

Local Policy Forum 6th April 2006

Topic Paper 2: The Regeneration of Swindon's Central Area

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Background

Throughout the post-war period Swindon has been subject to successive waves of investment and growth. However, development in Swindon's Central Area has failed to match the economic success of the wider Swindon Region. As a result of this under-investment, the Central Area fails to provide a real focus for the town, detracts from the overall image and attractiveness of Swindon to residents and visitors and at worse provides a disincentive to inward investment.

The Central Area's poor image and the limited facilities that it offers threatens the future development of the town. Regeneration is required to enable the Central Area to develop to the level expected of a town of Swindon's status as a regional growth centre.

To address the under-investment in Swindon's Central Area, an Urban Regeneration Company, operating as "The New Swindon Company", was established in 2001 as the vehicle for achieving the comprehensive regeneration of Swindon's Central Area.

The New Swindon Company

The New Swindon Company, which is administered by a board comprising representatives from a range of local and national bodies with a business or community interest in the Central Area, is at the forefront in delivering the regeneration of Central Swindon.

The aim of The New Swindon Company is to;

Create a high quality urban environment at the core of the urban area, attractive in terms of living, work, cultural and leisure activities.

A key role for The New Swindon Company in delivering this aim is to coordinate and enable development in Swindon's central area through strategic land assembly, assisted by the Compulsory Purchase Order powers of Swindon Borough Council, the South West of England Regional Development Agency and English Partnerships.

Previous Regeneration Initiatives

The Swindon Central Area Strategy, July 2001

The Swindon Central Area Strategy, 2001, produced by consultants Shillam and Smith, provided a starting point to developing a planning framework for the regeneration of Swindon's Central Area. The strategy provided ideas for the future of the Central Area and the impetus for the Council's Urban Regeneration Company submission.

The Strategy likened Central Swindon to a doughnut, with development in the areas around the centre having led to a vacuum in the middle. The Strategy set out to address this vacuum by showing how the Central Area could offer residents and visitors a more attractive and vibrant centre.

The strategy identified "5 key opportunities":

- Developing a fully integrated transport system
- Developing a modern digital cluster linked to education and research at North Star
- Completion of the redevelopment at the former railway works
- Town Centre housing
- Development of new facilities for family living

These "key opportunities" formed the basis of Swindon Borough Council's Urban Regeneration Company submission.

The Swindon Borough Council Urban Regeneration Company Submission, August 2001

Swindon Borough Council's submission for Urban Regeneration Company status was presented to the then Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions on 30th August 2001. The submission sought the establishment of an Urban Regeneration Company as a vehicle for achieving the comprehensive regeneration of Swindon's Central Area, working in tandem with Swindon Borough Council, South West Regional Development Agency and other stakeholders.

On 28th December 2001, Swindon Borough Council received notification that the Urban Regeneration Company bid had been successful. The submission established a working boundary for the Urban Regeneration Company, set out the role and structure of the Company and envisaged that the Company would operate over a 15-year period.

The Current Planning Framework for the Central Area

The New Swindon Company's Regeneration Framework

The New Swindon Company has published a Regeneration Framework, 'New Life for New Swindon'. The Regeneration Framework sets out the major

projects that will deliver the regeneration of the Central Area. In partnership with the Council, The New Swindon Company will be seeking to prepare detailed planning and development briefs for each of these major project areas (or the major components of them) as they come forward for developments. The major project areas comprise:

- North Star Village: Encompassing a large expanse of the North Star Area, this land is envisaged to provide for housing and would also include health and educational facilities, and new sports and leisure facilities.
- Swindon Central: Encompassing land in and around the railway station, this area is envisaged to encompass a mix of residential, small shops, leisure and office uses.
- The Promenade: Encompassing the land in and around Princes Street and Regent Circus, this area is envisaged to house a new library, art gallery and museum and an improved theatre. This area is also proposed as the home for the University of Bath's Institute of Contemporary and Interdisciplinary Arts.
- The Exchange: Encompassing a large expanse of land to the north of Fleming Way, this area is envisaged as a flagship office area, which will be complemented by a mix of residential, retail and leisure facilities, along with cafes and restaurants.
- The Campus: Encompassing the southern end of Hawksworth Industrial Estate and the adjoining former railway sidings, this area is identified to accommodate a business park.
- The Arena: Centred around Fleming Way, the Arena project will include a mix of retail, commercial and recreational facilities, centred on a piazza.
- The Hub: Encompassing land in and around the Fleet Street, Regent Street, and Sanford Street areas, this land is envisaged to be the focus of new shopping development, as well as a new department store, more restaurants and cafes and improved linkages from one retail area to another.

The New Swindon Company's Major Project Areas are identified on the Plan on the next page

The New Swindon Company's Major Project Areas



The Adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan 2001

Adopted in 1999, the Swindon Borough Local Plan 2001 was published prior to Swindon's Central Area attaining Urban Regeneration Company status. There is therefore no recognition in the policies of the Plan of the regeneration needs of the Central Area. Accordingly, the Adopted Local Plan does not assist in providing a basis for developing a policy framework that will deliver the regeneration of the Central Area.

The Emerging Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011

The emerging Swindon Borough Local Plan promotes Swindon's Central Area as the principal centre for a wide catchment area and designates Swindon's town centre as the focus for 'higher order' activities, including civic, cultural, education, leisure, retail and office uses.

The emerging Local Plan includes a Central Area Chapter, which contains policies and allocations intended to assist in delivering the regeneration of the Central Area. The Central Area Chapter divides the Central Area into a

number of mixed-use sub-areas within which regeneration opportunities can be exploited. These areas are consistent with The New Swindon Company's Major Project Areas.

The emerging Local Plan is timetabled for adoption in June/July this year.

Other Guidance and Strategies

A number of documents and strategies have been prepared or are currently in preparation which form part of the planning framework for the Central Area. These documents include:

- The Regeneration of Swindon's Central Area Guidance Note: This Adopted Guidance Note takes the principles of New Swindon Company's Regeneration Framework and presents them in a form that can be used to assist in the determination of planning applications.
- Draft Swindon Central Area Public Realm Strategy: The Public Realm Strategy seeks to improve the quality of streets and spaces in the Town Centre and the wider Swindon Central Area. The Draft Strategy is currently available for public consultation. The consultation period ends on 26 April and any comments should be addressed to Swindon Borough Council prior to this date.
- Draft Developer Contributions to Central Area Public Realm Guidance Note: A sister document to the Public Realm Strategy, this guidance note sets out how the improvements to the public realm set out in the Public Realm Strategy will be financed by means of contributions from new retail and residential developments throughout the Borough.
- Draft Swindon Design Guide: (not yet published for consultation) The Swindon Design Guide aims to raise appreciation and awareness of good design in the Borough. Whilst this guide will be implemented Borough-wide, it will be particularly relevant to Swindon's Central Area, where development proposals will be critically examined to ensure that they are of the highest architectural quality.
- Draft Shopfronts Guidance Note: (not yet published for consultation) The Shopfronts Guidance Note details strict criteria to be enforced in designing shopfronts across the Borough. The Guidance includes a specific section on shopfronts in the Central Area, with the aim of creating a more uniform and legible retail frontage.

The Central Area Action Plan

Introduction

Swindon Borough Council, in partnership with The New Swindon Company, is about to commence work on an "Area Action Plan" for Swindon's Central Area, which will build on the extensive work already carried out.

Area Action Plans are a new planning policy mechanism, provided by The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which are tailor-made for delivering a planning framework for delivering the regeneration of Swindon's Central Area.

Status

Area Action Plans are subject to independent examination and have the status of "Development Plan Documents". This means that upon adoption, the Swindon Central Area Action Plan will become the key planning document against which planning applications in the Central Area will be considered.

Form and Content

Government Guidance states that Area Action Plans should identify the distribution of uses and their inter-relationships, should include specific site allocations, and should set a timetable for the implementation of proposals within the Action Plan area.

Area Action Plans should also focus upon implementation and should provide a mechanism for ensuring development of an appropriate scale and mix is delivered. Swindon Borough Council, in partnership with The New Swindon Company, are seeking to produce an Area Action Plan for Swindon's Central Area that will achieve this.

Timetable for Preparation for the Area Action Plan

The timetable and key milestones towards adoption of the Central Area Action Plan are as follows:

<i>Informal Issues and Options Consultation</i>	<i>May 2006</i>
<i>Preferred Options Consultation</i>	<i>Aug 2006</i>
<i>Submission to Secretary of State and consultation on the Submissions Draft</i>	<i>Dec 2006</i>
<i>Public Examination</i>	<i>May 2007</i>
<i>Inspectors Report</i>	<i>Aug 2007</i>
<i>Adoption</i>	<i>Oct 2007</i>

Upon adoption the Area Action Plan will form part of the development plan for the Borough and will therefore be the key planning document against which planning applications in the Central Area will be considered.

Conclusion

The Central Area falls well short of the ideal of providing a focus for the town. It also does little to contribute to the overall attractiveness of Swindon as a whole as a place in which to live, work or spend leisure time. A Central Area

Action Plan will be of great value in helping deliver the much needed regeneration of the Central Area.

Extensive background work has already been carried out and policy guidance has already been prepared, in particular, The New Swindon Company 's Regeneration Framework and the Central Area Chapter of the emerging Swindon Borough Local Plan. It is considered a sensible approach that the Area Action Plan builds on, rather than replaces, this existing material. The Council will be seeking broad consensus from the Forum on adopting such an approach.

Forum Discussion

At the first meeting of the Local Policy Forum it is hoped that delegates will assist the Council in identifying key Issues and Options for delivering the regeneration of Swindon's Central Area. It is hoped that the Forum will reach a broad consensus on the Issues and Options that should be presented to the wider public in the "Issues and Options Draft" of the Central Area Action Plan.

To this end it is suggested that the following questions should be debated at the first meeting of the Forum:

What issues should an Action Plan for the Swindon Central Area be addressing? (example response: "improve the range of shops in the town centre")

Can you suggest options for the regeneration of the Central Area? (example response: "reinstate the canal")

Which area or site in Swindon's Central Area do you consider is most in need of redevelopment? What types of use(s) do you consider that this site or area should be developed for? (example response: "Granville Street Car Park – for new shops")

Do you consider that the Area Action Plan should be building on the work already carried out by Swindon Borough Council and The New Swindon Company? (example response: "The Area Action Plan should both complement and build on, not replace, the work already carried out")

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March 2006