



Artsminds Q& A

When: 31st May 2007

Where: Swindon Dance, Town Hall, Swindon

Time: 6-8pm

Facilitated by:

- Helen Miah, Arts Services Manager, Swindon Borough Council (HM)

Notes by:

- Steve Causer, Artsminds Co-ordinator (SC)

Panel members:

- Sarah-Jane Meredith from South West Screen (SJM);
- Jan Tierney Chair of the Swindon Cultural Partnership (JT);
- Peter James Director of the New Swindon Company (PJ);
- Justin Tomlinson Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Recreation (JT).

Questions, answers and comments

Q: How do we ensure the quality of the architecture in the new developments?

PJ: Developers have their own masterplanners and architects and this is being looked at. Quality of the public space around is also important this is often more difficult and artists 3 dimensional art can come into its own. Public art consultants will work with the developers, understand what they are trying to do and then talk to you about what your aspirations are.

Q: Old buildings in Swindon are in a state of disrepair. Why cannot these be used and rebuilt?

JT: In reality the council took it on to sort out the old buildings in the town. The Town Hall is a good example, with the new central library (due to open Summer 2008) 'completing' the existing town hall building.

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The Locarno and Mechanics are not owned by the council. There is pressure to work out suitable solutions with the owners. The former railway museum has had a solution put forward.

Rod Bluh is passionate about this and has set up the Heritage Board to look at how to keep the old buildings as part of the new Swindon. Need to speak to him. He is very approachable. He wanted the Tabernacle and it is being included in the redevelopment. He wanted to set up this project board. They also brought in Phil Young, as a cabinet member to look at regeneration and heritage. The support is there so hopefully it will be followed through

PJ: There are meetings set up with English heritage and council to discuss all proposals to try and gain some solutions. An application to demolish the northern section of the Mechanics will be resisted by the council for example.

Q: What is happening / strategy to develop and maintain what is already in place now. How will you keep the artists in Swindon

JT: We are close to having a proper plan for the new Art Gallery. It is not just about displaying art. It is about hands on, children local artists, local groups, getting them all making art. A facility that displays Swindon's wonderful art collection, but also a hive of activity, a place to champion the work that everyone does.

I can only talk about our track record – the library we have done the art gallery is in the 50 promises. A month away from knowing where the location is. We will come out to consultation and make sure people like you stay.

JTi: The New Swindon Company is looking to develop something around the railway village for local artists in the medium term.

PJ: In London Street they are looking at some space. Third of it is where all the bicycle racks are. Hundreds of columns holding up the roof. 1 metre apart. Difficult space to work with but they are having a meeting to see if there is some way to strengthen this space if taking the columns away. Biggest concern is not to raise people's hopes.

SJM: South West Screen are helping the media sector in Swindon by looking to set up a cluster to help people talk. South West Screen is all about people working within the area they live. Nurturing the talent in the area. Lots of funds around developing businesses. For moving image only though.

Q: The TV screen on Wharf Green when is this coming?

PJ: March next year.

Q: Is there scope for artists to use it?

PJ: Absolutely yes. It is a Public facility so will be used for public announcements and digital public art. It has to be looked at clearly and

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understand what it can be used for. It is tied up with the BBC so not a big advertising hoarding.

Q: Who represents the community people of Swindon on the Cultural Partnership?

JTi: Mark Waldron from Swindon Advertiser and Marie McCluskey from Swindon Dance.

Q: Is there not a need to have creative practitioners involved, people who live in Swindon?

JTi: Not had a meeting of SCP board since community meeting. Marie is the creative practitioner on the board. But it is on the agenda at the next meeting to look at the board representation.

New Director of SCP – graduated from Swindon college, lives in old town, a practising artist. Mike Pringle is dedicated to work for Swindon's culture, to persuade the people with the money to start listening to the community and start doing what they want.

PJ: Creative artists are involved in the regeneration.

Developers have their art consultants, and the Swindon Company has theirs. This is the time where the plans are being put together.

Q: How many of your art consultants live in Swindon

PJ: None

Q: Did the public art consultant job get advertised in Swindon?

JTi: It was advertised via Public Art South West and sent to all registered public art consultants on their database.

JT: Disappointed to hear that no-one from Swindon was involved. More pressure needs to be put on, to have the opportunity to pitch for jobs and work. Everyone must go away and make an extra effort, it is way of life and give you the opportunity to get up and match. It is everybody's town and you should be the first in the queue.

HM: Artsminds is a perfect network to get all info out via the bulletin and website.

Q: What is the SCP actually going to do?

JTi: The investing in festivals fund is already providing help across Swindon.

Festivals fund can be used to look at using local artists. That is just one aspect. They are working to be a facilitator of partnerships between organisations with similar or aligned objectives and businesses and a source of information for all interested parties.

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SCP – has identified that there is a missing link and to nurture new and existing arts practitioners and entrepreneurs and facilitator of info . It is important to raise awareness of cultural events and successes within the town and to the wider region. Looking to raise the aspirations of Swindon as a whole both audience and practioners.

Q: What strategic support is there for emerging writers of Swindon?

SJM: South West Screen support screenwriters. They have an application in at the arts council to help writers understand how to develop their work. To understand the connections between screenplays, theatre writing and writing for the radio.

JTi: Swindon Cultural Partnership want to support emerging writers. If they want something similar to the media cluster group they can help in setting one up. Need to speak to Mike or Sarah to say what they want. If they can help to provide a literature cluster they will.

HM: Swindon has a 3 year arts council grant for literature development. Matt Holland heads this up on behalf of SBC. Swindon is only one of two areas in the SW that has this kind of support. Have a chat with Matt as Swindon is brilliantly set up to develop writers.

Q: Need to know that the PR is in place to make this the cultural hotspot to make people want to come and see what goes on. If the audiences come the practitioners will come.

JTi: Absolutely right – SCP want to up the PR but need funding to do it. They are looking at an Interactive what's on guide that everybody can contribute to.

PJ: There are still people that do not know what is going on. Things like the Festival of Literature should be boasted much more about. Even banners all over town telling people when it is on for example. All this is being discussed. To find a better solution to show people what is going on, the New Swindon Company is 100% behind this. People don't come to Swindon so it is about getting the message out there.

JT: Budgets are blown on making things look good, it needs to be spent on getting it out to the people. Tell more people and more people will come.

Comments from the floor:

If there were a focal point (place) to go to it would be easier to get the info out. Transport and parking needs to be looked at, as does security and safety in car parks and the town. And signage is poor.

Communication – coming along to meetings like this I know 90% of people here and it is always the same people. There must be more people out there who would make an effort if they knew about it. It is a PR exercise

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There is an apathy and there needs a kick start to counter it. Having the infrastructure in place will kick start the audience and then kick start the artists.

Make a scene then people will come, we have an amazing catchment area. Have to use it

Q: There needs to be more incubation and facilities to allow artists to work in an environment with others similar people and organisations. A place for artists to go. The old buildings belong to the people of Swindon. Can these be used? Perhaps build an area with affordable homes and other developments to help fund an arts hub.

PJ: Investors have not done this so far as it does not pay for the renovation of the old buildings. Affordable homes are covered as plans for more are in place, the New Swindon Company is working with the councils policy.

The area south of the railway line is land that has been allocated as an arts hub. Network rail own this and they are looking to broker a deal with developers to provide these exact facilities. Create an artisan area. Cannot go any quicker, things are starting to happen now.

JT: Need to be realistic there is a certain amount taken from developers but it is not a bottomless pit. The Council are efficient in getting as much money as they can.

Q: What are you doing in the way of young people? Also to tackle the graffiti issue, allowing artists an area to use?

JT: Resident surveys raise the issues people have and Youth facilities is a lot higher than education. The old railway museum is to be used for youth services. Leisure has huge amounts of money being pumped into it. Underground the new youth facility in North Swindon is now open all week.

As we plan they will be continued to consulted with. There will be space for young people in the new art gallery for example. Arts and young people – Artsmad, arts makes a difference it is all about arts and young people. Doing an incredible amount of work. The new Flux Mobile is specifically for young people and taking art to them.

Q: Swindon has a history of murals and huge scale art works. Could we not have graffiti walls?

JT: Graffiti, it is not something I am comfortable with. I get huge complaints.

The council did build a wall for this. But it was a disaster. It was a continuously refreshed and so the artists realised that if they paint in the area around it, the work would not be painted over. It was then kicked in.



There are constructive times to use it, Use graffiti hoardings perhaps to go to ice skating etc and at times.

Q: Are there any plans for recording studios/facilities for musicians?

SC: Create has set up a recording studios on the new Flux mobile and in the Wyvern. Create are also looking at what they can do to support the local music scene, via training, courses and the use of their facilities.

Q: What about a larger venue?

JT: The Oasis as a venue came about by accident. It is not a great venue but it shows there is a market for it. As part of the rebuilding/ refurbishment of the oasis there will be a purpose built concert venue as part of the plans. 110% support this.

What you have to do is listen to the market. Promoters are saying that if it were a proper venue they would use it every week. There is a gap

HM: At the refurbished Wyvern Theatre the stalls can be removed not sure of the size but it can be used a venue.

Q: How long will it be until we have the new Oasis?

JT: Part of the 50 promise by 2010 all the plans will be in place. The officers went away to say whether there is a need to rebuild completely or rebuild the current Oasis. The report is coming back within the next 6 weeks recommending which way to go. See something in the local media in the next 3/6 months and then there will be consultation etc.

Artsminds, an initiative managed by Swindon Borough Council Arts Services, is a free forum and network for Swindon's creative arts practitioners and supporters.

Via quarterly meetings, an e-bulletin and their website, Artsminds aims to share experiences, be collaborative, social and fun.

If you would like more information on Artsminds or would like to join the network please visit www.artsminds.org.uk or email admin@artsminds.org.uk

**debate, discuss, plan, share,
collaborate, partnership, network...**

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