

**SWINDON CIVIC TRUST - Ref: 108**

**Swindon Central Area Action Plan 2008**

**Written Statement – Session 5**

**Overview of General Matters Relating to the Plan**

**Soundness of Policies.** When starting out on this extended period of consultation it was not made clear from the outset how our comments and objections would be used, and what work we may have to undertake to make them stick. There is a feeling that we have been let down by the Council over this process. The nature of tests to which policies are subjected was not made clear. It really needs to be a taught process to understand it. Having it thrust upon us at rather the last moment does not add up to sound consultation, even as per the Statement of Community Involvement.

The subtleties are not clearly understood. How should we express comments that are to be taken seriously if all we can say is whether a policy is sound or unsound unless the comment is acted on. Many of the policies may be generally sound as far as they go, but how can they be added to, or adjusted under the system? We have done our best within our limited resources to try and comply, but often, where we consider our proposal of importance, we have had to say we consider the policy to be unsound, just to ensure that the proposal is taken seriously. We apologise for this but a better briefing at the outset a year or so ago would have been helpful.

The original proposal is in italics. Our current response to your letter of 1<sup>st</sup> May is underlined.

It is also not clear what legal weight is carried by the pre-amble supporting text to the Policies. If they carry little or no weight, then the policies in themselves are too generic to provide the specific requirements of the town. A good barrister could play havoc at an Appeal. Would question if the policies would be sounder if they picked up more of the detail from the preamble?

**Democratic Process.** The fact that this plan has been put out to consultation shows intent to encourage democratic input. This is to be congratulated. The issue is that the process used by the Borough has not been sufficiently robust to draw out a fully informed debate, that would add richness to the plan. The various forum have been too controlled and unimaginative in their approach. As for Road Shows and post-it notes, it is difficult to see how these can be developed into the full blown criteria that the Inspector requires in order to validate (or not) the Plan. For these reasons we believe that the public input into the Consultation has been weak, to the detriment of the soundness of the Plan.

During the development of the proposals for the Central Area, over a course of several years, commencing with the study carried out by Shillam Smith, the Trust has held a number of its own events to help engage its members in the process. Two of the most successful were events led by Ove Arup, consultants to The New Swindon Company. These events held in conjunction with The New Mechanics'

Institution Preservation Trust, were among the most informative and generated good, informed discussion. These were held 5 years ago, and since then we have received little in the way of support or resources to hold similar events of the same quality.