

Equality Impact Assessment

Swindon Central Area Action Plan

1. Context

- 1.1 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, establishes a new approach to development plans. This includes the abolition of Structure Plans and the replacement of Local Plans with a Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF will progressively replace and update the Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011.
- 1.2 The LDF is an enabling tool that can help to positively shape places in a way that reflects a community's aspirations and priorities and is in effect a spatial representation of the Community Strategy.
- 1.3 Within the LDF is a Statement of Community Involvement adopted by Swindon Borough Council in January 2007. One of the main intentions behind the reform to the planning system is to encourage local people to 'have a say' on planning decisions that affect their area and thereby instil a greater level of 'ownership' of the planning system. In so doing, it is hoped that the revised planning system will be more 'open' and more accurately reflect the aspirations and opinions of as much of the local community as possible.
- 1.4 The Statement of Community Involvement sets out principles for community consultation and includes how to engage 'hard-to-reach' and under-represented groups (e.g. ethnic minorities and young people) who, historically, did not get involved in the planning process.
- 1.5 Also within the LDF is the Core Strategy, which establishes the strategic spatial land use policies required to deliver the Council's vision, its regeneration objectives and regional planning agenda. Consultation on the Core Strategy 'Preferred Options' will take place in March 2008.
- 1.6 The emerging Core Strategy places equalities issues at the forefront of its Strategy and notes that the future planning of the Borough must ensure that development within the Borough fosters a sense of community, is inclusive and sustainable, meets the equalities/diversity agenda, and enhances the quality of life for residents in all communities.
- 1.7 The Swindon Central Area Action Plan is a further development plan within the LDF that considers detailed development within Central Swindon (as defined on the Proposals Map). The Action Plan is at the Submission Stage and will be available for consultation from 31 December 2007 for a period of 8 weeks.

Both the Central Area Action Plan and Central Swindon Proposals Map will replace the relevant sections of the Local Plan 2011 on adoption.

- 1.8 Submission requirements for the Central Area Action Plan require an Equalities Impact Assessment as set out in this paper.
- 1.9 Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks (PPS12), paragraph 3.7 refers to 'Local planning authorities in preparing local development documents must comply with the general duty in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to promote race equality' and 'also comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which places a duty on all those responsible for providing a service to the public not to discriminate against disable people by providing a lower standard of service.'
- 1.10 This paper considers not only race equality and disability equality of the Central Area Action Plan, but also equality in terms of gender, age, religious belief and sexual orientation.
- 1.11 This Equality Impact Assessment also takes due regard of the Swindon Borough Council's guidance for undertaking Diversity Impact Assessments.

2. The Swindon Central Area Action Plan

- 2.1 The Central Area Action Plan adopts a vision for Central Swindon as:
An area that has life and energy throughout the day and into the evening. An attractive, safe, healthy and accessible place that people choose for leisure, living, shopping and working. Where civic pride is strong and where its prosperity drives the region's economy.
- 2.2 To help deliver this vision, Swindon Borough Council has prepared a Central Area Action Plan, which provides a planning framework that will guide the future development and regeneration of Central Swindon, an area that encompasses the Town Centre, the Railway Village, the historic Great Western Railway Works, North Star, Old Town and surrounding residential areas.
- 2.3 Informed by the Community Strategy, the Corporate Plan and public consultation, eleven key objectives for the regeneration of Central Swindon have been identified, which the policies of this Action Plan will seek to deliver. These objectives are in place to enable and ensure:
 - Central Swindon is a destination of choice within the region.

- The co-ordination and delivery of high quality and accessible services and facilities that are needed to support the communities living in or adjacent to Central Swindon.
 - The delivery of high quality and innovative design.
 - The protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment.
 - That new development promotes energy efficiency, prudent use of resources, and makes a positive contribution to the environment.
 - The provision of wider opportunities for Central Swindon living.
 - The delivery of commercial and employment generating development that contributes to the continued economic prosperity of the Borough.
 - The creation of safe, convenient, user-friendly and attractive routes into, out of and through Central Swindon, to help develop a vibrant and active community.
 - The enhancement of existing areas of public spaces and delivery of new public spaces.
 - The delivery of a strong and vibrant university presence in Central Swindon.
 - The creation of a Town Centre that provides a cultural and civic focus as a regional centre.
- 2.4 The Implementation Plan of the Action Plan establishes a phasing mechanism for delivering development and regeneration in a co-ordinated manner, sets out the approximate development quantum for the identified development opportunities, and where applicable, outlines how the development will be funded. The Implementation Plan also details the Quality Assurance measures that will be put in place to ensure that Central Swindon's regeneration properly reflects the aspirations and needs of Swindon.

3. Community Consultation

- 3.1 The Central Area Action Plan conforms with the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in that it has engaged a wide range of groups and organisations to ensure the Action Plan is as inclusive as possible and truly reflects community aspirations.
- 3.2 Planning Officers have met with relevant Borough Council service areas and Members, other public sector agencies (the PCT, the Fire Service, the Police and Schools), the Swindon Strategic Partnership (SSP), the Community Organisations Advisory Forum (COAF), the Swindon Local Policy Forum, the Planning Directorate's Community Forum, various coalitions and a range of

local community groups, including the Swindon Disabled Access Action Group and Equalities Advisory Forum, to discuss the contents of the Local Development Documents including the Central Area Action Plan.

- 3.3 The Planning Directorate has also been liaising with the Council's BME Development Officers to ensure that Black and Ethnic Minority Groups are fully engaged in the preparation of its Local Development Documents.
- 3.4 In addition, information on the Central Area Action Plan and consultation opportunities have been circulated in Council newsletters, the local press and to local libraries whilst copies of the Issues and Options Paper and Preferred Options Paper were circulated to interest groups and statutory consultees such as Parish Councils, Swindon Equalities Coalition and Coalition of Disabled People. Exhibitions and roadshows took place over the summer to consult on the Action Plan and the Issues and Options Paper and Preferred Options Paper were made available on the Swindon Borough website.

4. Policy Analysis

- 4.1 The Central Area Action Plan emphasises that all members of society should be able to move about their community in a safe, predictable and convenient manner and goes on to state that all planning applications will be scrutinised to ensure that they are accessible for all.
- 4.2 The Action Plan also emphasises that the concept of ensuring that Central Swindon is accessible for all encompasses more than the physical aspects of accessibility but also the less tangible but nonetheless important emotional aspects. This includes ensuring that the centre is accessible and welcoming to all sections of the community, throughout the day and into the evening. The Action Plan therefore seeks to deliver a regenerated Central Swindon that all sections of the community can feel proud of.
- 4.3 Policies within the Swindon Central Area Action Plan will seek to deliver key objectives for the regeneration of Central Swindon.
- 4.4 Policy 1 - High Quality and Innovative Design within the Action Plan requires that an access statement should be submitted with all planning applications that explains how the principles of inclusive design and access for all have been incorporated into the scheme.
- 4.5 Within Policy 2 - Sustainable Construction within Sustainable Waste Management, reference is made that waste management facilities should occupy convenient and accessible locations within the development.

- 4.6 Policy 3 - Public Realm, provides that on routes where street furniture is required, this should be aligned in a distinct zone to minimise visual and physical barriers to movement and legibility.
- 4.7 Policy 4 - The Canal, provides that footbridges should be provided at regular intervals along the canal route and that these footbridges should provide safe and convenient access for everyone.
- 4.8 Policy 7 - Public Transport, provides for a choice of drop-off and collection points for bus passengers to improve accessibility.
- 4.9 Within the Parking Strategy, all new and refurbished car parks provision will need to include disabled parking in accordance with the Council's adopted Parking Standards.
- 4.10 Policy 10 - The Railway Station and Railway Crossing, there is reference to rail crossings which should be refurbished and made more accessible.
- 4.11 Within the Railway Heritage Area, the former Railway Museum in Faringdon Road will become the hub for Swindon Borough Council's Youth Service.
Policy 17 - The Railway Heritage Area, further provides that the Railway Village Community Centre be protected for community use.
- 4.12 Policy 18 - Central Swindon's Residential Communities, provides for a more balanced split in housing mix in Central Swindon and a planning framework that will halt the trend of families moving out of this area. This will be significant in helping create sustainable communities that offer a variety of housing, in terms of tenure and price, and provide opportunities that are inclusive for all types of households in Swindon.
- 4.13 Further, the Policy provides that the provision of educational, health and community facilities will be actively supported in Central Swindon.
- 4.14 The Central Area Action Plan offers a detailed policy framework for the Board Street Area, which complements the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and Streets for Living Project, and aims to assist in delivering greater community cohesion in the area and support work on social inclusion. Development should enable social progress, which meets the needs of everybody through the provision of balanced, mixed-use communities that improve accessibility and avoid social exclusion. It is important that local communities, as well as local businesses benefit from Central Swindon regeneration, enhancing social cohesion and addressing the often very specific needs of different ethnic groups.
- 4.15 Within the Revised Sustainability Report incorporating the Strategic Environmental Assessment on the Submission Draft of the Central Area Action

Plan, the Government's five principles for sustainable development are set out and these include principles that encompass equality and diversity. They are:

- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society - meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all.
- Promoting good governance - actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society - engaging people's creativity, energy, and diversity.

4.16 The Sustainability Appraisal was carried out as an integral part of producing the Central Area Action Plan and has provided input at each stage when decisions were taken. Integrating the Sustainability Appraisal from the outset was considered essential in ensuring that the Action Plan meets the objectives of sustainable development.

4.17 The Sustainability Appraisal included an analysis of Action Plan objectives against sustainability criteria and reference for the purposes of this paper is made to inclusive communities which in turn considers the sustainability objective of reducing social exclusion and poverty and providing providing decent and affordable housing for everyone. The Sustainability Appraisal identified that the Central Area Action Plan policies would have a positive effect on these sustainability criteria.

4.18 The Council will measure the performance of the Central Area Action Plan against the targets, objectives and related policies set out in the Action Plan. Significant issues will be monitored through the Annual Monitoring Report process. Any indicators/targets which are performing badly will be examined to identify causes of poor performance - for example, economic or social circumstances may have changed to make the indicator/target inappropriate. Appropriate action will then be taken to improve performance or to alter the strategy in light of wider changes.

5. Conclusions

5.1 It is considered that the Swindon Central Area Action Plan will have a positive impact by promoting equality of opportunity. The Action Plan will further promote a better quality of life for everyone - including better social inclusion, accessibility and decent homes. In particular, it will improve the quality and mix of housing, reduce the need to travel by car and improve the range and quality of local facilities, services and amenities.

- 5.2 The sustainability of Swindon as a whole will be improved through strengthening the Town Centre and new employment opportunities will also be provided.
- 5.3 It is considered that the Action Plan will have no adverse impacts on promoting good race relations or eliminating unlawful discrimination.
- 5.4 The Action Plan further places strong emphasis on access of all.
- 5.5 It is considered that the Action Plan will have positive impacts on the quality of life of both men and women. A proportion of new homes built will be affordable, transport will be made more sustainable and new employment opportunities will also be provided.
- 5.6 It is considered that the Action Plan will have a positive impact on both young and older people's quality of life. A proportion of new homes built will be affordable, transport will be made more sustainable and accessible and new and improved community and recreational facilities will be provided.
- 5.7 It is considered that the Action Plan will have no adverse impacts on religious belief.
- 5.8 It is considered that the Action Plan will have no adverse impacts on any of the sexual orientation groups.
- 5.9 This Equality Impact Assessment paper has identified that the Central Area Action Plan will have positive impacts on improving the quality of life for those with disabilities, men and women, young and older people, whilst it will have no equality impact in terms of race, religious belief or sexual orientation.