

DESIGN RATIONALE – LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Project: **SWORDS CULTURAL QUARTER**

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

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1 Introduction

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

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

- A 165-no. seated theatre with associated control/ sound rooms & light lobbies
- Dressing rooms and rehearsal spaces
- An art gallery
- Café/theatre bar
- Exhibition spaces
- Workshop and study areas
- Meeting rooms
- Public library
- Offices
- Storage rooms, toilets and other ancillary uses.

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

This documentation is submitted as part of a Part 8 planning application to Fingal County Council for the public realm associated with Swords Cultural Quarter. The documentation should be read in conjunction with other documentation, as submitted by Dermot Foley Landscape Architects, O'Donnell + Tuomey, MHL & Associates Limited Consulting Engineers, Horganlynch Consulting Engineers, Charles McCorkell Arboricultural Consultancy and others.

As part of the pre-planning consultation process, Dermot Foley Landscape Architects attended meetings and discussed proposals for the landscape, open space, boundaries and planting

strategies with Fingal County Council. Comments received were, where possible and in line with the overall landscape strategy, incorporated into the design proposals. Dermot Foley Landscape Architects also attended meetings with Sustainable Swords where proposals for materials and tree planting were discussed and where agreed, were incorporated into the public realm design proposals.

Dermot Foley Landscape Architects and design team colleagues visited the site on several occasions from June 2021 to February 2022 in order to observe conditions on site, such as existing vegetation, conditions under foot, boundaries and other items which would have a bearing on the design process.

Charles McCorkell Arboricultural Consultancy were commissioned before the design process began to carry out a Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment in compliance with BS 5837:2012. These documents are included separately as part of this submission.

The following additional documents have been issued by Dermot Foley Landscape Architects as part of this submission:

No.	Scale	Size	Title
2001	1:500	A1+	<i>Landscape Plan</i>
2002	1:500	A1+	<i>Boundary Plan</i>
2110	1:200	A2	<i>Landscape Detail Area 1 of 2</i>
2111	1:200	A2	<i>Landscape Detail Area 2 of 2</i>
2400	1:100	A1	<i>Landscape Sections</i>
2500	1:20	A1	<i>Typical Landscape Details</i>

2 Landscape Appraisal

2.1 General

The site is located in the centre of Swords town and splays out from the busy junction created by the intersection of North Street/Main Street and Bridge Street/Seatown Road. The site encompasses:

- grounds associated with the community park; the courthouse and immediate surrounds;
- carriageway, footpath and kerbs associated with North Street, Bridge Street, Seatown Road and Main Street;
- grounds associated with the front entrance of Fingal County Hall;
- grounds adjacent to the walls of Swords Castle.

The site falls gently from south to north with localised areas of steep topography, in particular the areas proximate to Swords Castle and the area to the west of Fingal County Hall.

Swords Castle dominates the centre of the town both in its scale and historical importance. The walls of the castle are in tact, and excluding some buildings which have been historically built up to the castle walls, appear as a mass rising up from the surrounding townscape. A formal arched entrance encourages pedestrians to enter the castle grounds at the north of Main Street. A single storey structure exists to the north east corner of Swords Castle with boundary walls which are accreted to the eastern elevation of the castle walls. South of these lands and following the walls around their south east corner towards the entrance of the castle in the west, the character is open with full views of the castle walls available from Main Street and Seatown Road.



Image 1: View looking north on North Street, with southern elevation of courthouse and Fingal carpark to right of image



Image 2: View looking east from parkland in Swords Community Park towards courthouse on North Street and boundary wall of commercial property on right hand side

A park entrance of significant scale addresses North Street opposite the courthouse and is locked outside of daylight hours.

A gated car park is located at the junction of Seatown Road and North Street for the use of Fingal County Council staff and councillors. A small number of single trees, planted in islands through the car park, and a low hedge of mixed species grows at the base of the railed perimeter of the car park.

The area between the front elevation of Fingal County Hall and Main Street is comprised of a dense arrangement of mature trees on elevated ground. The full and evergreen canopy reads as a single mass as the individual canopies have grown into each other, and create a special character over the footpath at the east of Main Street. A significant level change between the footpath and the ground level associated with the trees exaggerates the height and scale of the trees. The *Cedrus deodora* (Himalayan cedar) close to the entrance of the building, appears on the 25" map (1897-1913) of Swords House (the site of current Fingal County Hall). Paved areas in front of the Fingal County Hall entrance and below the tree canopies, host a collection of sculptures. A ramped access path runs from the front of Fingal County Hall to Seatown Road to the north, and additional paved access exists from Main Street in the west, and Chapel Lane to the south.



Image 3: View looking south towards Main Street, with holmoaks (at front of Fingal County Hall) on left of image

2.2 Boundaries

The site boundaries vary in character. Please refer to *Drawing 2002 Boundary Plan* by DFLA. The north-western boundary falls within the current Community Park and is made up of open managed grass with occasional and recent tree planting and asphalt pathways. The northern boundary runs from the Town Park and crosses North Street in an east-west alignment and continues along the south-western boundary of Fingal Community College and excluding the existing buildings on North Street, is comprised of concrete block walls. The eastern boundary runs north-south with Fingal Community College and is composed of a block wall with climbing vegetation. The southern boundary runs along the southern edge of Seatown Road and comprises low block walls which edge the front gardens of residential buildings, until it swings away from the footpath and aligns itself with the western elevation of Fingal County Hall.

The western boundary runs along the front of commercial buildings on west Main Street until it turns west onto Bridge Street and crosses to a mixed limestone wall which continues to the southern elevation of Swords Castle. The remainder of the western boundary is comprised of the continued line of the castle walls: along the southern elevation; turning at the south-eastern point of the Chapel, and running north along the eastern wall; turning west at the north-eastern point of the castle, and continuing west to the mid point of the northern elevation.



Image 4: Built edge boundaries, left to right: curved western elevation of Fingal County Hall; northern elevation of Swords Castle Walls.

2.3 Existing Trees

Existing trees have been surveyed by Charles McCorkell Arboricultural Consultancy in accordance with BS 5837:2012. BS 5837:2012 calls for a realistic assessment of the viability of retaining trees in the context of proposed construction. The British Standard has been used here to assess the stock of existing trees and to make recommendations which are realistic and represent a fair assessment of the quality and long-term viability of the trees on site.

Of the trees surveyed, there are four main groups:

- street trees on Main Street and North Street
- trees in parkland associated with Swords Community Park
- trees in carpark on Seatown Road
- trees at front of Fingal County Hall

Trees surveyed on Main Street and North Street are comprised mostly of *Platanus x. hispanica* (London plane) and *Acer platanoides* (Norway maple) and are of variable condition, with most designated B2 or C2. Trees existing in Swords Community Park, located close to the park entrance, are comprised of semi-mature *Tilia sp.* (lime trees) designated B2, and semi-mature *Quercus ilex* (holmoak), designated C1/C2. The carpark on Seatown Road has a small number of existing trees located in islands and comprise of *Carpinus betula* (hornbeam) designated B2 and C2, predominantly in fastigiate form. A grouping of 24 no. *Quercus ilex* (holmoak) designated B2 and C2, and a single *Cedrus deodora* (Himalayan cedar) designated A2, are located between north Main Street and Fingal County Hall on ground which is elevated above the footpath.



Image 5: Quercus ilex (holmoak) trees at front of Fingal County Hall; north Main Street.

3 Landscape Strategy

3.1 General

The landscape strategy for the site is integrated with the building design of SCC (Swords Civic and Cultural building) and the existing character of Swords Castle. It takes into account the variation of building use and main characteristics of the existing site and context. The proposed Swords Civic and Cultural (SCC) building has been designed by O'Donnell + Tuomey, with public realm inputs from Dermot Foley Landscape Architects. It is in accordance with the Fingal County Development Plan and in line with 'Your Swords – Strategic Vision 2035', a master plan for the town of Swords.

The site acts as a key node in the townscape and has the potential to deliver an appropriate and important transition from Main Street and Fingal County Hall in the south-east, to the historical Swords Castle in the north-west and makes the current junction at the north of Main Street more intuitive. The landscape and public realm design maximises the use of space and orientation to deliver an attractive and usable public open space.

Proposals for Swords public realm will provide a lively, innovative, and resilient landscape which pulls together the proposed new Civic and Cultural Building with the existing castle, courthouse, county hall and Main Street. The urban nature of the site presents a challenge from the point of view of biodiversity, but that has been addressed through proposed tree planting and ground-cover. The landscape proposals have been developed by the entire design team, and together with Fingal County Council, in order to integrate planning, civil engineering and ecological

considerations with improved permeability and accessibility at the forefront of the design development process. The open space is proposed to vary in character in terms of use, circulation and ecology, all of which are determined by existing topography, road layout and existing trees. The public realm, therefore, will form a series of spaces and connections with varying character and function.

There are several components making up the overall landscape strategy:

- Primary character areas within the development: Main Street 'Market' Plaza; Amphitheatre/Park Entrance; Castle Greenspace; Courtyard Greenspace; Carriageway
- Legibility between carriageway and open space, ensuring provision of a safe environment for pedestrians and cyclists which is also a positive addition to the public realm
- Integration of functional landscape and external works such as cycle parking and pedestrian access to existing buildings
- Planting strategy to create external spaces and to integrate the development into the surrounding context.

The overall landscape strategy is underpinned by the following principles:

- Increase to biodiversity through the provision of well vegetated areas and proposed tree planting using native species.
- Improved permeability and accessibility throughout the public realm as well as the creation of a destination with a recognisable sense of place for residents and visitors;
- A range of spaces including flat open spaces, and spaces with native tree planting and ground flora for ecology, with the provision of a number of sub-spaces with character and function to cater for a variety of users and age groups.
- A safe environment which is available and recognisable to residents and visitors as public open space;
- Retention of existing trees where possible, especially those which form a distinct character and are of significant maturity;
- Retention and emphasis of physical characteristics of the site, most notably topography;
- Detail design to bring cohesion through materials;

3.2 Courthouse Greenspace

The proposed space at the sides and rear of the existing courthouse building will have visual access from the interior of the Swords Civic and Cultural building. The courthouse will be kept separate from the new building but connected by a planted green, inaccessible space. Proposed planting of the rare and native *Frangula alnus* (Buckthorn alder) will create vertical interest. A

selected mix of ferns and shade tolerant species are proposed for the understorey. Tree planting has been omitted from the northern area of the courthouse to provide a view from the interior of the building through to the park on the west side of North Street. Access for fire escape and for plant maintenance associated with the new building is provided for with concrete paths to the sides and rear of the courthouse.



Image 6: Examples of character of courtyard planting

3.3 Proposed Amphitheatre / Park Entrance

The proposals for the park entrance area opens up the north-east corner of the castle and allows for visual connections between the courthouse / art gallery of the new building and the open parkland of Swords Community Park. The formal entrance to the park is proposed to be part of a subtle yet robust line of control starting at the northern elevation of the castle walls and moving around to the building on North Street, north of the site boundary. Continuing with the existing character of the park access, this entrance is proposed to be locked at specified times. Bespoke steel fencing, designed to give a transparent quality, yet strong enough to withstand public usage, is proposed to replace the function of the stone wall and railings, which comprise the existing boundary at North Street. The amphitheatre and entrance space is proposed to be a sloped transition between the public realm area to the south and Swords Community Park to the west.



Image 7: left to right, examples of seating designed into topography in a parkland setting.

Informal seating is proposed to be integrated into the topography in the north-west of the site, between the proposed park entrance and North Street, to provide for a small event or performance space, and passive recreation. Tree planting along the northern edge of the new park boundary is proposed to disguise the southern elevation of the building on North Street and the proposed new toilet block in the parkland of Swords Community Park (situated outside the redline boundary of the site).



Image 8: Example of fence with transparent character

3.4 Main Street Market Plaza

The proposals for the landscape at the front of Fingal County Hall draw on the historical character of Main Street as a market space and aim to provide a connection between County Hall and the streetspace.



Image 9: Proposal for market area east side of North Street, looking north towards Swords Castle and new Swords Civic and Cultural (SCC) building

The re-alignment of the Main Street carriageway to the west provides for an improved and larger market area at the east. The widening of the pedestrian zone in this area allows for an increased scope of activities, improved visibility of the junction for all users, and, safety for the pedestrian. The existing wall bounding the county hall with Main Street is proposed to be retained with terraces formed in front of the wall to connect with the proposed new paving at street level on Main Street. Soft landscape proposals in the form of managed grass and herbaceous planting soften the stepped space and create visual interest. Seating is integrated into the terraces creating a strong node and giving the user clear views along Main Street, Bridge Street and North Street, and across to the castle walls and chapel.

The canopy of the existing evergreen trees is proposed to be raised to allow light in at street level and to afford clearer views of the castle from the open space at the front of Fingal County Hall.



Image 10: Proposal for open space at front of Fingal County Hall, looking north-west towards Swords Castle with raised tree canopy

3.5 Swords Castle Green Edge and SCC Plaza

A particular approach to the landscape has been developed in response to the surrounding context and proposed new building uses. Similar to the new Swords Civic and Cultural (SCC) building, the castle's green edge and plaza is regarded as a key node within the wider public realm of Swords and will provide a high-quality area of public open space. The plaza forms a fulcrum of intersecting pedestrian circulation and provides a space for seasonal and pop-up events.

The local topography associated with ground to the east of the castle walls is proposed to be in managed grass, sloping down to the hard landscape banding which is in radial formation to the west of the North Street carriageway leading visually to the new Swords and Civic and Cultural (SCC) building. Tree planting is kept to the lower levels of the sloped green space to allow the castle walls to be in full view from various points within and outside of, the new Swords Civic and Cultural (SCC) building and various approach routes. The vision for tree planting is flexible and allows for adjustments along the radial lines in response to archaeological and bedrock constraints.

Furthermore, the plaza is organised as a loose route from the crossing at the north of Main Street to the entrance of Swords Community Park with various sub-spaces containing seating and soft landscape areas. A greener character is proposed for the western side of the public space, while to the east, high-quality durable paving sensitively integrates into the built form of the new Swords Civic and Cultural (SCC) building.



Image 11: Proposed public realm viewed from entrance of new Swords Civic and Cultural (SCC) building looking west towards castle walls

4 Planting

Drawing 2001 Landscape Plan, includes a schedule of proposed planting and illustrates the location and extent of mown grass, groundcover, swale, and tree planting as well as existing trees to be retained and protected.

4.1 Proposed Tree planting

Proposed tree species are selected for longevity, suitability to public open space, local soil conditions, microclimate and biodiversity (native species). The species mix of proposed trees is substantially native to improve the biodiversity and the proportion of native species. The trees are proposed to be arranged either individually, in a loose grouping, or in organized grids. A significant grouping of existing trees are proposed to be retained and protected (holmoaks and Himalayan Cedar in front of Fingal County Hall and selection of street trees on Main Street). Typical proposed species are illustrated on the following pages.

New individual London plane trees are proposed on North Street as a continuation of the existing condition on Main Street.

4.2 Hedge, Groundcover and Bulb Planting

Low level and groundcover planting is proposed to be utilised: to make and reinforce sub-spaces within the larger more extensive landscape; for visual interest; for ecological purposes; to colonise

swales and; to guide or direct people's movement. The planting is conceived as a subtle layering of greens within the open spaces which will create space but not block views or visual links. The proposed planting is normally layered as follows: lowest - bulb planting; medium - groundcover planting, and is proposed to be mostly inground, excluding small strips of planters associated with the new Swords Civic and Cultural building along Seatown Road.



Image 12: Example of swale planting next to concrete path

5 Hard Landscape Materials and Finishes

The approach to the use of hard landscape materials is governed by the scale of the proposed new Swords and Civic Cultural (SCC) building and Swords Castle, and the requirement to integrate with surrounding streetscape, as well as the requirement to develop a palette of materials for the overall public realm. It is proposed to use landscape materials to facilitate accessibility and circulation; provide space for pop up or seasonal events; and, creating a recognisable identity for the centre of Swords.

The selection of paving and other landscape materials is determined by function, resilience, longevity and durability. The extent of materials and the locations where a transition is made from one material to another are determined by issues such as sustainable drainage, or proposed changes in the direction of the circulation, or by level change. Primary vehicular and pedestrian circulation is proposed as durable, large and small format granite paving, designed to 'play-down' the impact of the vehicular route in the landscape setting. It is intended to use sustainable

aggregates in new concrete. Primary pedestrian routes are proposed as in-situ concrete with selected aggregate finishes.

Within the parkland areas, paving materials, where practical, are proposed to be constructed in a way which is sensitively integrated with lawn and soft landscape, in order to minimise the impact of hard landscape surfaces

A range of sample images are included below to illustrate the general characteristics of the proposed materials.



Image 13: Examples of paving details (clockwise from top left) Small format natural stone cubes, streetscape detail with large and small format natural stone paving, raised steel planters, and soft landscape sensitively integrated with hard landscape

END.