



**Fingal
Chamber**
Advancing business together

FINGAL CHAMBER SUSTAINABLE SWORDS STRATEGY SUBMISSION

Introduction

Fingal Chamber is the accredited Chamber for the entire Fingal region representing over 400 businesses that support 25,000 jobs in the area.

Fingal Chamber is the independent voice of business in Fingal, with members across every town from Balbriggan in the north to Santry in the south, and from Howth in the east to Blanchardstown in the west. The Chamber advocates for business, provides advice, support, referrals, lobbying and represents members to deliver positive change and drive a strong vision for Fingal as the best place for business.

The Chamber also works with Government Ministers, MEPs, the Mayor of Fingal, Fingal County Council and local representatives to deliver pro-business and employment initiatives for the region.

Fingal has major economic assets which includes Dublin Airport and strong representation from the pharmaceutical, agri-food, IT, retail and extended aviation industry.

Context: Fingal Chamber Business Sentiment Survey

Fingal Chamber published the results of its Business Sentiment Survey in February this year.

The survey which focused on business challenges, competitiveness, staff recruitment and retention, flexible and remote work, local Government supports and the outlook for the region, was conducted over a two-week period last month looking at the immediate and short-term issues facing Fingal businesses.

The results of the survey provide a clear mandate for the Chamber to advocate on behalf of its members highlighting the key issues impacting them.

Of the total number of responses received from businesses in the region, 36% were from companies with 50+ employees, while 64% came from businesses ranging from one to 50 employees.

The key findings of the survey indicated that over 40% of businesses in the area said that staff retention and recruitment is their biggest challenge. The survey also showed that the availability of skills and talent (32%) together with short supply of housing (26%) and transport issues (15%), will threaten the future competitiveness of Fingal according to local businesses.

Shortage of housing (26%) and public transport services/traffic congestion were also highlighted as risks to Fingal's competitiveness.

Fingal Chamber's submission to Fingal County Council's Sustainable Swords Strategy is set against the backdrop of its Business Sentiment Survey.

It cannot be understated the importance of addressing critical issues such as lack of housing, transport delivery and congestion issues sooner to ensure Fingal and its citizens are best placed to embrace economic, employment and economic growth across the region.

Fingal Chamber broadly supports the Sustainable Swords Strategy which states that the goals of the strategy are to increase resilience of the local economy and to provide for an enhanced accessible, inclusive, age friendly and healthy urban environment.

All businesses are facing new challenges every day with rising inflation and energy costs in addition to increased labour costs so it is critical now more than ever to increase resilience within the local economy of Fingal and Swords.

While improvements have been made to Swords Main Street in the past decade, a radical step forward is now needed to upgrade the town centre in line with similar European towns and cities such as El Prat, Utrecht and Copenhagen.

Theme 1: Swords Main Street Transformation

- Fingal Chamber fully supports the completion of Swords Cultural Quarter public realm.
- New Market Quarter by the Old Borough/Garda Station area. A good example of a market area is the TimeOut Market in Lisbon. This new market area is an excellent opportunity to showcase the best produce and local art talent Fingal has to offer. It is a fantastic opportunity to be a focal point and delivered as a centre of food and talent excellence for the region.
- With the removal of parking areas on the main street there needs to be tried and tested robust alternatives nearby for business deliveries and people with reduced mobility. This needs to be delivered in consultation with businesses in the area.
- Drop off points for cars, taxis and coaches must be well thought out to avoid congestion on the main street.
- Bus stops need to be off road to avoid traffic congestion and hold up and keep the flow of traffic through the main street moving.

Theme 2: Reimagining the Public Realm

Fingal Chamber is supportive of the:

- Liveable Laneways initiative, Key Street Enhancements widespread CCTV is required to foster a sense of safety throughout the area, thereby reducing any potential anti-social behaviour.
- Swords Shopfront Enhancements is to be fully welcomed for businesses in the area and we encourage Fingal County Council to invite local businesses in for a briefing on supports available and how to apply for them.
- While the shopfront enhancements are very much welcomed and supported by Fingal Chamber, we would like to see a comprehensive plan of attracting new traders to the street. Ideally traders showcasing local art, design, crafts etc.
- Fingal Chamber is disappointed there is no reference to adopting the living over the shop initiative in the strategy. This is a hugely important issue in breathing vibrancy into the town centre and enhancing the local economy.

Theme 3: Improving Access, Permeability and Connectivity

- Fingal Chamber fully supports the proposed cycle and Greenway network and encourages the development of this as soon as possible.
- The Swords Western Distributor Road is critical to ensure the plans success and the Chamber fully supports its development.
- The success of both of these initiatives is dependent on excellent design, layout and delivery.

Theme 4: Protecting and Promoting Our Heritage

- Fingal Chamber is fully supportive of protecting local heritage sites in the area.
- These are so important in telling and maintaining the history of the town for locals and tourists.
- Heritage sites can and should be used for town events and as part of the local heritage trail. There are endless possibilities which can include the support of local businesses.
- In addition to the Fingal Coastal Trail, there is a tourism opportunity to have a multiple town/village tour of Swords-Malahide-Ballybough, Donabate, Skerries or Balbriggan. There are plenty of opportunities to be explored here with local businesses.

Theme 5: Supporting and Celebrating a Sustainable Community

- Fingal Chamber is fully supportive of these initiatives to improve the environment and wellbeing of the area.
- There are multiple opportunities to work with local businesses to make a real impact and difference to the region.
- Fingal Chamber encourages the Council to seek the input of local business at early stages of enhancement initiatives for maximum impact.