identified as *access to services, growth potential, and quality of life*
- Swords top three constraints as a place to do business were identified as *cost of housing, availability of office space, and accessibility (public transport options)*
- 60% of businesses responded that their sector is either growing well or very well and expect that to continue into the medium term.

3.3 The future Swords – A Childs Perspective

It is critically important to involve children in the Sustainable Swords project and to consult with them on the development of their town. Children have often been forgotten and left out of the planning process, as a result towns and cities have been developed which often neglect the needs and wants of children in terms of how they use spaces, how they feel when in a space, what facilities they need and how they would like to travel. Children have an important role in building a more sustainable Swords and can greatly add to the process by bringing their unique perspectives to the project and offering solutions that may be overlooked by adults.

Ireland is a signatory to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Goal 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities sets out a vision of how we make our towns and cities sustainable. The key element to making our communities sustainable is to ensure an inclusive approach so that all members of our community have a voice when it comes to developing a town for their future. **Children are the future of Swords and without their involvement then an inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable town may not be achieved.**

To engage with schools Green-Schools firstly devised a travel survey to send electronically to parents of the students of the nine participating schools. This survey was carefully designed using ArcGIS, to be clear and user friendly, while also maximising the data it would provide. Questions focused on how students usually travel to school, how they would prefer to travel to school, what are their perceived barriers to active travel, what improvements would encourage them to choose an active way to travel to and from school. **The survey was very well received, with 647 responses.**

Primary School Analysis

The results from the survey were particularly interesting as to show the levels and reasons why families choose different modes of transport to get to school.

For primary schools it was observed that a considerably large portion use active travel to get to school, with walking (63%), cycling (2.5%) and scooting (2%). Whilst such a high percentage of students walking is encouraging, the considerably lower figures for cycling and scooting are

noteworthy. The survey question of “If you could pick your favourite way to travel to school?” adds further to picture, with respondents giving cycling (28%) and scooting (9%). Though primary students would potentially like to take another mode of transport they may not feel able too.

When those who already travel to school in an active way were asked what would make them feel more comfortable about walking/ cycling to school the top four points that were selected were: safer crossing points (30%), reduced traffic speed (24%), reduced traffic volume (20%) and new/improved footpaths (19%).

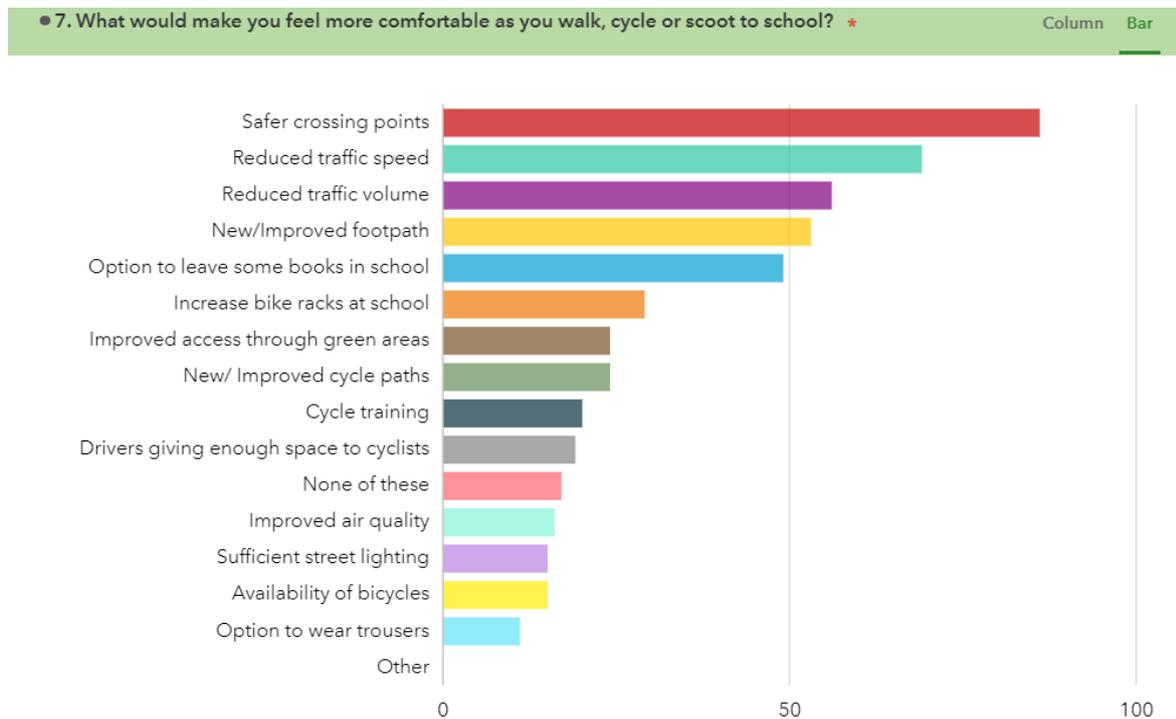


Figure 3-1 Survey Answers

By considering students responses as to their day-to-day experience of the paths and roads in Swords, considerations and improvements can be made to enable more to walk, cycle and scoot and to make the routes safer. It can also aid future development of the area to see what issues hinder people from choosing active travel modes.

Secondary School Analysis

The results of the secondary school survey revealed the following breakdown of those traveling in a sustainable way- walking (32%), cycling (6%), public bus (9%), private bus (4%) and with car travel at (40%). When asked how they would prefer to travel, walking was (34%), cycling (15%), private bus (8%), public bus (6%) and car at (28%). [Though it is to be noted that the survey was conducted during Covid-19, and this may attribute to the decrease in wanting to use public transport)

With such a considerable amount travelling by car, and expressing that it is not their preferred mode, it highlights further opportunity to improve the infrastructure and address concerns in order to encourage sustainable travel modes.

When respondents who do not walk, cycle or scoot were asked what would encourage them to, the answers were a mixture of behavioural and infrastructural. The option to leave books at school was (19%) and an option to wear trousers (15%) both rated highly. The second most popular response was improved access through green areas (18%) with other options which also featured quite highly being: new/improved cycle paths (12%), new/improved footpaths (12%) and safer crossing points (10%).

Answers	Count	Percentage
New/Improved footpath	42	11.54%
Safer crossing points	38	10.44%
Reduced traffic speed	21	5.77%
Reduced traffic volume	27	7.42%
Improved access through green areas	64	17.58%
Sufficient street lighting	26	7.14%
New/ Improved cycle paths	43	11.81%
Drivers giving enough space to cyclists	22	6.04%
Cycle training	16	4.4%
Availability of bicycles	19	5.22%
Increase bike racks at school	24	6.59%

Figure 3-2 Survey Answers

Both for primary and secondary school a large portion of students walk, with 63% and 34% respectively. Though it must be noted that the above attitudes to active travel on the school journey only reflect the eight schools surveyed, and not all the schools in Swords. However, it does indicate that **there is huge potential in encouraging and supporting the school communities in the area to walk, scoot or cycle to school.**

School Workshops – in September/October 2021 Green Schools plan to engage with primary and secondary schools with in-school workshops to seek the views of children as to what they want their Swords to look and function like in the future. This detail will inform the Sustainable Swords project outcomes.

3.4 Strategic Conversations Summary

Strategic conversations were held with 24 individuals and groups of people representing key focus areas. The businesses and organisations contacted are listed in Appendix 1. Principal points made echo many of the comments made by those completing online surveys. The key themes coming from these strategic conversations are as follows:

The positives

- **Swords has strong heritage that can be promoted as a way of bringing people into the town.** Swords Castle and the Round Tower are a unique selling point for Swords in this aspect, Swords would benefit from promoting this heritage as a way of attracting visitors into the town
- **The Swords Cultural Quarter will provide an attraction for the north end of main street and north street** and will attract greater numbers of footfall to the area, this space has potential for a cultural centre, regular food markets and other outdoor events
- The number of **parks and green areas around Swords is a big positive** for the town, the proximity to the ward river and the ward river valley park benefits the town hugely, connections and permeability to these areas should be increased to maximise this benefit
- The **new estates being built to the north west have great cycle infrastructure to schools**, if this was replicated for the whole of Swords it would enable more kids to safely cycle to school.

Public Realm and maintenance

- A key theme that came out in almost every strategic conversation was **the poor conditions that the footpaths and cycleways around and in Swords town centre are in**, these bring a lot of negatives to the town such as lack of access for the disabled/elderly population and it is perceived as unsightly
- The main street has many architecturally pleasing buildings, but many are **negatively impacted by poor shopfront design at ground level**. Several people highlighted the need and benefit for a universal shopfront design
- Many of the strategic conversations spoke about an **element of pedestrianisation on main street, this was either for full or partial pedestrianisation with many people mentioning a one-way system** as a compromise if full pedestrianisation was not realistic from a transport planning perspective.

Accessibility and permeability

- One of the positives was Swords close proximity to parks and green spaces, particularly the Ward River Valley Park and the Malahide Estuary however, it was a key theme in these conversations **that is a lack of or poor connections from the town centre to these parks and green spaces**. It was noted that if these connections were improved, school kids, would use these connections more as a means to travel to school.
- **Walkability and cyclability in and around Swords was a reoccurring topic, many of the conversations people stated it was not easy or safe to walk into the town from the surrounding areas let alone cycle**, if this aspect was improved, less people would rely on their cars getting into the town.

Traffic and roads

- **Traffic and congestion within the town centre, particularly around the junction to the North end of Main street is an issue.** There is a high level of car dependency within Swords and this can be seen with main streets on-street parking being extremely busy most days.
- **There is a lack of official pedestrian crossing across Swords, particular around large junctions and main street.** If more of these were to be added, it would make Swords more accessible for children and the less abled population.



4 SWOT Analysis

Following the stakeholder interviews and survey response feedback, an analysis of Swords Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) was undertaken associated with the development of Swords Town. Socio-economic profiling, along with stakeholder consultation helped form this SWOT analysis and demonstrates what is valued within Swords and where the threats and opportunities lie.

This SWOT analysis helps understand what the towns downfalls are, what needs to be changed, what the future opportunities are and what threats are posed to the town's development.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic location on Dublin – Belfast Economic Corridor – strong employment base • Excellent road connections with City Centre, Dublin Port, other areas of GDA (M1, M50, Port Tunnel) • County Town with a rural village feel close to Dublin • Once-in-a-generation public transport investment in Metrolink and BusConnects • Funding available for cycle lanes under NTA 5-year programme • Natural assets offered by the Town Park, Ward River Valley Park and Broad Meadow River, and proximity to Estuary • Historic assets offered by Swords Castle and St. Columba's Church and Round Tower • The architecture of the main street buildings • Architecture of the main street buildings providing a village feel • Relatively flat topography highly amenable for walking and cycling where conditions are favourable • Planned investment in the Swords Cultural Quarter • Pavilions Shopping centre in the centre of town attracting large volumes of footfall • The towns environs food expertise • County Hall being located within the Town • Large population that is continuously growing • Strong sense of community through social groups and enterprises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of direct rail connectivity to Dublin, Airport and other destinations • Little dedicated cycle infrastructure within Study Area • Quality of pedestrian environment and crossings variable across the town centre • Cluttered public realm in town centre – dominated by car parking and legacy of road engineering • Town centre highly dominated by the car. No restrictions for through traffic • Lack of safe access to the town centre from Knocksedan estate • Impact on quality of life and health through car-based emissions • East-west mobility is limited by road corridors (R132, M1) and lack of permeability through housing estates. • Underdeveloped public transport and active travel connectivity with wider FCC area (Malahide, Donabate) • Lack of accessibility for disabled citizens • Poor pavement conditions on sections of Main Street • Lack of all-weather playing pitches at Fingallians and high-quality public facilities • Lack of public toilets • Lack of lighting along Ward River • Restaurants blocking Ward River Walk • Refuse collection and litter blackspots • High vacancy and poor quality of public realm along North section of Main Street • Lack of a central attraction within the town • Swords in not included in the LEADER catchment • Side streets are neglected

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evening economy in Swords has a large catchment area. • Wide footpaths through the town centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor signage on Main street • Some poor-quality retail offering on Main Street • Presence of anti-social behaviour • Lack of facilities for youth • Lack of connectivity and permeability through parks
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Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for a more compact, concentric development in what will be one of the most accessible town centres in the State by 2027 • Opportunity for car-free and car-lite developments in line with National Planning Framework and Sustainable Housing Guidelines • Estuary Park and Ride is an option for those who live far from a metro station but also offers opportunity to Park At Distance for those that only need a car occasionally • R132 upgrade: opportunity to provide a more multi-functional street (DMURS) than is presently the case • Western distributor road to help ease traffic congestion in the town centre with focus on enabling a public transport corridor linking residential developments with transport hubs (Metrolink) and places of work and study • Opportunity to dramatically increase sustainable transport mode share for short journeys (<5km) through compact development and improving pedestrian and cycle network and other forms of micro-mobility such as e-scooters • Access to proposed MetroLink stations by well-designed cycle and pedestrian linkages must be prioritised to facilitate complete journeys by active travel and public transport • Opportunity to undertake and leverage temporary walking, cycling and temporary place-making interventions such as outdoor seating, pop-up cycling lanes and School Streets through the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If opportunities to restrain car parking in housing and employment developments are not taken then the future transport network is likely to be as congested as it is at present • Failure to reallocate road space from the private car to pedestrian, walking and cycling may lock-in car-dependency under a 'do-nothing' scenario • A change in the economic cycle that delays Metrolink and other key infrastructure • Changes in the political climate at local and national level that does not adhere to the NPF Compact Growth principle could lead to a de-prioritisation of investment in public transport and active travel. • Growth of online retail and changing consumer patterns may impact upon viability of town centre retail leading to vacancy • Brexit may have long term impact • Covid may continue to have a negative impact on the economy in 2021-2022

increased NTA and Arts Sustainable transport allocations

- Implementation of Safe Routes to School programme
- Enforcement of permeability measures in new estates by not taking in charge developments without measures included
- Main Street & Cultural Quarter: Potential to remove significant amounts of through vehicular traffic and significantly enhance the town centre
- Potential for improved cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, including potential Greenway from Malahide to Swords and link to Fingal Coastal Greenway, and Donabate to Swords
- Opportunity to significantly enhance Ward River Park to act as a sustainable access route linking west Swords to the town centre and north to the Town park and Broadmeadow Greenway (estimated to be completed in 2022). Ward River Greenway & Heritage Trail to link Rivermeade to Swords
- Provision of a bike share scheme around Swords
- Provision of a public school bus service
- Development of School Zones (Clear road signage, no idling zones, low speed limits)
- Provision of EV delivery/public transport hub
- Engagement of Swords businesses in Fingal County Council's Sustainable Business initiative
- Make use of free council parking at weekends- utilise this to bring people into the town centre for events.
- Improvements to public realm – outdoor seating, public toilets / bins, façade treatments, seasonal instalment of overhead canopies along Main Street where restaurants/cafés/bars are located
- Shopfront incentivisation scheme to enhance appearance of town centre retail
- Public amenity facilities (leisure centre PPP) with consideration of swimming pool for Swords

- Enhancement of playing facilities at Fingallians to encourage physical activity
- Public art / street art
- Promotion of Swords Cultural Quarter as a local and visitor cultural and events hub
- Promotion of Swords and Malahide as a two castle offer to domestic and international visitors, linked by a new Greenway along the Estuary and with bike hire available
- More seasonal events and activities in town to increase animation
- Enhanced outdoor dining facilities
- Consideration of St Columba's Church and Round Tower as a visitor attraction as a part of a Swords Heritage Trail (site maps, signage etc.)
- Community centred cultural programmes to celebrate all of Swords' diversity and traditions
- Better linkages and connectivity from town centre to the surrounding parks
- Regular Swords Castle Market or Market on Main street with potential for sponsorship of a Swords Farmers Market to provide farmers with a direct market for their produce and facilitate shorter supply chains and a lower carbon footprint for our food
- Provide better public amenity and facility provision – particularly for those aged between 12 and 18 years
- Becoming Ireland's first carbon neutral town
- Improved access for disabled citizens
- Free wifi in town centre
- Integration of the proposed national Town Centre First policy. To include use of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme to bring vacant and derelict sites back into commercial and residential usage
- CPO or CSO (Compulsory Sell Order) for derelict buildings and consideration of adaptive re-use to encourage upper floor use
- Repurposing of vacant buildings to create a remote working hub in the town centre to reduce need for commuting
- Utilise vacant site levy and building rates to minimise vacancy and dereliction in the town centre

- Facilitate Green infrastructure initiatives including enhanced green space, community gardens to increase biodiversity and connect communities to nature
- Increase in number of trees in Swords Town centre and links to green infrastructure network around the town to include community-based tree planting initiatives
- New build developments should integrate rooftop solar and environmentally friendly heating systems (heat pumps) and should provide for EV charging stations on site where possible
- Tool library/tool shed
- Bottle filling stations and public fountains should be rolled out at scale to reduce plastic bottle waste, following on from the successful rollout of 9 contactless Ecofil stations in 2020.



5 Strategic Priorities

The aim of this plan is to increase the resilience of the local economy and to provide for an enhanced, accessible, inclusive, child-friendly, and healthy urban environment. The strategic priorities outlined hereafter identify new opportunities for Swords to achieve this plans goals.

By carefully considering the combined qualitative analysis of the physical assets and condition of the town and, the quantitative baseline data, the opinions and advice provided by consultees, as well as national and international good practice in placemaking and the future role of town centres the project team have developed a list of strategic priorities that are based on solid evidence, voices from the community and that are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Strategic Priorities are framed by 6 themes:

- Improving access, permeability, and connectivity
- Reimagining Our Public Realm
- A town for all
- Protecting the natural environment
- Promoting and linking heritage assets
- Supporting local businesses

For each of the themes proposed projects and recommendations have been identified by the project team in partnership with Fingal County Council. Further research and engagement will be undertaken to develop each project and to determine whether additional projects should be included.

Theme 1: Improving Access, Permeability and Connectivity

Enabling connectivity and permeability to facilitate more active travel is critically important. This will enable delivery on ambitions with regards to reducing private car-use and enhancing access to future Metro-link and Bus Connects locations. In turn this will have a positive impact on the environment, physical health and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. These interventions will seek to showcase Swords rich natural and built heritage and capitalise on public investment in Metrolink, BusConnects and the R132.

1.1	Western Link Road i. Feasibility Study / detailed design – Southern Section ii. Delivery/critical infrastructure	Delivery of a Western Link Road will be critically important in enabling traffic movements to be directed away from the town centre, enabling future phases of town centre enhancement to take place. Detailed feasibility and design would take place as part of future studies.
1.2	Swords Multi-Purpose Mobility Hubs- Mobility Points/Park and Ride (P&R) i. feasibility study ii. detailed design iii. Delivery	Best practice regeneration proposals in the UK and the Netherlands increasingly feature Mobility hubs. These can facilitate a transition to car-sharing, bike maintenance and storage, Electric Vehicles (EV)'s and other forms of emerging mobility as a service. Other aspects can include active ground floor uses and parcel collection and drop off.
1.3	Swords Greenway Network Initiative	The aim would be to facilitate more sustainable modes of transport to places of work and study as well as

	i. feasibility study inc environmental assessment ii. detailed design iii. Delivery	enabling recreation and tourism. The network could, subject to feasibility studies, link Swords town centre to Rivermeade via the Ward River Valley; Ward River Valley to Broadmeadow Valley Greenway via Town Park; town centre to Malahide via new off-road estuary greenway, as well as provide linkage to parks/green space and schools. An immediate benefit could come from provision of better linkage to Swords Community College.
1.4	Swords Pedestrian Linkages/Quietways/Home Zones i. feasibility study including environmental assessment ii. detailed design iii. Delivery	A range of initiatives to enhance suburban streets, enhancing linkages and biodiversity and multifunctionality e.g. Play Streets.
1.5	Swords Safe Routes to School/School Zones	Safe Routes to School, an initiative of Fingal County Council will deliver a suite of proposed solutions to school environs including crossing points, pedestrian islands, speedbumps etc.

Recommendations

- Work with NTA to enable low emission public bus (Local Link) to link residential developments with transport hubs (Metrolink) and places of work, play and study
- Future temporary road closures for events and markets
- Continue to encourage & facilitate sustainable transport infrastructure e.g. electric bike share (Bleper Bikes) and private sector provision of last mile delivery infrastructure at mobility hubs/points, and car-sharing. B.

Theme 2. Reimagining Our Public Realm

This envisages a step change in the quality of the urban realm of Swords town centre, encouraging people to stay longer and have a more enjoyable experience. The focus is upon a phased enhancement of the urban realm that provides space for all.

2.1	Swords Main Street Transformation ii. Design iii. Delivery	Coordinated and phased upgrade of public realm in Swords town centre. An immediate benefit could involve de-cluttering, parking rationalisation, SUDS, parklets, market & event infrastructure.
2.2	Swords Liveable Laneways Strategy i. feasibility study/detailed design ii. Delivery	Focussing on the laneways that run east and west from Main St would see laneways enhanced and animated through upgraded surfacing, lighting and art.
2.3	Swords Shopfront Improvements Grant scheme	Recognising that some shopfronts detract from the character of Swords town centre, this project is envisaged to take the form of a grant scheme with

		common design guide building on the existing 'Fingal Shopfront and Main Street Residences Painting and Improvement Grant Scheme 2021' https://www.fingal.ie/painting%26improvementscheme
2.4	Swords Smart Streets	Smart streets will have solar powered lighting, WiFi provision, smart lighting (to monitor air pollution/noise/footfall), bottle filling stations and public fountains.
2.5	Swords Green Space i. feasibility study including environmental assessment ii. detailed design iii. Delivery	Including: environmental improvements to existing parks and green spaces e.g., pollinator friendly planting, recreational amenity enhancements, with community involvement; enhancement of playing facilities e.g. Balheary Park; Play Streets to encourage children to play outdoors; and new green spaces e.g. corner of Church Road and Brackenstown Road.
2.6	Amenity Provision for All	Fingal's 'Space for Play- A Play Policy for Fingal' includes detail on creating safe and inviting spaces for young children and teens. Seating areas can also be provided for older citizens.
Recommendation Public art programme		

Theme 3. Facilitating Major Infrastructure

Enabling the ambition to grow Swords to a city of 100,000 people means providing necessary infrastructure which will reduce the need for car-based journeys and providing key community facilities. Provision is envisaged to be through public-private partnership initiatives.

3.1	Feasibility study for major integrated recreation and leisure facility	Any initiative would need to be based on a detailed feasibility study that considers gaps in provision of existing facilities and optimum location.
3.2	Feasibility study for major health facility	Any initiative would need to be based on a detailed feasibility study that considers gaps in provision of existing facilities and optimum location. The HSE would be a key partner.

Theme 4. Involving Our Community

The community are the essence of what makes Swords a special place. While the needs of the community underpin all of the actions proposed here, it is important to focus on initiatives that can have a positive impact on community cohesion and the environment of Swords.

4.1	Community Driven Sustainability Initiatives Fund	The local community in Swords are currently actively involved in many projects that are linked to an ethos of more sustainable development. Many of these are led by the Tidy Towns group. It is envisaged that a dedicated fund would be established to support several key projects annually.
4.2	Swords Community Forest i. feasibility study including environmental assessment ii. detailed design iii. Delivery	The Swords Woodland Association has an advanced plan for a tree planting initiative around Swords. It is envisaged that this project would be supported as a Swords Community Forest and progressively implemented where feasible to provide a green corridor around the town and into the town centre.
<p>Recommendations</p> <p>Support the Biodiversity Action Plan being developed with Tidy Towns</p> <p>Investigate opportunities for alternative energy production e.g. solar panels on roofs of key buildings such as The Swords Pavilions to power community infrastructure such as the Swords Cultural Quarter and/or street lighting.</p> <p>Consider opportunities for an enhanced senior citizen facility</p>		

Theme 5. Protecting and Promoting Our Heritage

The built heritage of Swords provides the basis for the story of the evolution of the settlements. The projects included here enhance and protect that heritage for future generations as well as providing a basis for encouraging increased tourism spend in the town.

5.1	Swords Cultural Quarter Delivery	The Swords Cultural Quarter will provide a high-quality library, theatre, event space, community space, and café for the centre of Swords adjacent to Swords Castle. Detailed design is currently underway.
5.2	Swords Stories heritage attraction i. feasibility study including concept development ii. detailed design iii. Delivery	Sword has a rich and evocative history. Many people in the town have stories of the past that would be of interest to current and future generations. This attraction would capture these stories and provide an immersive and compelling experience.
5.3	St Columba's Church and Round Tower Visitor Experience Feasibility Study i. feasibility study	St Columba's Church and Round Tower are distinctive heritage features in the town and can enable the story of the towns early history to be told. The feasibility of enabling sensitive visitor access would be investigated.

Theme 6. Supporting Our Local Businesses

Swords has a thriving business community. The aim is to support this community and position Swords as the best place to live, work and visit in County Dublin, and to progressively capitalise on its enhanced sustainability credentials.

6.1	Swords promotional and branding initiative	Business community initiatives aimed at rebuilding the local economy in Swords will encourage the public to shop local and support the town’s service and retail providers. A campaign developed off the success of the ‘In It Together’ initiative will encourage business to network, collaborate and provide support for each other, and give them the online and branded resources to inspire their customers. A concurrent social media campaign aimed at the public will encourage purchasing in Swords and develop pride and advocacy among customers.
6.2	Development of town centre enterprise/remote working hub	Remote/hybrid working is very likely here to stay. This model encourages reduced commuting and facilitates increased local footfall. Provision of a high-quality centre will encourage more people to work in Swords town centre.
<p>Recommendations</p> <p>Seek provision of third level educational facility linked to DIT or other third level institute</p> <p>Establish Swords Business Improvement District (BID)</p>		

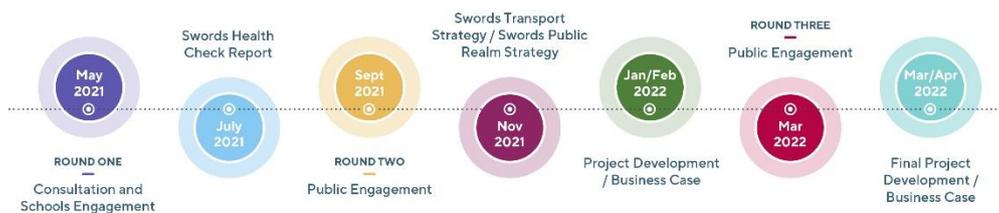
6 Next Steps

Swords is in a unique position where national and regional policy states its population is planned to double by 2035 and, with its key strengths and invaluable assets, Swords is in an excellent position to accommodate this growth and develop.

Recommendations outlined in this report are suggestions informed by professional experience, best practice examples and by engagement with key stakeholders. It is hoped that they can inspire more people and businesses to get involved with Sustainable Swords to bring real and tangible changes for Swords and its community.

This Health Check forms Part 1 of the work programme. A Public Realm Strategy and Transport Strategy will form Parts 2 and 3 and will be completed by November 2021. The fourth element will include a business case evaluation of key transformative projects identified during the study. The project will conclude by March 2022.

Sustainable Swords Timeline



A town is never complete and its never stops changing, Swords will experience a lot of change as it aims to accommodate 100,000 people by 2035. The challenge is to ensure that the change that happens within Swords is a positive process that will make Swords a better place to live, work and visit, a more vibrant town for all and a good practice example of a sustainable approach to urban development.

A Appendix

A.1 Consultees

KPMG Future Analytics would like to acknowledge the help and guidance of the many people we have spoken to:

- Fingal County Council:
 - Emer O’Gorman, Director of Economic, Enterprise, Tourism and Cultural Development
 - David Storey, Director of Environment, Climate Action and Active Travel
 - Liam Burke, Acting Director of Housing and Community Development
 - Oliver Hunt, Head of Finance
 - Fionnuala May, County Architect
 - Ronan O’Reilly, Climate Action Officer
 - Sinead Murphy, Active Travel
 - Aoife Sheridan
 - Christine Baker, Heritage Officer
 - Helena Bergin, Conservation Officer
- Duncan Smith TD
- IDA
- Enterprise Ireland
- Failte Ireland
- Fingal Chamber of Commerce
- Swords LEO
- Drinan Enterprise Centre Ltd.
- Pavilions Shopping Centre
- Wrights Café Bar
- Fingal Leader Partnership
- Fingal Public Participation Network (PPN)
- Swords Tidy Towns
- Age Friendly Fingal
- Castle View Residents Association
- Swords Woodland Association

A.2 Relevant Policies and Strategies

A2.1 Statutory Plans

Project Ireland 2040 – The National Planning Framework

The NPF is a high-level strategy that aims to shape growth and development in Ireland out to the year 2040. The NPF draws upon lessons learned from the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2022 and provides a framework for the sustainable development of Ireland's existing settlements, as an alternative to an uncoordinated "business as usual" approach to development. As a framework document it sets in train a process by which more detailed planning documents must follow, including the relevant RSES and County Development Plan. The Strategy also contains a range of National Policy Objectives providing a wider context for targeting future growth across the country.

While the purpose of the NPF is to enable all parts of Ireland, whether rural or urban, to successfully accommodate growth and change by facilitating a shift towards Ireland's regions and cities other than Dublin, the NPF also recognises Dublin's ongoing key role. The need to better manage the growth of Dublin and its suburbs, promote compact growth within its settlements and address infrastructural and transport needs

The importance of sustainable placemaking policies in future and current settlements is also echoed throughout the NPF, with national objectives aiming to:

NPO 4: Ensure the creation of **attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality** urban places that are home to **diverse** and **integrated** communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being

The NDP 2018-2027 sets out the investment priorities that underpin the implementation of the National Planning Framework as part of Project Ireland 2040. Regarding the National Strategic Outcomes aimed at urban development, the Urban Regeneration Development Fund allocates a **€2 billion investment** to enable the five cities and other large urban centres to achieve sustainable growth. A total of **€550 million** of these funds are made available up until the period ending **2022**.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Spatial Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031

The RSES is a high-level plan that seeks to support the implementation of the NPF by providing a strategic planning and economic framework for the region's sustainable growth and development. It echoes the NPF in emphasising sustainable development patterns and seeks to focus growth within the footprint of existing urban areas and in key regional growth settlements. A key element of the growth strategy identified at the national level, which the RSES reaffirms, is the focus on contained growth and reduced sprawl by targeting infill and brownfield lands in existing built-up areas. Swords is identified as a Key Metropolitan Town within the EMRA RSES and has subsequent Regional Policy Objectives (RPO's) specifically relating to its spatial and economic growth regarding compact growth and enhanced public realm and is highlighted as a town which can accommodate above average growth and development relative to other Key Towns in the Eastern and Midland region. The RSES recognises the potential of Key Towns and urban centres, like Swords, to promote sustainable and compact growth, efficient use of both new and existing infrastructure services, revitalise a sense of place and heritage within large towns and integration of natural and green spaces into urban areas.

Fingal Development Plan 2017 – 2023

The Fingal Development Plan 2017-2023 sets out the proposed policies and objectives for the development of Fingal County over a 6-year plan period. The Development Plan seeks to develop and

improve, in a sustainable manner, the social, economic, environmental and cultural assets of Fingal County. The underpinning principles of sustainable development, climate change adaptation, social inclusion and high-quality design are highlighted as the key elements which tie together the core strategy and strategic vision for the development of the County. A Development Strategy is also set out for Swords within the Development plan and, where applicable, provides associated Specific Objectives. The individual settlements and communities will aim to develop in accordance with their development strategies and objectives having regard to the principles of Placemaking outlined in Chapter 3 of the Development Plan.

South Fingal Transport Study

The main objective of the SFTS is to carry out a comprehensive feasibility study of the South Fingal area to produce a strategic 'vision' and overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the study area, based on a sustainable transport and smarter travel approach, planning for all transport modes and needs. The SFTS contains a Swords Transport Assessment which groups Swords into four main sectors. The assessment analyses travel patterns, land-use forecasts, population and employment growth projections which are informed by the County Development Plan and Local Area Plans to generate recommendations towards achieving the goals set out in the CDP and LAP's and to address issues from this analysis. The SFTS Swords recommendations are aimed to be taken forward as a single or small number of packages, leading to a more detailed transport assessment of the town and the preliminary design of individual schemes. This package(s) of measures is to ideally be combined with a public realm strategy for the town centre and be aligned with future opportunities and constraints presented by the emerging MetroLink route and associated Specific Objectives for Swords.

Fingal Age Friendly Strategy 2017-2023

The priorities and actions identified in the strategy are focused on promoting Age Friendly initiatives throughout Fingal and underpins the work and goals of the Fingal Age Friendly Alliance and Development Plan 2017-2023. The strategic goals outlined in this strategy are structured around eight thematic areas identified by the World Health Organisation as augmented and categorised by the WHO Age Friendly Environments in Europe project (AFEE) 2018 and include themes regarding the physical environment, social environment and municipal services. Outdoor environments, transport and mobility are some of the key elements which comprise the strategy.

Fingal Local and Economic Community Plan 2016-2021

The LECP comprises of an integrated framework of six overarching themes, ten high-level goals, thirty-eight supporting objectives and a suite of 115 actions. These themes, goals, objectives and actions vary in scope. These goals, objectives and actions are encapsulated in the LECP Vision Statement, which aims to create:

*An inclusive, ambitious and prosperous place where people want to live, work, visit and do business in an environment which is **sustainable**, valued and enhanced for **future generations***

Fingal Heritage Plan 2018-2023

The Fingal Heritage Plan 2018-2023 is a supplementary document to the Fingal Development Plan 2017-2023 which lays down a road map to guide renewed efforts to protect, manage and promote Fingal's rich and diverse heritage. The Fingal Development Plan 2017-2023, which Fingal County Council has a statutory duty to implement, supports the implementation of the Fingal Heritage Plan

and has a range of specific objectives to support the protection and **integration** of **heritage** and **green infrastructure** into the planning process. The Plan ensures that the inherent value of our natural, cultural, archaeological and architectural heritage is protected and managed as part of the planning process.

Yours Swords – An Emerging City – Strategic Vision 2035

The Strategic Vision outlined in the document is heavily informed by sustainable development principles and incorporates a 'Green Agenda' in response to both new and ongoing challenges facing the town:

*To promote and facilitate the **sustainable development** of Swords Town as a **vibrant** consolidated major town with a thriving economy; an attractive and highly **accessible** built environment with the highest standards of housing, employment, services, recreational amenities and community facilities*

The Strategic Vision ensures that Swords will incorporate and be synonymous with:

A Green City in terms of the physical landscape and sustainable environmental objectives

An Integrated Transport Strategy comprising significant public transport services (including Metro North and local and regional bus services) and strategically important road infrastructure

A Vibrant Economy with flag ship retailing and a unique and attractive Town Centre

An Improved Employment base striving to provide a sustainable level of employment for its population, in terms of the number and quality of jobs available within Swords

Quality of Life, whether for its residents, business community, employees, or visitors

It is proposed within the document that Swords will be an exemplar of a '**green city**' in terms of its physical landscape, setting and in terms of its sustainable environmental agenda.

Swords Castle Cultural Quarter Master Plan (SCCQ Master Plan)

The SCCQ Master Plan seeks to energise the layout potential of the existing town centre - focusing on the castle environs as a new cultural hub. The plan is a road map for further improvements and opportunities for strategic physical improvements to take advantage of existing natural resources of the town's lands, infrastructure and heritage to create sustainable civic and cultural spaces. The plan aims to instil and foster a sense of place and civic pride and act as a counterpoint to the shopping and business areas of the town.

The plan is informed by both extensive public consultation and stakeholder engagement workshops towards creating a shared vision for the town and its civic and cultural quarter, identifying the challenges, opportunities and solutions for the town, while also reflecting local, regional and national objectives towards healthy placemaking and sustainable inclusive development.

The plan also acts as a catalyst for future 'pipeline' projects and a variety of sub-projects relating to the development of new public realm and civic space in the town centre, landscape interventions in parks and town centre, and the creation of a Cultural Quarter/Hub. The Master Plan initiative is multi-layered and includes issues such as identifying cultural uses for the castle, identifying opportunities for new cultural buildings and environmental improvement.

POLICY REVIEW – CONCLUSIONS

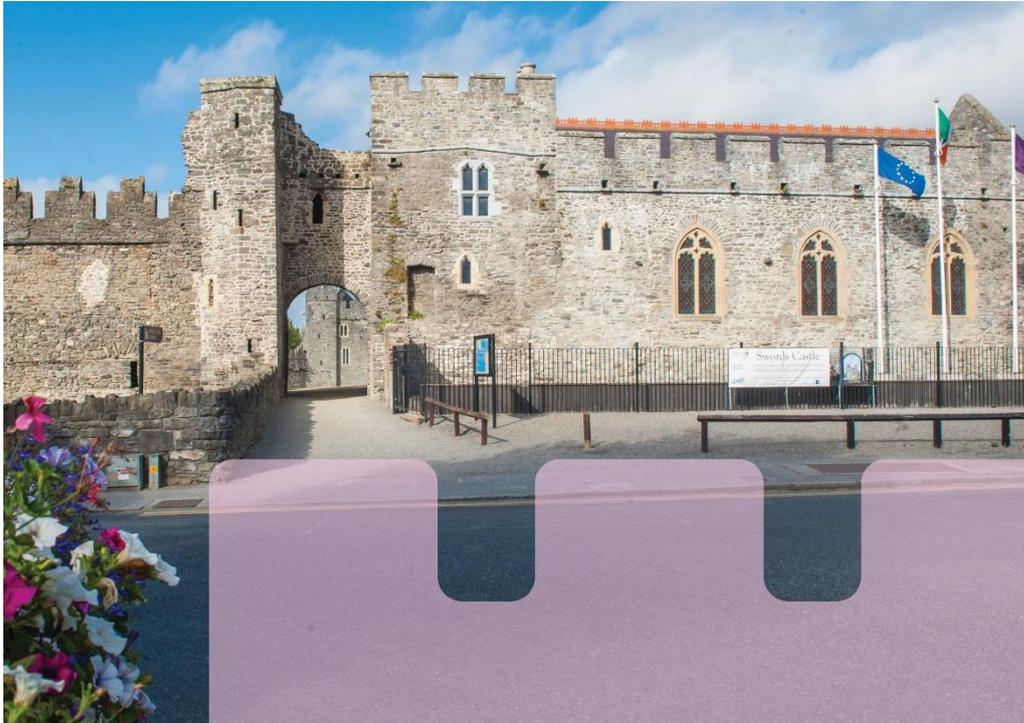
The recent events and circumstances our societies have been faced with surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it both challenges and opportunities. While the adversity faced by Ireland and its people in recent times has and continues to have an enormous impact on our society and our lives, in the face of this adversity comes great opportunity. As people across Ireland realise the importance of their towns and sense of place, the opportunity to act upon and realise these shifts in values has never been greater. While our governments and our people adapt to the ever-changing circumstances of how we live our lives, the platform provided by our national, regional and local strategies can help achieve a sustainable and resilient Ireland.

The duty of achieving a sustainable and resilient Ireland lies in the actions of our regions, cities and towns. The framework for which to realise these aspirations has been laid out all at scales and level. Our National Planning Framework and National Development Plan outline the importance of fulfilling our growth potential in a sustainable manner and the importance of spatial planning and development towards fulfilling this potential; through new infrastructure, housing, employment, recreation, heritage, services and amenities.

These strands are continued through to our regional strategies - the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies of our three distinct regions; they echo the National Planning Framework in emphasising sustainable development patterns and seek to focus growth within the footprint of existing urban areas and in key regional growth settlements, while also looking to our regional cities and towns in underpinning this overarching framework for the creation and enhancement of attractive places.

From these national and regional strategies, our development plans form the backbone of our plan local authorities. They provide an invaluable framework and context at a local level in helping to achieve the goals and outcomes of our national and regional strategies towards the sustainability, resilience and physical health of our cities, towns and communities. The Fingal County Development plan aligns with these goals to a fine degree: from the importance designated to the vibrancy of its towns and quality of its public realm to the improvement of its public transport infrastructure and enhancement of its natural amenities and biodiversity.

This firm stance taken at all levels on the importance of Ireland's sustainability and resilience form the spine from which these national, regional and local strategies can be supported, implemented and achieved. The Sustainable Swords strategy embodies these multi-scalar visions in regenerating the town of Swords to create a sustainable, resilient, inclusive and healthy urban environment. Though the present and future challenges faced by our communities in our VUCA world are significant, the role of our cities and towns in rising to these challenges has never been greater.



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