

CHAPTER 2: THE POLICY BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the current policy context in Fingal. It examines national, regional and local guidelines and strategies and considers how they influence development in the study area.

2.2 National Policy

2.2.1 The National Development Plan 2000-2006

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006 strategy is based on an assessment of the development needs of the country to ensure:

- Ireland's recent economic progress is consolidated and built upon in a sustainable way;
- economic growth is distributed both regionally and throughout society; and
- achieving a balance between the environment and development.

It states that there is evidence that supply-side constraints, congestion, a weak supply response to a sharp rise in housing demand and skills shortages in a number of areas may inhibit growth unless they are tackled.

The national objectives that underpin the strategy are (p33):

- *“continuing national economic and employment growth;*
- *consolidating and improving Ireland's international competitiveness;*
- *fostering balanced regional development; and*
- *promoting social inclusion”.*

A fundamental aim of the NDP is to balance regional development to ease pressure on the urban infrastructure; tackle urban and rural poverty; and in the long term to integrate physical and economic planning through effective land use. The distinctive challenges that apply to the South and East Region, including South Fingal, are:

- to consolidate and build upon the Region's recent economic performance, maintaining its key role in national economic competitiveness;
- to address urban congestion and bottlenecks to growth in urban centres;
- to develop counter-balances to Dublin, relieving pressure on the capital and hinterland;
- to support the agriculture and seafood sector;
- to promote social inclusion in deprived areas;
- to maintain a viable rural economy.

2.2.2 The National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) develops the national strategy in terms that are of direct relevance for policy choice in Fingal. It is a twenty-year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development, and population growth, between regions. It aims to sustain a better quality of life for people, a strong competitive economic position and an environment of the highest quality. It provides the crucial context at national strategy level for all development planning policy.

The overall approach to achieving balanced regional development is

- Maintaining the performance of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) for the overall economic well being of Ireland while at the same time building up places and areas be similarly strong on a national and international scale – generating benefits closer to where people live.
- Addressing the problem of unbalanced development e.g. leading to long distance commuting due to the strong economic performance of some areas and the comparative weakness of others.
- Accommodating the population within existing settlements, including cities, towns and villages while the economic and social strengths and resources of rural areas are also promoted.
- In physical development terms, consolidating and developing Ireland's existing cities, towns and villages – i.e. keeping them as physically compact and public transport friendly as possible and minimising urban sprawl, while also achieving a high quality of design in new development. Urban land needs to be used carefully, sensitively and efficiently – with the aim of reducing dereliction and under-utilisation. Where Greenfield development is necessary it should take place through the logical extension of existing cities, towns and villages.
- Implementing policies and programmes through the national framework provided by the NSS.

The spatial policies of the NSS for the Greater Dublin Area can be summarised as seeking to secure its vital national role in terms of improved mobility, urban design quality, social mix, and international and regional connections.

Some of the factors that will critically affect the future of the Greater Dublin Area are:

- creating efficient and high quality public transport connections within the Dublin area to improve access to employment, education, services and amenities
- good international access particularly through Dublin Airport and Dublin Port
- good transport and telecommunications connections with other national gateways
- concentrating employment intensive activities close to public transport corridors and road transport intensive activities close to the strategic road network

The strategy also promotes the development of the Dublin to Belfast corridor.

In summary, Ireland's future transport network can be viewed in terms of:

- Strategic radial corridors, e.g. good quality road and public transport connections between Dublin and Belfast and international access through ports and airports and onwards to other parts of the island through the various corridors.
- Strategic linking corridors
- Strategic International access points e.g. Dublin Airport.

Effective connections to the world are vital for Ireland to have a globally competitive but regionally integrated economy. In relation to air access, a critical mass of population is required within an airport's catchment to support a range of services to and from a wide choice of destinations. Dublin Airport serves the city, region and country and offers the greatest number of international connections. Expanding the level of services available from Dublin Airport to an even wider range of destinations is essential in the interests of underpinning Ireland's future international competitiveness. However, in a liberalised aviation market, route-planning decisions of airlines depend primarily on the anticipated level of demand. The national and regional benefits of expanded services from Dublin Airport can be enhanced through improved connections with (i) the integrated public transport network proposed by the Dublin Transportation Office in *A Platform for Change*, (ii) the national roads network and (iii) regional airports.

2.2.3 National Retail Planning Guidelines

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has published a set of Retail Planning Guidelines (RPG), which lay out national retail policy. These provide a "comprehensive framework to guide both local authorities in preparing development plans and assessing applications for permission and retailers and developers in formulating development proposals". The Guidelines address the retail hierarchy, policy objectives, the role of town centres, and general principles for assessment of new development. The resulting proposals for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) cover the full range of retail provision, from the city centre to small town and district centres within the conurbation, tied closely into the Strategic Planning Guidelines.

The guidelines aim to achieve the following:

- A wide distribution of reasonably sized convenience goods outlets at locations accessible by car with priority given to places also served by public transport;
- A set of established and developing centres well served by public transport, which together with the city centre would offer a good provision of comparison goods;
- A limited number of retail warehouse developments at locations accessible by car; and
- The preparation of a County Retail Strategy for each local authority.

Paragraph 25 of the guidelines indicates that the preferred location for retail development should be within town centres, consistent with the requirement to achieve good access especially by public transport. If there are no development sites available within a town centre, then the next preference should be a location on the edge of the town centre.

Over the next 5-10 years, considerable growth is expected in consumer expenditure on both comparison and convenience goods. This is likely to support major expansion of retail provision in Greater Dublin.

2.2.4 Sustainable Development – A Strategy for Ireland (1997)

Sustainable Development – A Strategy for Ireland (1997) was formulated in response to the Earth Summit in 1992. The overall aim of the strategy is to allow Ireland to develop to its full potential within a well-protected environment, without compromising the quality of the environment, with responsibility towards present and future generations and the wider international community. The strategy addresses all areas of government policy and the economic, social and physical activities that impact on the environment and sets out a number of initiatives. Elements of particular significance for this study are:

- More sustainable urban development will be promoted by:
 - Closer co-ordination between transport and land use planning
 - The promotion of higher residential densities in appropriate locations
 - Emphasis on clear demarcation between urban and rural land use
- Policies for achieving sustainable urban regeneration will have key elements:
 - Integrated strategic economic and social planning
 - Ecological principles
 - Improving accessibility
 - Environmental upgrading
 - Design flexibility
 - Open spaces
- Minimisation of potential growth in transport demand will be incorporated as a leading consideration in land use planning.
- Efficient, cost-effective and customer-focused development of the rail network will be supported for its economic, social, environmental and regional benefits.
- Planning authorities will make provision in their development plans for sustainable tourism, and ensure through the planning process that over-development does not take place. Controls will be needed on certain activities which are incompatible with the sustainable development approach.

2.3 Regional Planning Policy

2.3.1 Regional Planning Guidelines (RPG) 2004-2016

Regional guidance for the Greater Dublin Area is now right up to date, with the publication (July 2004) of Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) for the period 2004-16. Prepared by the Regional Authorities, the RPGs provide a long-term strategic planning framework for the development of the Greater Dublin Area –within the National Spatial Strategy vision to 2020.

The RPGs replace the Strategic Planning Guidelines (1999, reviewed 2000-2), but take the SPG vision as their primary starting point. That vision sketched out broad objectives for Dublin as capital city, for the Dublin and Mid-East Regions, for the Metropolitan and Hinterland Areas, and for Urban Centres and Urban form. Two themes of particular relevance for South Fingal are:

- Dublin, through its port and airport, will continue to be a very important entry/exit point for the country as a whole, and a “gateway” between the European Union and the rest of the world, and consequently access to and through the area will continue to be a matter of national significance.

- Development throughout the Greater Dublin Area will be increasingly related to a significantly enhanced public transport system.

The preferred Strategy in the RPG, for the ‘Metropolitan Area’ within which South Fingal sits, is for development to be consolidated, with a much-enhanced multi-modal transport system. The general recommendation is therefore “to work towards the creation of an integrated polycentric city region.” (p.110, 5.8) – a single integrated local market. Substantial continuing growth is to be planned for, and this is especially marked in the case of Fingal: RPG Table 7.4 forecasts an increase in households (2002-2010) of 33,477: 55% more than at Census 2002, and indeed a quarter of the total growth in the whole Greater Dublin Area.

Economically, the 2004 RPGs note that outside central Dublin, major employers have been attracted to existing centres that are well served by major transport corridors and that are near, or offer ease of access to, Dublin Airport and Port. The RPGs advocate the “least restrictive enterprise land use approach to zoning of land, consistent with good planning..”

On Transport, the Guidelines emphasise the need to improve international, national and local accessibility and connectivity of the Greater Dublin Area and the settlements within it. The DTO’s “Platform for Change” (see Chapter 6 below) is regarded as a starting point for strategy development: it “provides a comprehensive framework for addressing accessibility and connectivity within the Metropolitan Area of the GDA...” but “it is recommended that the timescale... is reviewed and that the phasing of infrastructure projects be re-examined in the light of changed and projected economic conditions” (p.113, 8.4). The RPGs introduce a special policy zone corresponding to land within the reach of a multi-modal transport corridor – where development should ensure that all significant origins and destinations of travel are located as close as possible to multi-modal transport facilities; and they point out that this may entail both locating transport where land use indicates it as desirable, and/or locating land uses at multi modal transport facilities creating opportunities for further development. Figure 7.2 “Multi-Modal Transport Corridors” in the 2004 RPGs shows a “Priority Objective Airport (rail) link”, described on p142 as a key strategic priority. The strategy is for landside access to Dublin Airport to be improved by the provision of an extensive, high quality, fully accessible integrated public transport network. Road access will be improved by widening the M50; other strategic projects of relevance noted are the M1 Drinan interchange, N2 Improvements, and Outer Ring road south and west from the N2 (though not eastwards, i.e. between the Airport and Swords to the M1).

Development of the Airport, as one of the country’s premier international access points, is regarded as essential in underpinning international competitiveness. Landside access is noted as a key issue.

The RPG states that in order to achieve air passenger numbers of 22.3 million by 2010 and 31.0 million by 2020, Dublin Airport will require a new runway by 2009, extended apron facilities and additional terminal passenger processing facilities. Increasing airfreight will require the relocation and provision of additional freight facilities on new sites within the Airport area.

Three other aspects of RPG guidance have particular relevance for the South Fingal study area:

- **Open Spaces and Recreation:** planning authorities are to have a presumption in favour of the retention of existing sports and recreation facilities, and to identify areas for the provision of public open space for informal recreation which can address enhancement of the open space network, can secure landscape and biodiversity enhancement, and can improve the environment of the urban fringe.
- **Protection of Environment and Amenity:** ensuring that development does not result in adverse impacts on those living and working in/visiting the area as a result of changes in emissions, stress levels, etc.
- **Green belts:** created to protect and enhance the open nature of lands between urban areas, for agricultural and recreational use, the accepted aims are to limit development so as to retain attractive landscapes, to protect agricultural land from urban pressures, and to shape patterns of urban development at sub-regional and regional scale. The RPGs provide guidance on how planning authorities should use Green Belt notation, including establishing visual breaks, protecting countryside, and providing opportunities for access to open countryside.

2.3.2 GDA Retail Planning Strategy

The Retail Planning Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area is designed to ensure that there is a sufficiency of retail floorspace to accord with population and expenditure growth, and that it is located in an efficient, equitable and sustainable manner.

The Strategy for each County needs to respect the significant differences in the role of shopping centres throughout the GDA. The immediately surrounding Counties within the Metropolitan Area have been the focus for large new shopping developments which should be preserved and strengthened since they provide important intervening shopping opportunities for many of the residents of the Hinterland Area and beyond.

In Fingal, it is recommended that the potential for further comparison floorspace to 2006 should be concentrated on Swords and that growth prospects beyond 2006 may by then allow capacity for development in other centres. In the short term, considerable potential scope for convenience retailing is identified, distributed in accordance with need, having regard to the emergence of Malahide and Balbriggan as second tier centres within the County.

2.4 Local Policy

2.4.1 Fingal Development Board Strategy

An overlaying strategy for all aspects of service planning in Fingal is now provided by the “Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development in Fingal” prepared by the Fingal Development Board/Forbairt Fhine Gall in 2002. County Development Boards (CDB) were established across Ireland in 2000. Each CDB was required to prepare and oversee the implementation of a 10 year strategy for the economic, social and cultural development of the county, which would provide the template guiding all public services and local development activities, bringing more coherence to the planning and delivery of services at local level. The CDBs are led by local government and are also representative of local development bodies together with the State agencies and social partners operating locally.

The Strategy states a Vision for Fingal: “By the year 2011, Fingal will be readily identified as a county with a distinct social and cultural identity reaping the benefits of sustainable development where residents and organisations will share responsibility for maximising all of the county’s advantages in enhancing the quality of life for all”.

The Strategy profiles the County, and the Board has also audited service provision (reported separately). It identifies the dramatic scale of change expected, the youthfulness of the population, and the pressure on resources and services. Eight Strategic issues are set out: County Identity, Land Use Planning, Transportation, Economic Development, Housing, Health and Social Services, Lifelong Learning, and Environmental Protection. For each, the strategy defines Goals, Actions and Agencies to lead implementation.

The Strategy is extremely wide-ranging, with a wealth of cross-cutting and interacting policy recommendations. Of particular note for planning in South Fingal are:

- The issue of image, identity and tourism potential – including the practical suggestion of an Airport presence for a Fingal-focused tourism effort.
- The need for balance between maintaining the character and identity of Fingal, and encouraging the development that will maximise opportunities for local people – which leads to many detailed recommendations on land use planning policy.
- For the Airport, a stress on maximising the strategic value, by creating a Stakeholders Forum, expanding training initiatives, and improving public transport links, especially rail, as a matter of urgency.
- Strong emphasis on sustainability and a public transport emphasis in access planning, coupled with demand management (for reasons of efficiency, safety and environmental intrusion) on the road network.
- Specific support for rail schemes: Luas to Ballymun, Metro to Swords, and both plus heavy rail to the Airport.

Other elements of the Strategy provide a carefully-thought-out and integrated package of policies on education, health, skills, community services, etc; but are of countywide application rather than specific relevance to the South Fingal Study area.

2.4.2 Fingal County Development Plan (1999-2004)

The Fingal County Development Plan (CDP) was adopted in 1999, with a period of application to 2004 (extended to 2005 by the Planning and Development Act 2000). It provides local development objectives based on international, national, and regional factors, including land use in development areas; social and physical infrastructure provision; social inclusion; and rural development, amenity, conservation, leisure, tourism and recreation. (As noted above, regional planning guidance suggests that population growth is thought to have accelerated since the development plan was adopted).

Airport - The CDP identifies the airport as the ‘gateway’ to Ireland and Dublin. It is the most significant single economic entity within Fingal and the region. Its large employment base, major passenger throughput and ready access to airfreight facilities, means the airport has a unique contribution to make to the economy, both nationally and regionally, and to Fingal in particular. The airport and environs will become a major

development area because of the rapid growth in the volume of passengers using the airport and planned improvements to passenger facilities and road and public transport proposals in the area.

In assessing the effect of proposed development on the safety of aircraft and principles of safe and efficient navigation thereof, the Irish Aviation Authority will have regard to International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO) Annex 14, Volumes 1 and 2 with reference to any official safeguarding map which may be lodged with the local authority.

The CDP policy determines the development potential of the airport and environs and provides that Fingal County Council will act as the guardian of this national resource.

The CDP outlines the importance of the South Fingal Planning Study in determining the long-term development of the area. It sets out that the study should cover:

- the current and future operational, safety and technical requirements of the airport;
- facilitating the provision of the second major east-west runway;
- ameliorative measures for minimising environmental effects of the airport; and
- development of appropriate uses within South Fingal and adjoining the airport.

Urban Development Strategy - The urban areas within and surrounding the study area include Swords, Blanchardstown/Castleknock, Baldoyle, Portmarnock and Malahide.

Swords is the local government administrative centre for Fingal. It is identified as a major growth centre for development in the south east of the county, including the creation and maintenance of jobs with particular emphasis on continuing development of its high-tech industry. The primary development areas are to the north and south of the town, with additional land identified for industry and residential zones. The long-term target population target is 50,000.

The key points for the study of the CDP's main development objectives for Swords are:

- Protection and conservation of the historic core of Swords, including the area of archaeological potential in the centre of the town.
- Facilitating improved accessibility for all, with improved transportation infrastructure, including rail, light rail transit, quality bus corridors, cycle routes and provision of a public transport interchange.
- Protecting the identity of Swords by maintaining the green belt separation between Swords and Malahide, and providing a green belt around the town.

Blanchardstown will remain the largest urban settlement of Fingal and as a social, cultural and local tourism centre – it has an ultimate target population of 100,000. It will provide for growth in the south west of the county for residential, commercial and industrial development.

The primary area for development is to the north of the town. A considerable proportion of undeveloped zoned industrial land is contained within proprietary land. Much of this is committed for development, and therefore the Plan indicates additional zoning for industrial land.

Development objectives for Blanchardstown, which relate to this study, include:

- To develop a wide range of employment opportunities;

- To retain the individual identity of the town, maintaining its physical separation from other towns by the retention and addition of Green Belts;
- To preserve and enhance the character of the villages of Blanchardstown, Castleknock, Clonsilla and Mulhuddart;
- To encourage major office and service development in the town;
- To provide for a regional park.

Accommodation of Employment - The CDP stresses the need for jobs to be located next to housing in order to decrease the need to travel.

The study area lies partly within and partly adjacent to the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. The CDP notes that the corridor has the potential to provide one of the most significant economic development entities in the country, and is expected to grow rapidly over the next decade. The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor Study states that primary objectives are to increase the growth potential and maximise equitable and sustainable employment opportunities arising from the development of the corridor. The objectives of the corridor include maximising economic growth and sustainable employment for the population.

Specific objectives include:

- To focus future developments along the corridor so as to enhance existing industrial clusters, particularly computer hardware and software, IT, pharmaceuticals and electronics;
- To facilitate the development of small indigenously owned companies throughout the County which will benefit from the enhanced inward investment and tourism activities associated with the corridor;
- To facilitate equitable economic development within the County and, in particular, to ensure that less developed areas within Fingal benefit from future developments associated with the Corridor;
- To market and promote Fingal, particularly in Northern Ireland, as an attractive tourist destination in the main population centres along the corridor.

Background studies also identified the following objectives:

- To develop skills by ensuring economically active people resident in the County benefit from new jobs;
- Address the weaknesses in the tourism infrastructure and amenity value to stimulate development and economic activity in the tourism sector.

Rural Areas and Green Belt - An important element of the CDP policy relates to rural and open areas. The majority of the South Fingal study area is designated as rural and/or Green Belt. Apart from the airport, the study area is largely rural in character, although sited between major urban areas with large residential populations. It is characterised by scattered individual dwellings and development clusters, often along main roads. There is a mix of traditional farm-based dwellings, small newer houses and a few larger dwellings set in grounds. The only significant settlement is St Margaret's, at the western edge of the study area.

The study area contains a large portion of Green Belt providing a physical separation between the airport, Swords and Blanchardstown and land devoted to agricultural and similar uses with development limited to meeting local needs.

The CDP's primary objective for the Green Belt is maintaining the open character of the land to ensure a strong, efficient and permanent Green Belt. The policy supports the concentration of development in existing centres with the Green Belt forming buffer zones in order to secure a clear distinction between urban and rural areas.

The CDP records the secondary roles of the Green Belt as:

- Access to the open countryside for the urban population
- Outdoor sport and recreation
- Protection of agricultural land
- Available mix of land uses within the areas
- Urban forestry/woodland
- Retention of 'demesne' type landscapes

2.4.3 Draft Fingal Development Plan 2005-2011

A draft Development Plan for the next planning period has now been produced and put on display by the County Council. "Your Fingal – Fingal Development Plan 2005-2011" sets out a complete review of the policy basis. Notably, in terms of the study area, it draws on the work done in the South Fingal Planning Study, proposes a Designated Airport Area as suggested in the Study, includes a revised Metro alignment, indicates a possible development node related to such new public transport capacity south of the Airport, and makes other more minor alterations and modifications. It also sets out the County Retail Strategy which covers the retail hierarchy, core retail areas, the sequential approach to shopping provision, the assessment of need, and the policies for specific shopping centres and types of retailing.

The key policies and objectives proposed for Dublin Airport and the South Fingal Fringe are:

- DAP 1 & TP15: to safeguard the current and future operational, safety, technical and developmental requirements of Dublin Airport, having regard to the environmental impact on local communities.
- DAP2 & TP20: to realise the optimal use of lands around the airport.
- DAP3: to promote the continued co-ordinated, sustainable and well-planned physical and economic development of Dublin Airport, having regard to its sustainability within Fingal and to government policies in relation to decentralisation and the National Spatial Strategy.
- DAP4: to encourage and facilitate the provision of an integrated public transport network to serve Dublin Airport.
- DAP5 & TP16: to protect and enhance the transportation capacity required to provide for the surface access needs of the Airport, which is an important national asset, but also a major source of employment growth potential in its own right.

- TP17: to control the supply of car parking at the Airport so as to maximise as far as is practicable the use of public transport by workers and passengers and to secure the efficient use of land.
- TP18: to promote appropriate land use patterns in the vicinity of the flight paths serving the Airport, having regard to the existing and anticipated environmental impacts of aircraft movements.
- TP19: to implement the policies to be determined by Government in relation to Public Safety Zones for Dublin Airport.
- TP21: to promote the extension of the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act and EU environmental standards to all relevant activities at Dublin Airport including noise control, engine run-up and air pollution.
- TO18: to determine a Designated Airport Area for Dublin Airport, and to zone the lands included in that area for uses integral or ancillary to the functions of the airport as such.
- TO19: to facilitate the early development of a second east-west runway at Dublin Airport.
- TO20: to restrict the Crosswind Runway to essential occasional use on completion of the second east-west runway.
- TO21: to facilitate the on-going augmentation and improvement of terminal facilities at Dublin Airport.

2.4.4 County Retail Strategy

In May 2003, Fingal County Council adopted a Retail Strategy which augments CDP policy as required by the GDA retail planning strategy. It sets out a clear hierarchy based on four core retail areas (Swords, Malahide, Balbriggan, Blanchardstown SC), plus neighbourhood centres and more local provision. It allows for the possibility of innovative shopping formats (RS7), but makes no provision for the airport or South Fingal area. It emphasises the application of the Sequential Approach which favours town centre and edge of centre locations for retail development.

2.5 Summary of the planning policy context

The planning policy documents provide a strong and clearly articulated set of principles to guide choices around the airport, more widely in South Fingal, and in the hinterland. Policies on the economic importance of the north-south corridor, the role of the airport itself, location of denser employment activities in relation to public transport, and the separation role of the Green Belt are all essential structuring elements in developing the specific recommendations for South Fingal.