



OPERATIONAL PLAN

2025 - 2030

swordswoodland.ie



Trees and a connection to nature enhance the lives of the many residents, workers and visitors of Fingal, and will continue to do so in terms of both physical and mental health. Studies show that spending as little as two hours per week in nature, including trees, is associated with good health and wellbeing.

FORESTS OF FINGAL
(White et al., 2019)



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Introduction

Our updated Operational Plan (2025-2030) describes some of our new Objectives as well as some adaptations we are making to existing projects.

As a voluntary organisation, we are reliant on expertise and funding from other agencies and individuals who have regularly donated at the Swords Christmas Market in support of our Photography Competition. We offer sincere gratitude to you all.

Swords Woodland Association is a Community focused organisation seeking to secure a sustainable quality of life for those who live, work and visit Swords, especially its splendid rivers and parklands. We have focused on several themes of action from our beginnings.

The protection of green belt zones- inadequately called green infrastructure- has been a key objective. We think that a more fitting name for these zones would be “the lungs” of our community.

There is a new sensitivity to the enhancement of local surroundings as resilient biodiversity impacts. This is why Swords Woodland Association advocated with great urgency for the enhanced Biodiversity Office in Fingal County.

Since we delivered our original Operational Plan in 2020, we have been recognized by Fingal County Council in an important new concept: the Sustainable Swords Strategy (May 2021). The long-awaited update of the Tree Strategy for Fingal arrived. (November 2021). Climate Action targets were agreed, and results are being closely monitored. Since 2021, CCAP has been managed in the Dublin Region by CODEMA.

https://www.fingal.ie/sites/default/files/2023-03/Sustainable%20Swords%20Report%20Final_24.02.2023.pdf

https://www.fingal.ie/sites/default/files/2022-03/forest-of-fingal_-a-tree-strategy-for-fingal_2022-2032.pdf

<https://dublinclimatechange.codema.ie/t/50477/x/a9eae1afb4/dublin-city-council-ccap-final-sea-environmental-report-f01.pdf>

We believe in the power of our green-belt zoning to deliver Climate benefits and in coalescing numerous impacts of biodiversity protection. On top of this, it is obvious that nature-based solutions deliver Quality Placemaking for everyone.



© Ramune Kuzminiene

Background & Objectives

Swords Woodland Association originated from a community-based initiative to promote the concept of urban forestry. From the beginning, our strong participation in educational and practical projects has promoted resilience and learning.

We support land use planning that identifies the benefits of forestry, woodlands, allotments and community gardens in generating healthy urban communities.

We believe that our community needs to understand the challenges of climate change, threats to biodiversity, river basin protection/ flood attenuation and ecological risks arising each year and in every season.

SWA strongly advocates for the enhanced development of pedestrian and cycling options in the Greater Swords Area. Active travel options help drive sustainability and deliver a healthier built environment. We are especially keen to support AT projects whereby increased tree cover can be incorporated.

To protect, maintain and sustainably develop the existing woodlands and green belt in the greater swords area is a primary objective.

We wholeheartedly support growth in quality and capacity for parks, urban woodlands and greenways. These will deliver multiple benefits to the individual and across communities. We believe that in the right context and with determined effort, available green infrastructure can consolidate into a 'Green Necklace' urban genre. This vision was first published in Your Swords, An Emerging City. In the new

Development Plan 2023-2029 there was very broad agreement that this would be part of Swords going forward.

Across our County the Council has new strategies to expand nearby areas such as Lusk and Donabate, while in the new Development Plan the "Key Town" for expansion is Swords. Adding new families and services to the current communities is essential but also brings a pro-rata requirement for recreational and high-quality parklands. Recognising the ongoing success by the Council in established sites like Newbridge Demesne and Malahide Castle, we are confident that FCC values Nature and has the right aptitude to deliver.

To secure delivery of the Swords Community Forest per the Sustainable Swords Strategy is imperative as an Objective.

Our community based initiative has a substantial rate of achievement in



© Mark Collins

planting for Swords (see photo gallery). Our strong participation in educational and practical projects has ensured the advancement of the urban forest model. Our advocacy of the potential in a Miyawaki model of small-scale/high-impact forest projects is now identified in all Council policies related to Climate and Biodiversity.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/2024/0308/1436684-trees-climate/>

We are excited to be appointed principal advocate to deliver a Community Forest for Swords.

Theme 5 - Supporting and Celebrating a Sustainable Community/ Sustainable Swords Strategy. (page 64)

"The Swords Woodland Association has formulated an advanced plan for a tree planting initiative around Swords town. It is considered that this project would be supported as a Swords Community Forest

in line with the policies, objectives and actions outlined in the Council's adopted tree strategy "The Forest of Fingal, A Tree Strategy for Fingal."

It is inevitable that Swords will become much more densely populated as envisioned in the new Development Plan and in view of the Government's aggressive housing strategy. Only a properly resilient land use ethos will add value to our existing open space and deliver a viable forest that is required for healthy placemaking.

Urban Forest is an internationally used term to define an integrated, city-wide approach to the planting, care and management of trees in the city to secure multiple environmental and social benefits for urban dwellers.

Alarmingly, we know from the latest Climate Action update that of the six Policy Categories it is progress on Nature-based Solutions that is woefully behind schedule.

An ongoing objective is to encourage greater urgency in Climate Change awareness by enhancing contacts with local community groups, reaching out to local schools and educating local Councillors.

The various connections between afforestation in the urban context and healthy placemaking is incontrovertible. Obviously, a flexible but plan-based approach to climate actions requires the widest possible cooperation and positivity as a constant focus.

The Sustainable Swords Strategy is a departure gate for our journey to many smaller interconnecting strategies. To put collaboration to full use it would be great to establish a Sustainable Swords Network.



Work to Date

Since its inception in 2017, Swords Woodland Association has engaged several schools in our '*Grow a Native Tree Locally*' project. This project ceased in 2024 when our success became something of a nemesis, in that our tree nursey reached capacity and our efforts to find suitable alternative premises are presently ongoing.

In terms of trees grown from locally sourced seeds the project was a proven winner. In a particularly resounding success, we transferred 212 broad leaf saplings from St Finian's Community College one-metre propagation box to our nursery site in Rath Lane.

It is appropriate to acknowledge the fantastic work and commitment of Stuart Davis since Day One.

The tree propagation project rapidly expanded to six local schools- two Secondary and four Primary. Keeping to the "copy nature" ethos as closely as possible, we did adapt the original plan to improve the harvest process and in one instance retired our box as the school needed space to expand.

There is no doubt that schools or other community groups can build "tree banks" on a space as small as one square metre. However, we also know that new saplings are at risk from drier and brighter summers. The leaves of the young trees lack the protection of a natural canopy

and the roots suffer from lack of moisture. Through dealing with this over the years we discovered that it is possible to deploy screening that offers shade and that even in the absence of mains water there are simple irrigation systems that will overcome short spells of drought.

In an Appendix we have demonstrated a version of the original Dunneman concept that could be used in the future.

As indicated earlier we have established a tree nursery but mostly on an *ad hoc* basis. Given that tree nursery projects area included in the Forests of Fingal Policy, we are determined to move forward on such a project for Swords. The Development Plan for the Ward River Valley Regional Park offers a potential option.

In terms of a substantial investment by Fingal Council to restore an historic walled garden in Knocksedan, with the objective of establishing a Community Garden, our 'tree banking' proposals are very compatible.



© Ronan Lynch

2018-2025 Engagement and Activities

Aside from the pandemic obstacles, SWA has been competently **planting trees** in collaboration with the CRAAN/ Easy Treesie initiative: Plant for the Planet and FCC. Our Swords based partners include Swords Tidy Towns, Friends of the Irish Environment, Hilltown Residents Association, Broadmeadow Community Garden, Swords Scouts (49th & 136th) and many local schools. Access for the planting projects, normally during Tree Week, was facilitated by FCC in the following Parks:

- River Valley Park: Three locations
- Broadmeadow Linear Park
- Balheary Park
- Holywell
- Rob's Wall / Malahide Castle (CRAAN Tree Academy, 2018)
- Newbridge Demesne: Four locations

We have photographed each of these events and have as much as possible produced follow-up research.

A selection of our file photos are included in this document and are easily available on the website or Facebook.

Starting in 2019 SWA has been pleased to join in the work of **Fingal PPN**. This engagement has included PPN submissions on climate and biodiversity policies as well as taking a role on the Climate Action, Biodiversity and Environment Strategic Policy Committee. Our current PPN Rep is Tara Bryne, who also has a role on the PPN Linkage Group structure.

Over the last number of years we have also organized a **Tree Week in the Atrium** at County Hall. Notable events starting with the memorial for founder Ken Doyle have involved a tree giveaway precedent with Dominica McDevitt, Head of the Ardgillan Castle landscaping

team. We joined with Easy Treesie to help promote the work of a Dutch NGO MEERgroen at the Tree Week event in 2023. The school children who always feature have joined in quizzes and the Poetree was very popular with the avid young people from Rivermede.

Each year since 2022 we have conducted a **Swords Photographers Contest**, where contributors featured in the Calendar we produced with generous assistance from Fingal Community Office.

We have 200+ sign-ups for our **Woodland Ambassador Scheme**.

Our objectives mirror and support several Nature Based Solutions and Action Objectives in the *Fingal Climate Action Plan, Biodiversity Plan, Forests of Fingal Policy (2022-2032)* and the *Sustainable Swords Strategy (2022)*.



© Tommy Kavanagh

Including but not limited to:

- To protect and enhance Fingal's trees and woodlands, to maximise both the benefits they offer and the character they bring to the county, to ensure a greener and healthier Fingal for now and future generations.
- Protect existing trees, increase tree cover [...] and investigate feasibility of urban orchards.
- Identify sites for woodland planting.
- Engage with regional working group on nature-based solutions.
- Naturally growing diverse woodland can store carbon at a far greater capacity than monocultural plantations for production. Increasing tree cover in Fingal will contribute to a reduction in atmospheric carbon.

We believe that these objectives can contribute towards several **UN Sustainable Development Goals**, namely:

- **Goal 15 - Life on land:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
- **Goal 3 - Good health and well-being for people:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- **Goal 13 - Climate action:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by regulating emissions and promoting developments in renewable energy.





In Conclusion

Swords Woodland Association is working to a 2030 deadline for the delivery of the Swords Community Forest, as part of the Sustainable Swords Strategy.

This public amenity will feature a strategic expansion of public open space in the Swords Development Area.

Given that Swords is becoming a dense urban community it follows that we require an innovative design for a multi-faceted urban forest amenity.

We have discovered in the Planning files of the County current open space strategies that can accommodate an integrated forest model. For example, the current Development Plan endorses an open space strategy that **“focuses on the value, quantity, quality, sustainability, conservation, and protection of open spaces, recognizing their importance for health, social, economic, and environmental well-being.”** The Swords Community Forest will deliver value and maintain healthy balance.

The connection between sustainability and access to quality education is indisputable. We support a land use design with the option to align new schools (particularly at Secondary level) as components of our public open space. Coordinating land use decisions can bring urban parkland into the school campus and learning into our natural surroundings.

An innovative school that delivers groves, stepping-stone biodiversity projects and sensory paths should not be seen as costly or complicated but rather a 21st century Placemaking mentality.

Within the boundaries of Swords, we have miles of riverbanks and acres of natural floodplains. Innovative Greenway projects can facilitate permeability while utilizing marginal lands for advancing tree cover and nature restoration. The golden rule is simple: *“the right trees in the right places.”*

The heritage of Swords and restored sites such as the Castle and the Glebe towers are actively protected by the Council. Using the Ward River as an anchor we should opt for Greenways

connected to heritage sites integrated into a distinctive “open” space.

We urge the Council to adopt an open space zoning initiative. We see an incredible opportunity within the ongoing development plans for the Regional Park in River Valley and the similar amenity (Swords Regional Park) planned less than two miles north along the Broadmeadow River.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eVmq-4n9yl>

The new Community Forest can become the home to forest classrooms, allotments and a garden/tree nursery. Local groups, such as “upcycling” or arts initiatives could flex their muscle in sustainable outdoor facilities.

Gathering together the considerable energy of community groups in Swords by means of a public realm Trust, could be the formula for achieving an extraordinary potential. Swords can opt for something beyond congestion, we can achieve Strategic and Sustainable progress.

Benefits of Trees in Ealing



Conserve Energy

Carefully positioned trees can cut heating and cooling requirement in buildings, providing shade in summer and blocking cold winds in winter.

234,400

Trees in Total

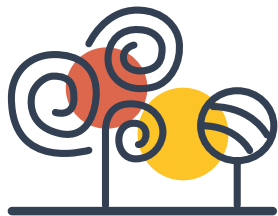


Reduce Flood Risk

Trees absorb water, lowering stress on storm water drains and mitigating flood risk. They also improve soil quality and prevent erosion, so more water is held in the ground.

74,440m³

Storm Water Alleviation (per annum)



Support Environmental Education

Planting and caring for urban trees can help to develop awareness, understanding, skills and knowledge about the local environment.



Improve Air Quality

Trees improve air quality by absorbing pollutants and intercepting gases harmful to human health.

Total Annual Benefits

€1.8M



Enhanced Health & Well-being

Trees and green spaces can improve recovery times from illness, reduce stress and boost mental health.



Storing Carbon

As trees grow they accumulate carbon in their woody tissues, reducing the amount of this greenhouse gas in the atmosphere.

76,670

Carbon Storage (tonnes)



Add Character & Charm

Trees add beauty to their surroundings. They bring colour, soften harsh lines of buildings, screen unsightly views and enhance the character of an area.



Strengthen Communities

Creating and caring for green spaces helps people reconnect with their neighbours and surroundings.



Enrich Habitats & Biodiversity

An increase in tree diversity benefits a host of insects, birds and mammals that rely on trees for food and protection. For example, they are an important source of nectar for bees.

Replacement Costs

€260M



Enable Urban Foraging

Trees provide fruits and nuts for wildlife and humans. Community Orchards offer health, social and environmental benefits.

16.9%

Canopy Cover



TREE IDENTIFIER

Common trees found in Ireland



ASH

Fuinseog /
Fraxinus Excelsior



BEECH

Feá /
Fagus Sylvatica



CRAB APPLE

Crann fia-úll /
Malus Sylvestris



ELDER

Tromán/
Sambucus Nigra



OAK (Sessile)

Dair ghaelach /
Quercus petraea



HORNBEAM

Crann sleamhain/
Carpinus Betulus



HORSE CHESTNUT

Cnó capaill/
Aesculus Hippocastanum



SYCAMORE

Seiceamóir/
Acer Pseudoplatanus





PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE WOODLANDS IN THE GREATER SWORDS AREA

Swords Woodland Association seeks to create a well-planned quality of life for those who live, work and visit the Greater Swords Area through the maintenance, enhancement and sustainable development of our woodlands and existing green belt. We believe that the ability of our green infrastructure to act as a carbon sink for high emissions from Dublin Airport is essential to the health and wellbeing of our citizens. We support land use planning that recognises the benefits of forestry, woodlands, allotments and community gardens in generating healthy urban communities.

We believe that our community needs to understand the challenges of decreasing biodiversity, climate change, river basin protection, flood attenuation and other issues that may arise more quickly than we wish. We will join with others in the sharing of relevant information.

We believe that through *school based initiatives* teachers, students and their families can be instrumental to developing community led climate action.

We seek to link new and existing transport commitments to land use plans that sustainably address the housing and movement needs of citizens. SWA strongly advocates for the enhancement and further development of pedestrian and cycling options in the Greater Swords Area.

Guided by the belief that wellbeing is a social asset, SWA advocates for properly scaled eco-tourism initiatives that offer the benefits of outdoor pursuits and exercise to all citizens of and visitors to the Greater Swords Area.

We seek a climate of genuine partnership and engagement within communities that will assist in defining constructive and sustainable goals.

We endorse the concepts of open government and advocate for simplification of access in the planning process. We seek to introduce greater respect and equity in all public spheres.

www.swordswoodland.ie