

# **The Regeneration of Swindon's Central Area**

Development Control Guidance Note

Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft

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## **Development Control Guidance note: The Regeneration of Swindon's Central Area**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Development Control Guidance Note is intended to provide a method by which the principles of The New Swindon Company's Regeneration Framework can be used in determining planning applications. It clarifies the principles of the Regeneration Framework, which provides guidance to inform development proposals in Swindon's central area. This Guidance Note takes the main principles of the Regeneration Framework, setting out land use and development criteria for the project areas, which should guide and influence the masterplan/development brief process.
- 1.2 Crucially, the guidance note sets out principles for development (see box, para. 3.2) which stress the importance of the masterplanning process and the importance of controlling development that may prejudice or compromise holistic and comprehensive development and therefore the regenerative effort.
- 1.3 The key policy guidance in the Draft Local Plan from which this note takes its lead is policy CA1, though other policies of relevance are highlighted where necessary. The important guidelines in respect of this note are highlighted in the two grey text boxes.

### **2. Context**

- 2.1 This guidance note provides the Regeneration Framework with some status in the statutory planning system. It means that applications received in the central area, and especially in the major project areas, will be scrutinised for their effect on the regeneration aims for the central area, and will be used to help determine where there is a clear conflict between the policies of the adopted and emerging Local Plans and the New Swindon Company's Regeneration Framework. Where the conflict is deemed to be material, proposals for inappropriate development may be refused.
- 2.2 There are a number of factors here that require some additional explanation:
  - The New Swindon Company – an urban regeneration company (URC) - was formed in 2002. Urban Regeneration Companies are a Government initiative directly related to the Urban Task Force Report of 1999. These companies are intended to respond to specific regeneration needs in areas of market failure and are frequently found in areas where traditional

industries have declined. A case for the company has to be made to Government normally by the local authority. Support is required from local stakeholders and the Regional Development Agency (RDA). Swindon Borough Council made the case for a URC in central Swindon, and this was supported by the South West of England RDA and English Partnerships;

- Guidance issued by the Government for URCs suggests that a strategic vision is prepared for the area, and it uses the term 'regeneration framework'. On formation of The New Swindon Company, a regeneration framework was prepared for central Swindon. This was published in September 2004, and a more detailed 'technical' document was issued for the public local inquiry into the Draft Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011, in March 2005;
- Although the total area covered by The New Swindon Company is 220ha and the company will involve itself in regenerative matters throughout this area, the company's priorities are seven major projects. These each contain land which has a realistic chance of being assembled for comprehensive redevelopment. These projects are The Exchange, The Arena, The Promenade, The Hub, Swindon Central, North Star Village and The Campus, and they correspond broadly to project areas defined in the Central Area Chapter (Chapter 3) of the Draft Local Plan 2011. An indicative plan of the URC area, and the projects, is included at Appendix 1.
- URCs have no powers of their own for determining planning applications, and the Regeneration Framework has no planning status without being linked to the statutory development plan. This means that the Regeneration Framework is unenforceable unless it is worked into the statutory planning system, with which it must accord;
- During the iteration of the Regeneration Framework, the local plan (the statutory planning document) has been under review. The Plan includes a specific chapter that seeks to provide a context to the regeneration of central Swindon. However, this chapter contains several policies of a 'semi-strategic' nature. These policies identify zones within the central area in which certain mixes of uses would be appropriate. The Regeneration Framework provides a greater level of detail as to these uses, containing principles that should underpin all development proposals in these zones. The New Swindon Company are supportive of this approach, which, in abdicating detailed development criteria to the Regeneration Framework (or similar document) guards against the imposition of inflexible or cumbersome site-specific policies that would not provide the necessary flexibility to facilitate appropriate regeneration. Consequently, there are few differences between The New Swindon

Company's Regeneration Framework and the content of the Draft Local Plan. On adoption of the Local Plan in 2006, the Regeneration Framework and the Local Plan are likely to be fully aligned. This will allow for the preparation of Development Plan Documents for the policy areas;

- the Local Plan has been through a public local inquiry and the Inspector's Report has been received. Reference to the Revised Deposit Local Plan remains appropriate at this time whilst the final stages prior to adoption are negotiated;
- In the interim period between the release of the Regeneration Framework and the formal adoption of the Local Plan it is important that a level of detail is provided below that in the Draft Local Plan's policies. This note provides guidance for developers regarding what the local planning authority seeks and comfort to The New Swindon Company that the principles of the Regeneration Framework are protected within the plan-making process.

### **3. Key Principles**

- 3.1 The main objective of this Guidance Note is to allow some regard to the Regeneration Framework in advance of the adoption of the statutory Local Plan to 2011. Its emerging policies rely upon the Regeneration Framework, prepared by The New Swindon Company, to guide and assist in the definition of land uses within the central area. However, until adoption, there is a degree of uncertainty about the policy framework in respect of development proposals in the central area.
- 3.2 The key principles regarding development in the central area, and in particular, within the project areas, are defined by the Regeneration Framework. The general rule applied to all development in the central area is as follows:

**Within the major project areas, development proposals:**

**(a) must accord with a masterplan/development brief that has been adopted by the Borough Council for that area, or**

**(b) must demonstrate that the proposal will not compromise or prejudice the comprehensive masterplanning/development of the area, where a masterplan/ development brief has not been adopted**

**In addition, all development in Swindon Central Area will be considered in relation to the statutory planning framework and the broad principles of the Regeneration Framework listed in this guidance note.**

3.3 These principles stem directly from Policy CA1(b) of the Revised Deposit Draft Local Plan, which seeks the production of development briefs, or framework plans for the central area projects in accord with the Regeneration Framework.

3.4 The remainder of this Guidance Note sets out the broad planning objectives of the framework, and the masterplanning guidelines within each project area, and can therefore provide further information with respect to decision making and formulating the briefs and masterplans. Development proposals falling outside of the broad planning objectives are unlikely to contribute positively to the regeneration of central Swindon.

#### **4. Regeneration Framework - Broad Planning Objectives**

4.1 The following broad planning objectives are adopted by the Borough Council for use in the consideration of planning applications and are intended to supplement the Local Plan, 2011.

4.2 These objectives have emerged from a process of consultation and involvement that culminated in the production of 'New Life for New Swindon – Regeneration Framework' by The New Swindon Company in September 2004, and the submission of a more detailed background document to the Local Plan Inquiry in March 2005.

4.3 These objectives apply to all development proposals in Swindon's central area (as defined on the Draft Local Plan's Proposals Map). Proposals that materially conflict or compromise these principles would be unlikely to contribute positively to the regeneration of central Swindon. Policy CA1(a) of the Revised Deposit Draft Local Plan provides the statutory basis for determining development.

**Swindon central area should contribute to a prosperous and inviting place to live and work, incorporating:**

- High quality, innovative urban living with a diverse community;
- A leading leisure, shopping and cultural location with a range of facilities;
- Attractive, compact retail core;
- Mixed use, prime office area.

**The central area should be a pleasant, attractive and safe place to be, providing:**

- A new 'heart' for the town – a civic and cultural focal point for Swindon;
- Intelligent, imaginative and innovative design, architecture and public spaces that at least meet the expectations of the Government and CABI and other design champions.

**The central area should provide the sub region's leading leisure, shopping and cultural location – with a diverse community, incorporating:**

- New cultural and higher education facilities.

**The central area should be a place that's easy to get to, providing:**

- Transport and access that makes central Swindon easy for everyone – uncluttered, understandable.

**In all cases, buildings should be constructed to the highest environmental and design standards (Draft Local Plan policy DS6) and make a clear and positive contribution to public realm (Draft Local Plan policy DS7). All buildings should be accessible to all users (Draft Local Plan policy ENV8) and contribute to a range of development requirements in accord with Draft Local Plan policies DS8 and CA15.**

## **5. Masterplanning Guidelines for the Project Areas**

- 5.1 The following points provide a checklist for the preparation of the masterplans and development briefs for each project area. It is not intended as a rigid and definitive set of requirements, but will need to be flexible and the progression of time may reveal new opportunities or obstacles.
- 5.2 The following principles have been derived from the Regeneration Framework, and provide a guide to the forms of development and land use anticipated within each project area. The policies of the Revised Deposit Draft Local Plan to which these principles relate are highlighted in each case, and the proposals map of the plan define the areas to which the policies apply. These principles should be used as the basis for the production of development briefs and masterplans for the project areas. However, in the absence of any such documents, they should be used as a guide to assess proposals that come forward in each of the project areas. Any proposals that materially compromise the principles for that project area are likely to be unacceptable.

### **Exchange and Arena (Local Plan policies CA6, CA6B, CA6C, T3)**

- create a distinctive prime mixed use quarter for the town centre of the highest design quality;
- deliver a high quality environment and public realm that will be instrumental in the creation of a 'heart' for the town (the Arena being conceived by The New Swindon Company as a future public space between the Exchange and the Promenade which could help to define the town centre);
- provide robust and flexible office space (B1), capable of sub-division, with active frontages and/or ground floor A1/A2/A3 where feasible;
- provide office buildings (B1) that can compete with out-of-centre locations on similar terms (easy access, convenient car parking, are well-related to the rail station and retail core and to other businesses in the town centre) and meeting the market's needs for buildings that have large floorplates and raised floors and that meet high standards of design and environmental sustainability;
- provide a high quality of environment and property product that would induce office-based inward investment (B1) into Swindon;
- meet the office needs of existing businesses in Swindon (B1/A2) wishing to upgrade and improve their operating efficiency;
- provide the types of retail units sought by both leading multiple (high street) traders and smaller traders;
- accommodate high quality urban housing to ensure the area is active outside of office hours;

- provide landscape and other improvements needed to produce high quality public spaces;
- provide active trading edges at ground level onto the principal pedestrian linkages between the rail station and The Arena and onto The Arena – using a mix that may comprise prime retail, food and drink, hotel and other appropriate leisure activity.

### **Swindon Central (Local Plan policy CA2)**

- create a distinctive new quarter for the town centre that contributes to the expansion of the high value commercial core of the town centre;
- develop the distinctive character of the railway corridor, acknowledging (whilst protecting and enhancing) the heritage value of the location and its distinctive place in Swindon's history;
- complement the creation of a prime office offer in the Exchange;
- build upon and complement the urban residential offer in the town centre, helping to attract and retain the labour market sought by existing and proposed central area businesses;
- provide a distinctive railway gateway into the rest of the town centre to the south, and from the town centre to the railway heritage and North Star to the north;
- enable the relocation of the rail car parking to the north of the rail station and the provision of a northern entrance to the rail station;
- facilitate new and improved access across the railway;
- provide the public realm improvements, infrastructure works and public spaces needed to ensure legibility and connectivity – including a new public square at a remodelled station entrance into the town centre to the south.

### **The Hub (Local Plan policies CA5 (part), CA7-CA13, S1)**

- additional comparison retail (A1) and leisure floorspace that the town centre will need in the period to 2016 in order to function competitively as the sub-regional shopping centre for the wide hinterland Swindon serves;
- satisfy the requirements of the retail sector for the robust units these traders need in order to offer their full range of goods and trade efficiently;
- create a strong prime pedestrian circuit across which to concentrate pedestrian footfall, so that the secondary streets which lead off the prime circuit can also prosper;
- create the quality of public realm that will, with the new shopping and leisure facilities, encourage the residents of Swindon's catchment to use the town centre in preference to any other alternative destination for meeting their higher order shopping needs;
- provide new residential above ground floor levels in the retail area to ensure activity throughout the day and evening.

### **The Promenade**

#### **(Local Plan policies CA5 (part), CA5A, CA10, T6)**

- provide facilities and focus for a vibrant cultural and civic life with good connections to the Arena and in a setting that is of a high environmental and design quality and supports the mix of activities required;
- to provide the opportunity to bring the higher education facilities Swindon needs to help it provide a quality labour force to stimulate spin-outs and new businesses, attract suppliers and support inward investment;
- to provide a flagship studio/workspace scheme to support the Borough's small business sector – particularly in the creative and IT sectors that benefit from the proximity to educational, civic and cultural land uses;
- to extend the core town centre functions (of The Hub) within the Promenade – to the south, including the Regent Circus site, and to the east to Princes Street; and
- to improve linkages between the town centre and Old Town, to mutual advantage.

### **The Campus**

#### **(Local Plan policies CA3, CA3B)**

- to create an environment that will attract large office (B1) space users into Central Swindon who need accessible, large floorplate offices and good choice in the labour market;
- to provide developments that would allow for greater representation from high growth sectors of the economy, complementing the office provision in The Exchange;
- integration of large scale leisure and residential uses avoiding a use mix that will allow The Campus to be self-contained and thereby encouraging more customers to the town centre's businesses;
- provide a very high quality external environment with an appropriate level of car parking and usable public space;
- ensure that The Campus is physically connected to the GWR works area and to the town centre in particular to encourage occupiers of The Campus to become regular users of the town centre – both to purchase business services and to meet their shopping, personal service and leisure needs.

### **North Star Village**

#### **(Local Plan policies CA3, CA14)**

- the creation of a high density, urban village capable of meeting a range of residential markets, including families;
- the provision of well-designed and easily accessed communal open space and play areas with clear ownership by the dwellings that overlook them;
- the provision of a good quality neighbourhood local centre to supply day-to-day convenience needs;

- easy, safe and attractive pedestrian linkages to the town centre, to the leisure elements of The Campus, through The Campus to the GWR works area and across Great Western Way to the parkland and informal recreation areas to the north of the central area.

## 6. Contacts

This note is intended to act as an interim step whilst the emerging Local Plan goes through its remaining stages between the public inquiry and the formal adoption. The plan, once adopted, will be the starting point for the determination of planning applications and should reflect the Regeneration Framework and its objective more fully and wholly within the statutory process.

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**Appendix 1: Map of the Major Projects (indicative)**

