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Swindon HAZ place brand

Engagement Phase
Insights Report
24 September 2021



Contents

SECTION A

1 Project introduction	03
2 Executive Summary	05
3 Engagement approach & profile	06

SECTION B

1 Consultation insights	07
2 Vox pop insights	15
3 Survey insights	20
4 Sentiment research overview	33

SECTION C

1 Looking ahead	36
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Quotes included in this report are verbatim comments from the survey activity, as well as also some captured from consultations.

A1. Project Introduction

"...the creation of a brand, visual identity and messaging for Swindon [HAZ] inspired by its unique railway heritage which can assist with 'place-making' and promote Swindon as a destination and place of interest."

Heritage Action Zone Place Branding Project RFQ
Swindon Borough Council

The project is concerned with the creation of a brand, visual identity and messaging for Swindon (Heritage Action Zone) inspired by its unique railway heritage which can assist with 'place-making' and promote Swindon as a destination and place of interest.

Important factor will be the understanding of how this 'place' brand fits with Swindon as a whole, and its major plans and sector brands, e.g. inward investment, destination.

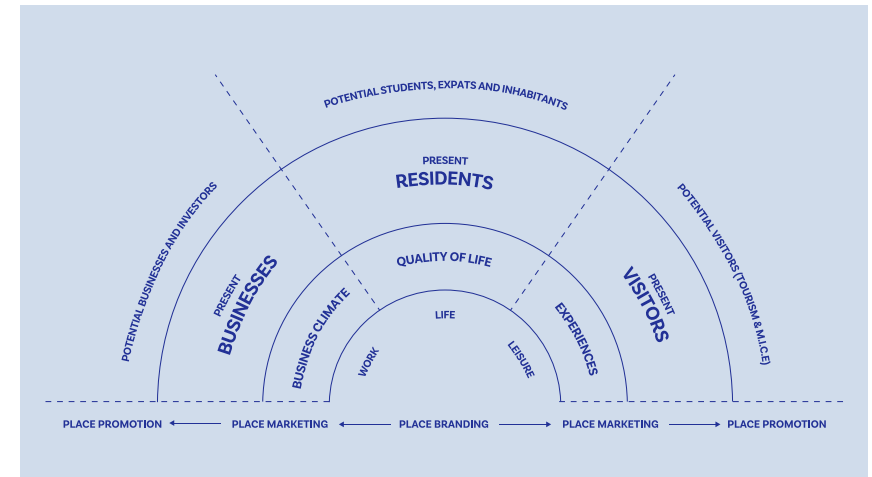
What do we want the place brand to achieve?

1. Influence perception and improved positioning.
2. Embed integrated and collaborative placemaking.
3. Align purposeful decision-making.
4. Build community confidence and cohesion.
5. Steer a course for sustainable growth and investment - people, talent, business, visitors.

Making the difference - engaging with purpose

- We engage to fit your place, not make your place fit our engagement approach

- Reaching every part of Swindon is vital
- This is part of a long-term dialogue
- Asking the right questions, not the usual ones



Engagement and ongoing advocacy as the place brand is activated must continue to reach a diverse range of communities and stakeholders.

Comprehensive engagement can only be sustained through implementation through the creation of an inclusive vision - there are no assumptions as to what the engagement programme will be before the project begins and no assumptions as to what the insights will be from this critical phase of place brand development.

Core brand proposition

Our purpose is to understand the depth and breadth of associations which people hold of Swindon through its heritage and how that affects perceptions, opinions and aspirations. These insights will affect and inform the future place brand strategy and direction - the strengths to deploy and the hurdles to overcome.

- Name
- Visual identity
- Brand guide, assets and collateral
- A strategy for implementation
- ... but not just a 2021 version of 'heritage quarter'

Our approach

Step 1 - Research, benchmark & engage
Step 2 - Set the strategic direction
Step 3 - Define and test place brand
Step 4 - Partner implementation plan
Step 5 - Tools

This report summarises Step 1 and creates the platform for Step 2.

Issues identified through initial briefing and auditing sought to address some critical questions, a few of which are:

- The interdependent relationship with the town and town centre?
- Where you see success to build on...?
- ...and barriers to achievement?
- The HAZ residents, and where surveying will help, and harm?
- What should the future of the Mechanics' Institute (asking before what it could be in the current climate)?
- Who's not at the table yet, but needs to be?
- Outputs and outcomes already in mind?
- Pipeline activity that could kickstart the place brand?
- Who is doing great work across HAZs, cluster heritage development?

A2. Executive Summary

This **Insight Report** presents the results from the series of 1:1 interviews and group workshops and public surveying (vox pops and field survey) that the consultancy team ([CTConsults](#) and [Hemingway Design](#)) developed, facilitated, and analysed as part of the ongoing consultation aimed at reviewing and developing Swindon's Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) place brand.

Our purpose is to understand the depth and breadth of associations which people hold of Swindon and its HAZ and how that affects perceptions, opinions and aspirations.

We wanted to tease out if and how there are meaningful differences based on interest / relationship with the area / town, by location, by age for example - so we can understand how strongly held those associations are.

These insights will affect and inform the future place brand strategy and direction - the strengths to deploy and the hurdles to overcome.

This set of reports informs the next stage of Place Brand development, as the **Brand Values and Narrative** are created for testing and validation.

A3. Engagement Approach and Profile

The engagement exercises were conducted between 14 May-23 July 2021. Consultations were conducted from 14 May-15 July. Vox pops were conducted 8-10 July, and the more comprehensive field surveys were conducted between 15-18 July. Sector-specific in-person workshops were conducted on 6-7 July, expect for a remote workshop run for young people on 2 July.

29 individuals were interviewed in addition to the steering group from an invited cohort of 38 (a good response rate), which were followed by **6** group workshops. In-person attendance has clearly been affected by Covid, with an average 35-50% of confirmed attenders typically withdrawing from sessions shortly before. Average attendance was 5 per session.

Consultations and workshops reached across a number of sectors and disciplines to build a broad picture of the town. These included:

- Local government
- Regional agencies
- Regeneration and place-making
- Culture, heritage & tourism
- Retail and town centre
- Business, commerce and property
- Community, third-sector and ecclesiastical
- Young people
- Education, skills and training
- Environment.

The vox pop team conducted **50** interviews, although some interviews were with more than one respondent.

The field survey that followed saw **200** successful survey completions over 4 days, in part helped by vaccination drop-in centre footfall.

The survey samples included a balanced mix of males and females, and represented a good mix of those who live, work, visit the area. The age profile skews towards younger people, whose views are essential for future planning and development.

- 41% are aged under 35 years and 37% are aged 35-54 years.
- The sample included a good spread of ethnicity, with 15% of responses from non-white people.
- Over half the respondents are in full-time employment.

Most survey participants were either Swindon residents or live close by. Reasons for being in the area are split across shopping, living or working there.

B1. Consultation Insights

Consultation Insights

Over 40 potential consultees were approached and 29 one-to-one consultations were conducted with representatives from Swindon Council, Swindon Leisure, MacArthurGlen, Visit Wiltshire, local FE colleges, local BBC radio stations, Arts Council England, local residents / Friends groups, Create Studios, Swindon Business Improvement District. Some of those consulted also participated in the in-person workshops that took place in Swindon.

Many of the findings that came through the different methodologies: consults, vox pop, workshops and the survey all reiterate similar perceptions about Swindon and the Heritage Action Zone.

The consultations focused primarily on the Heritage Action Zone within the wider context of Swindon. Not surprisingly, consultees talked, often passionately, about the value of the area's railway heritage, with its strong working class roots and its national and even international significance. Most consultees recognised that the area has vast potential to reflect, celebrate and be inspired by the 'heritage of the firebrands of creative thinking and social welfare politics that forged Swindon's reputation as a centre for the railways and a 'model' for a new way of living and community life. However, feedback was clear that the aspiration for the area needs to address opportunities for young people, business and creativity, not on gentrification that excludes local people, nor heritage 'disneyfication'.

In short, the desire to see the heritage of the place used as a catalyst for regeneration came through very strongly - but to strike a balance between commercial investment (important), but never at the expense of building a healthy, engaged and sustainable community.



There is recognition that the area suffers from fragmentation, lack of connectivity with other parts of the town and is missing a critical mass of activity with a lack of social infrastructure - retail, food and drink, leisure, business etc. - across both sides of the tracks.

Physical barriers - the railway, roads, underpasses (historically more significant as the entrance to The Works than its contemporary status affords), high brick walls - make the fragmentation more apparent than it should or needs to be. Consultees often commented on the visual appearance of the HAZ as vacant and deserted and being 'overwhelmed by urban issues', e.g. a transport thoroughfare - bus routes and busy roads; unsafe tunnels; vulnerable residents and anti-social behaviour,

particularly drug use, which affect local residents' living experiences and negatively impact on perceptions of the place.

The definition of the HAZ as a cohesive area of Victorian character and values is not yet there - it is seen and talked about more as its 'parts' than the sum of them. Added to that challenge is the context of Swindon - a place where consultees felt there to be no real sense of cohesion and which struggles with its overall identity. Swindonian identity is wrapped up in the HAZ area and pride in what it once was - the work connections go back generations and the stories of learning to swim in the Health Hydro small-pool, play in the park and the role of the Mechanics Institute are rooted in the collective psyche.

The 'modernity' of the thinking behind the 'social utopia' which Brunel and Gooch seeded, is a real and genuine source of pride and the connections between the current zeitgeist and reappraisal of how we live and work and build communities is not lost on people. In this respect Swindon HAZ inspires - or could.



In this context, dereliction 'hurts' and the positive connection between historical innovation and the now and future tech and

urban living success stories has not yet been made, which stakeholders recognise is a galvanising force for linking the old, the now and the new in terms of distinctive national and regional positioning.

Meanwhile however, there is a general feeling of a lack of pride in the HAZ and the town as a whole and that locals tend to 'talk down Swindon', it's that 'big, ugly town near the Cotswolds'. More work needs to be done to engender local civic pride and to encourage locals including the council and local businesses to become active, realistic, positive champions for the place and its people. There is recognition of the need for joined-up thinking and there is concern amongst some consultees that there is a disconnect between what's happening in the HAZ and the new creative quarter and other regeneration developments in the town.

There is a very strong and active community of local heritage groups, mainly comprising of older residents with strong views about Swindon's heritage including the HAZ and individual assets within, e.g. Health Hydro, Mechanics Institute. Many feel frustrated regarding the slow pace of change and feel that they are often the strongest voices championing the value of the town's heritage. Conversations and e-exchanges with many of these individuals continues, as they hope that the place-brand process will bring about the positive resolution that they are seeking.

Of course the Mechanics Institute is far from a unique or new challenge and it has become a very visible community focal point as a major at-risk heritage building. There is an understanding amongst consultees that there is no single or obvious solution and that it is still in private ownership, and will require vision, imagination and major investment.

For many consultees they view the Mechanics Institute as a priority whereas others are more resigned to the continuing 'heated debate' and 'long-term procrastination' around its future.

Workshop insights

An intense two days of workshops followed the stakeholder consultations on 22-23 July. Individuals representing different constituent groups were invited to sessions covering a number of emerging themes:

- a. 'A place to learn and create'
- b. 'A place to live and build communities'
- c. 'A place to visit and experience'
- d. 'A place to collaborate, work and invest'
- e. 'A place for heritage and conservation'

An additional session exclusively with engaged young people (from Create Studios) was done online.

The aim of all the workshops was to open out and extend the discussion to new voices, but timing them so soon after lockdown relaxation affected attendance. Those who came included many of the stakeholders heard above and the sessions served to build on what went before.

We broadly asked the groups to consider:

- What Swindon / the HAZ really stands for;
- How it makes them feel and what they want it to be known for;
- What would be missed/lost if the HAZ fails to be successfully regenerated (and who would miss it);

- And what will success look like in terms of a media headline.

It needs noting that frustration is a key 'block' when talking about the HAZ and what it stands for. Tensions, based on past and current experience of poor / slow / absence of decision-making, are getting in the way of focusing on positive shared vision/purpose. The default position across (almost) all sessions is that it can be hard to believe in a future despite the opportunity that investment and focus brings - despite the efforts they see being made by good individuals.

- *It is the town's collective family member left rotting in plain sight.*
- *Swindon feels like an island lost between two big counties.*
- *Our 'town centre' is just the road that joins the Old Town to Brunel's New Town. So it's frustrating that the part we're known as - the high street and centre - is actually just an accident really.*

And the lived experience of residents cannot be ignored - one older Railway Village resident, who has spent all of her adult life in the HAZ, described her life as never more lonely and isolated, and changed in every way from the vibrant community with plenty of amenities, shops, things to do and places to go which she first found.

There is a call for greater 'balance' - across all aspects of the HAZ:

- *settled vs. transient, modern vs historic, two sides of the track, perception of wealth created on one side through the regeneration, and the working class council estate on the*

other. It's about making sure everyone is included. There needs to be more connectivity - physically and emotionally.

There is a need to find the common 'positives' rather than be united in frustration.

It was flagged that tensions existed right from the very beginning - that the development of Swindon as 'a smoking monster' was perceived by some as ruining not only the pastoral idyll, but also the rural economy - but which went on to be a great success. Taking that success as a starting point, there are a number of opportunities and values which all of the group sessions largely agreed on, albeit through different lenses.

Victorian 'railway' Swindon was a vision **for** the future. And a vision **of** the future.

Whilst this is of course part of a nationally and globally-exported Victorian mindset - and not exclusive to Swindon - this pioneer Industrial Revolution town differs because of its relative isolation in the rural South West. And although Brunel built the infrastructure, and GWR provided 'purpose' this was not a wholly paternalistic, planned and managed owner-worker approach, but a responsive, adaptive community doing it for itself, in partnership with its employer, working with the materials available, being self-sufficient and actively building a living-working community.

In doing so it created a place that was unlike many of its Industrial Revolution counterparts:

- Socially responsible - participative, active community, 'modern' in its outlook for what makes a good life;
- Self-sustaining / self-sufficient / problem solving - hands-on, getting on with the job despite the hardships;

- Seeding and incubating ideas and nurturing people - looking to improve things;
- Moving away from a paternalistic view of the world and towards a participatory community. It's about grassroots actions and community-led regeneration.

And so there is a common view that the inspiration for Swindon HAZ doesn't come from Brunel / Gooch and trains - but comes from adversity and the initiative, participation and imagination of its people.

It is a narrative which carries through - not just the canals, steam, hydrogen - but a powerhouse of UK/European thought-leadership and incubator funding (Space, Science, Tech, Heritage, Business).

"I used to work in research councils, and I'd find myself going somewhere like Cambridge, and these world-leading academics are treating me like royalty because I'm from Swindon - because Swindon holds the purse strings that allow them to do their ground-breaking research."

- *Swindon helps UK be better - people in offices in Swindon are making things happen everywhere - e.g. Swindon FUNDS UK universities but doesn't have one / Swindon has National Trust / Historic England HQ but doesn't have a National Trust / Historic England property.*
- *Tim Berners-Lee was successful because he got funding based in Swindon. There's lots of research councils.*

This is a truthful and relevant story of the HAZ - the origins of modern-forward looking Swindon - and sets a vision that Swindon HAZ could and should be a place that seeks to be ready for the future - to test-solutions and supply answers to prescient, global

questions around what a socially responsible, self-reliant, successful future looks like (work / life balance, participative community, wellbeing, environment, skills, education and 'good' work, sustainable/resilient economy, use of the heritage for low-no carbon repurposing, climate change, urban farms...). It has done it before - from the ground-up. Why not again?

With these successes at the foreground of Swindon's place brand, identity, values - discussions around how to revisit the well-rehearsed issues of, for example - the housing stock, vulnerable tenants, bus routes, urban issues, what to do with the Mechanics Institute and other community buildings/businesses, wayfinding and connectivity across Swindon - could become much more positive, less focused on problems and tensions and more around co-designing solutions, dynamic and coherent, celebrating new ideas and delivery models - and offer a future direction for community-designed heritage regeneration.

Young people

Listening to the views of young people is essential in this process. Less frustrated by local political context, they see the potential through fresh eyes and know what they want.

The Create Studios group echoed things that we hear from young people around the country. To them a place that they would like to call home is one which is built around community, heart, family, and a *perfect* place is one which has:

- Arts and culture;
- People and community - is kind and inclusive;
- Heritage - which is 'told', accessible and visible;
- Things to do;
- Immersive;

- Is well presented physically, aesthetically, even 'enchanting';
- Otherness, can be explored, discovered, a touch of edge.

In comparing Swindon to that standard they recognise that it is underperforming, even left to fail a bit, but want to be optimistic. As it is now they see Swindon as their family town but need to be given stronger reasons to make their own futures here.

- *can't evolve, career town, corporate, butt of a joke, blank, jumping off point - stepping stone, unattractive, wouldn't aspire to (live there), dull, dark, industrial*

They understand the importance of the heritage narrative but they want it updated, extended and reflective of a forward-looking, evolving, dynamic place. They feel Swindon is experienced by many (such as commuters / shoppers) in disconnected quarters and zones and feel that is reductive.

We talk about entrepreneurial spirit but is it an entrepreneurial place?

This group's involvement in Create Studios means that they are aware of investment, and they believe that things can change, and for the better. They have hopes that their generation will 'get hold of' the problems. Developed in their vision, a future HAZ will be one which provides opportunities for them to be entrepreneurial, where they have ownership and which supports them and nurtures them as they 'have a go', and take risks. If the HAZ can supply the energy, activity and most importantly the substance that they are seeking then they see a future here. Asked how they want Swindon to be thought of in, say, 10-years' time they say:

- good for young people, indie, creative, entrepreneurial, energetic, substance and known for that, vibrant, colour
- to think more like a city - Bristol has colour, you feel like you have arrived somewhere

They also want to feel that it is *more 'connected' and less isolated from other places*. This is more about 'coming from Swindon' being more valued / included / understood / admired in the regional/national associations than it is the physical connection.

And for the HAZ - or 'village' - they want it to be a place where they will choose to live, still affordable but more progressive, with 'culture' and things to do on the doorstep - still a strong community but characterised less by social housing and fewer of the wider-urban tensions and spoilers.

Comparators: HAZ and the Mechanics Institute



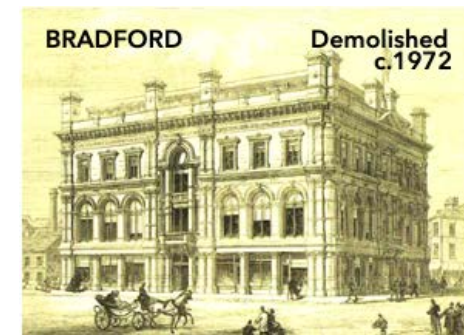
Swindon's Mechanics Institute is rightly or wrongly seen by some as a bellwether for the progress of the railway village / HAZ zone. As such it requires additional attention in perception terms as well as development planning.

"[Swindon's Mechanics Institute] is perhaps the most evocative example of a type of building which once played a vital role, not just in their community but in the development of adult education in Britain and beyond."

Historic England

There are some very distinct challenges and opportunities before the HAZ in Swindon. Collectively they may be unique, but there are many useful similarities that make even a quick comparator analysis useful, and in some case even reassuring.

A national picture: 74 listed; 23 in private use; 4 disused; 2 at risk (inc. Swindon).



1. Comparators: Historic assets and hubs at the centre of their place

Piece Hall, Halifax, West Yorkshire



Once a single council vote from demolition, this town square is now recognised as the most important secular in Yorkshire. But it lacked vision and purpose for decades until a capital programme transformed it into cultural and heritage hub, with over 2.5m visits pa and an events programme that attracts regional audiences who had previously no knowledge of the place.

London Road Fire Station, Manchester



A striking and historic building across the street from Manchester Piccadilly that seems destined for dereliction, with local heritage support groups working hard to keep its viability alive. A progressive plan has finally been approved and further consultation will help to develop the mixed use plans.

Former Spode factory site, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire



Closure 15 years ago has seen the factory site only just start to emerge, somewhat piecemeal, towards a new future. The near-11 acre site at the heart of Stoke town is now the home to a leading cultural festival, a heritage centre, a boutique hotel, a café and c.40 micro-business units, with plans for a gaming development centre (affiliated to Staffordshire University). A significant part of the site remains un-regenerated, and is under City Council ownership.

Buxton Crescent, Derbyshire



One the country's remarkable Georgian crescent façades, Buxton's Crescent had lost its purpose. A single occupier - in this case a European spa resort hotel group - has transformed the site into a 5* offer, as befits the spa heritage of the town, providing a new gateway to the Peak District for a high-end visitor market.



Buxton's Spa Resort hotel opened just before the pandemic.

2. Comparators: Model villages

Saltaire, West Yorkshire



Saltaire, on the outskirts of Bradford, was transformed through the vision of one man in regenerating the former factory site at its heart - Salts Mill. Jonathan Silver bought the site and created a Hockney Gallery, art and design led retail, food and events. With tenants providing rent in the vast site - including tech and manufacturing companies, the sense of place has enabled the village to become a part of the offer, with a vibrant year-round programme based on designer-makers, artists, leisure and food.

Port Sunlight Village, Wirral



Built for the workers of Lever Bros., this village is now a tourist attraction in its own right, having been maintained and its heritage interpretation invested in (as well as its art gallery, pub, retail etc.). Partners include National Museums Liverpool.

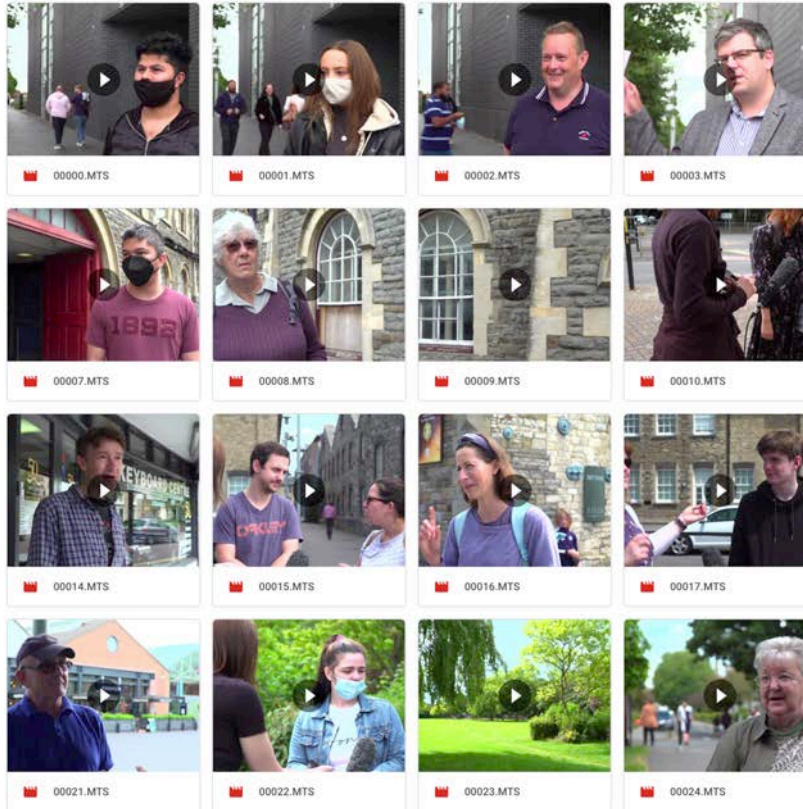
Bourneville, Birmingham



As with Port Sunlight, GWR's railway village could draw comparisons from Cadbury's model village.

B2. Vox Pop Insights

A Swindon-based videographer and interviewer were commissioned to conduct a series of in-person interviews at a number of agreed locations across Swindon over four sessions between 8-10 July. This has generated many hours of footage.



The interviews took place across the following locations:

- Outside the Outlet Shopping Centre;
- Outside the tunnel opposite the Mechanics Institute;
- Faringdon Road shops;

- Outside the Health Hydro;
- Faringdon / GWR Park;
- Town centre.

There was a good representative sample of people interviewed including a mix of ages, class, diversity, locals, including railway village residents, visitors from neighbouring towns and counties and those who'd travelled from further afield. The residents included those that have lived in Swindon most, if not all of their life and those that have moved to Swindon recently, within the last 5-10 years.

Perceptions of Swindon

All interviewees were asked to provide three words to describe the town. The responses varied depending on the location in which they were interviewed.

For Swindon as a whole, local residents stated that the town is a good place to raise a family, and the railway history was repeatedly mentioned as something distinctive about the town. Many younger interviewees described Swindon as boring.

Local residents acknowledged that Swindon is a town of different parts, e.g. the Old Town area around Wood Street was regularly described as being full of independents and a nice place to go out & eat out; whereas the town centre was often described as dying, a place that used to be booming but is now run down and full of empty shops, with no real reason to go in.

Repeatedly the town's history and heritage, especially its railway heritage was cited as of value to them and to the town. The shopping offer, particularly at the Outlet is perceived to be of quality and distinctiveness to the place. Local residents living in or near the Old Town very much value its independent scene of food and drink and retail and it was often cited as the 'only decent place to go for a night out'. Swindon's location as a town with the facilities of a city, but close to countryside and with good connections to London are all positives to build on. There was recognition from residents and visitors from nearby that economically Swindon is doing well, mainly due to its move to big business, and that it has a mix of communities, but that it is rooted in its working class heritage - 'it's not Cheltenham or Bath'.

Awareness and perceptions of the Heritage Action Zone

The Heritage Action Zone area did not figure much in a lot of people's thinking unless they were regular users of the Health Hydro or are local shop owners on Farringdon Road or of course local residents, although many didn't know much about the HAZ at all and were not clear on its boundaries, remit and deliverables.

The interview responses highlighted a real disconnect between different parts of Swindon; clearly some residents (those not living within the HAZ boundary) never go into the town centre now, or rarely and many rarely go to the HAZ area as they feel there is no reason to go.

Local residents had very strong feelings about the decline of the town Centre using phrases like: 'once vibrant, now degeneration', 'rough feel', 'gone downhill rapidly', 'ghastly'. On a positive note the railway heritage has strong connotations for residents and some visitors as there is an understanding of its historical

significance ('at least it's not Crewe!'), although not many interviewees had a good understanding of how all the elements of the HAZ connect precisely because of the railway heritage.

When interviewees were asked to describe the railway village area in three words, many had to be informed where it is and what it covers. The following responses were repeatedly mentioned - run down, shabby, neglected, but on a positive note, the majority of interviewees did mention heritage and history.

Positive words and phrases that were used to describe the HAZ include, usually from older local residents but also from some visitors with a particular interest in heritage included:

Pretty, like it, history, heritage, generally ok, peaceful, cosy, very friendly, potential, nice feel to architecture, toy town, similar to Bourneville.

However more respondents, including Swindon residents and visitors described the HAZ areas as:

Sad, depressing, shabby, run down, doesn't feel that safe, some bits need tidying up, feels closed, neglected, just want to get through it, not a place to dwell, deprivation, busy roads, dirty brickwork, lack of trees, every place has some parts that are run down, not what it was, grimy, doesn't look nice, not thought of as a nice place, something needs to be done.

There was very little recognition of the '**Railway Village**' as a recognised area, wherever respondents were asked the question. Everyone asked to describe the area by the McArthurGlen Designer Outlet described it simply as the Outlet, very few people were aware that it is part of the HAZ area. A high percentage of

those asked had never used the tunnel or knew what was on the other side.

There is widespread recognition of Swindon's railway heritage from residents and visitors alike, partly because it is still visible throughout the town. However, knowledge is limited, even for those living in the railway village, except older residents with an interest in history and heritage. Only one person mentioned Brunel and he was a railway buff! Very few people know about the NHS connection and those that do have a misguided understanding of Swindon's role in the creation of the NHS.

But those that were interviewed who lived in the railway village, both younger families and older long-term residents liked living in the railway village, especially those near the park. They felt connected as a community, and that the location is handy close to the town centre and Faringdon Park, though long-term residents acknowledged that the sense of community isn't as strong as it used to be. Many people interviewed that were visiting friends or relatives living in the railway village were not as complementary about the area, citing the social problems, particularly regarding drugs and anti-social behaviour contributing to the feelings of not being safe.

Faringdon Park is well used by locals in the surrounding vicinity, especially at weekends and school holidays, but not by residents from other parts of Swindon. One railway village resident described it as 'my front garden' and many older local residents still call it the 'GWR Park'. The lack of facilities, and that the park has become known for drug-taking, rough sleepers, anti-social behaviour and vandalism at night has contributed to feelings that it can be a 'bit rough' and 'dated round the edges'. Respondents cited that they would like to see an improvement in basic

amenities such as more benches, toilets, rubbish bins, an open-sided shelter, CCTV, gates on the exits, and floodlights.

Those who know the area, even if they don't call it the Railway Village, have a real affection for the heritage architecture, and they feel strongly that it's important and should be protected. However, many interviewees needed to be prompted as to whether it should be protected and whether old buildings could be reused for other purposes.

It's not surprising then, that generally those interviewed stated that they want to see the HAZ area tidied up, cleaned and painted (though one person thought it needed more colour to brighten the area up, though recognised they are heritage buildings so probably not able to add colour). When prompted, interviewees agreed that they would like to see more facilities though virtually everyone struggled to answer more specifically unless they were prompted and the usual responses were: independent shops, cafés, bars, and restaurants. There is a lack of knowledge of existing independent shops and cafes that are already in the HAZ area (except for the Outlet), though some did know that the community bakery cafe didn't make it through Covid, and that in fact, even before that it was struggling due to a lack of footfall.

Some older people who were interviewed still remember GWR being operational in the area and what a busy, bustling area it was then. But very few people understood the historic connections between the park, houses, Health Hydro, Mechanics Institute etc.

There was disappointment from interviewees that the **Mechanics Institute** has been left to decay - 'blot on the landscape', although many visitors did not know about it at all. Everyone wants to see something done with the building but recognise that it will take a

lot of money and that it's not in council hands. There is a lot of support for the idea of an arts centre for the community (theatre, music, gallery) but with a commercial arm, e.g. cafe, events space, but most people interviewed understood the complexities involved, whatever its future.

Those interviewed with families want to see more family friendly activities in the town, and particularly in the HAZ area. Many people stated strongly that they do not want to see the area gentrified and become expensive ('not like Clifton in Bristol!'), and that whatever happens, it still has to be affordable for local communities. Very few people thought the area had real tourism potential, except for rail buffs or industrial heritage fans. Visitors and residents generally felt that industrial heritage is not intrinsically attractive and that a lot more would have to be done to make it a viable tourist destination.

Awareness and perceptions of the Outlet

For those interviewed near the Outlet, responses were universally very positive, citing that the area is nice, pretty, clean and safe. Interviewees stated that they liked the repurposing of railway heritage buildings for a modern commercial use, and particularly the use of original features and machinery as part of the tasteful redevelopment. The area around the Outlet is well liked and well used; it is seen as one of the main reasons to go to Swindon (for a visitor - 'pleasant day out') or to go to that area (as a local - 'well maintained, easy access'). The Outlet draws visitors from a distance due to its location, range of shops, and its designer outlet status. However, many people interviewed close to the tunnel had no idea what was on the other side.

The following words were used to describe the Outlet:



Awareness and perceptions of STEAM - Museum of the Great Western Railway

A good number of people interviewed near the Outlet had also visited the Steam museum or had gone to that area specifically to go to STEAM; (though many people visiting the Outlet had never been to the museum and some didn't even realise that there was a museum there).

Awareness of STEAM was more likely from locals in particular, from visiting as a child (with school) but many still claimed to know little / nothing about Swindon's railway heritage. The museum was popular with families and particularly intergenerational, with grandparents taking grandchildren more than once. Some interviewees felt that the museum is a bit run down, and needs investment across the whole site including its retail and catering offers.

What people want to see happen in Swindon and especially in the HAZ

Families interviewed stated that they would like to see investment in more leisure facilities and activities, especially playgrounds for younger children and generally respondents want 'more to see and do'. Many interviewees stated that they would like to see more arts activities, especially new facilities such as a performance/music venue, comedy club, cinema.

Universally respondents highlighted the need for better signage and connectivity between different parts of the town. Those that were local residents within the HAZ want to see the buses removed from the centre of the Railway Village and for the council to address the anti-social behaviour to make the area feel safe

once more. Creating opportunities for young people such as the Technical College was often cited by local residents as a priority for the HAZ, as well as affordable housing and reduced rates to encourage more independent retail and hospitality start-ups.

Time and again interviewers stressed the need to maintain the character of the buildings in the HAZ area to find new purposes for them that will appeal to residents, businesses and visitors, and importantly to protect and profile the area's heritage for future generations. There was general feedback that investment in lighting, cleaning brickwork, better pedestrianisation, more trees, more obvious entrances and exits to the Railway Village and signage could improve the area in the short-term.

B3. Survey Insights

The final 'research' piece was a field survey carried out by a Market Research agency to add quantitative data along-side the depth of the Vox Pops. This methodology was chosen (rather than a Swindon-wide online survey) for a number of reasons including timings with other surveys/previous online surveys etc., but primarily to ensure that by doing surveys in-situ, that responses were clearly focused in and on the HAZ area.

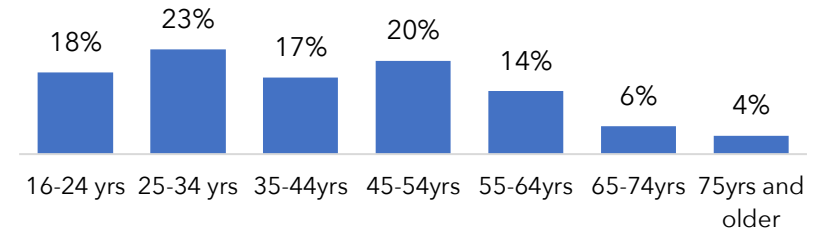
A total of 200 face-to-face interviews were carried out 15-18 July 2021 covering different times, days of the week and locations in and around the HAZ.

- The sample included a balanced mix of males and females;
- The sample was a good mix of those who live, work, visit the area;
- The sample included a good spread of ethnicity, with 15% of responses from non-white people;
- As the survey coincided with STEAM being used as a vaccination centre, the age profile skews towards younger people. 41% are aged under 35 years and 37% are aged 35-54 years. This is a segment whose views are often not-heard but are essential for future planning and development.

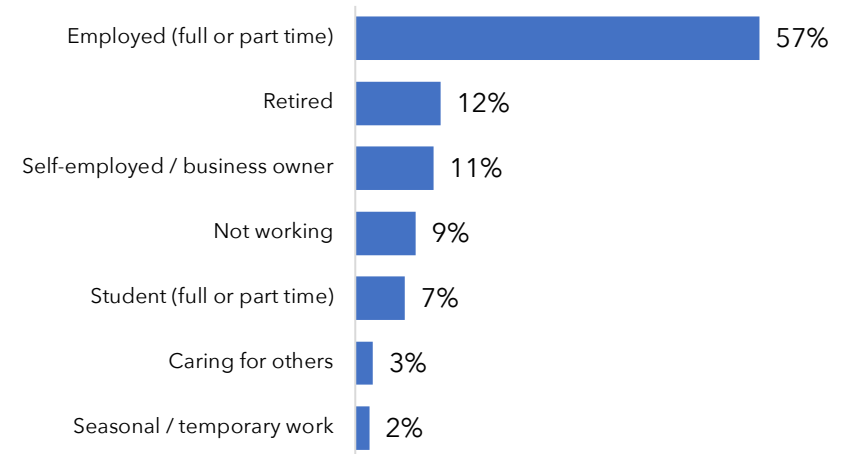
Gender



Age



Employment status



Ethnicity

	% of Sample	England & Wales 2011 Census
Asian	6%	8%
Black	1%	3%
Mixed	7%	2%
White British	73%	81%
White other	7%	5%
Other	1%	1%
Not stated	3%	N/A

Heritage is currently only playing a ‘supporting role’ in how people view the area, and what has motivated them to be there, and feelings related to being in and around the HAZ are mixed.

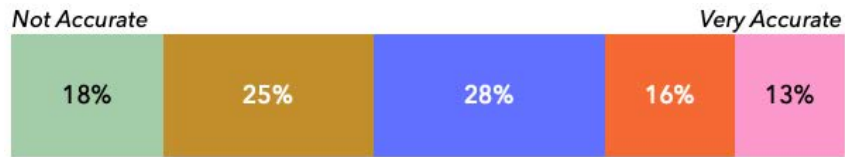
The history and heritage of the area is recognised by some, but is not a leading descriptor or motivator overall. Most respondents were in the area for non-heritage purposes – with almost everyone accounted for by shopping (40%), living (32%), and working (29%).



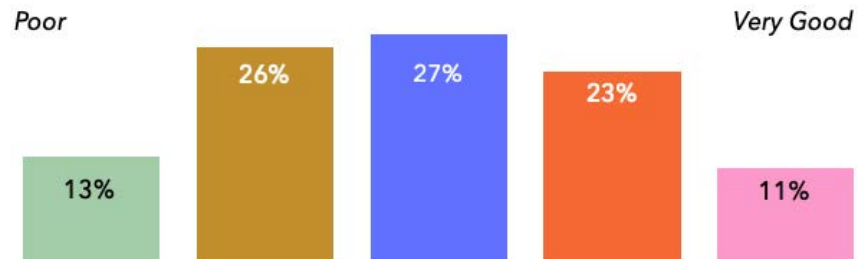
One of the overriding features of the survey is that the heritage in the HAZ doesn’t evoke a particularly strong response. Across the range of questions, most answers follow a pretty standard ‘distribution’ with middling rather than strong positive or negative responses. This is unusual for an area rich in heritage stories and potential – explained by a majority perception that the industrial heritage isn’t being well communicated / made visible, and that the buildings / area need more looking after.

What the area evokes...

Being here makes me feel connected to the town's past.



A place that communicates the story of its industrial heritage.



If the HAZ isn't currently delivering a clear sense of place / story, when asked if they would be interested to know more about Swindon's heritage as a centre for engineering innovation and for pioneering a model for community life and wellbeing - the answer is overwhelmingly high. This is significant, respondents, whether they are or aren't familiar with the heritage of the area, are connecting and finding relevance with the HAZ story of a vibrant, socially-purposeful and resilient community. It taps into the times we live, perhaps accentuated by the impact of Covid and the increased focus that has brought both on community spirit and personal wellbeing, and whilst interest is higher among older people (87%), it is still something which clearly resonates strongly with under 35s at almost 70%.

The Pioneer Model

Are you interested to know that this part of Swindon was once a centre of engineering innovation and a pioneering model for community life and wellbeing?



Interest in heritage of the area as a centre for engineering innovation and for pioneering a model for community life and wellbeing is high. This is perhaps accentuated by the impact of Covid and the increased focus that has brought both on community spirit and personal wellbeing.

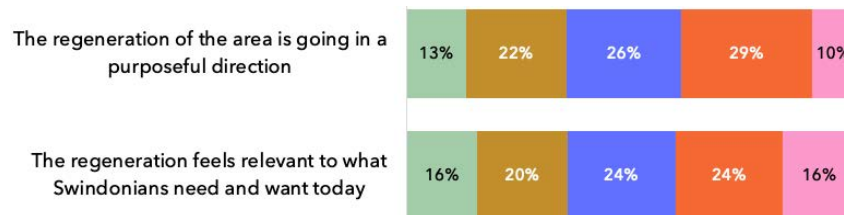
Interest is higher among older people; 87% among those 35 and over, compare to 69% among the under 35s.

Those who live in the area have a greater interest (88%) than those who are in the area for other reasons (work 74%, shopping 75%).

And we see it carried through in appreciation for the parks and green spaces, which are mentioned by local respondents as an aspect of the area that they love.



With four in five people are interested to know that the area was "once a centre of engineering innovation and a pioneering model for community life and wellbeing" the opportunity for this may come from the perceptions of the current regeneration, which is many feel is going in a purposeful direction and feels relevant to the Swindon community.



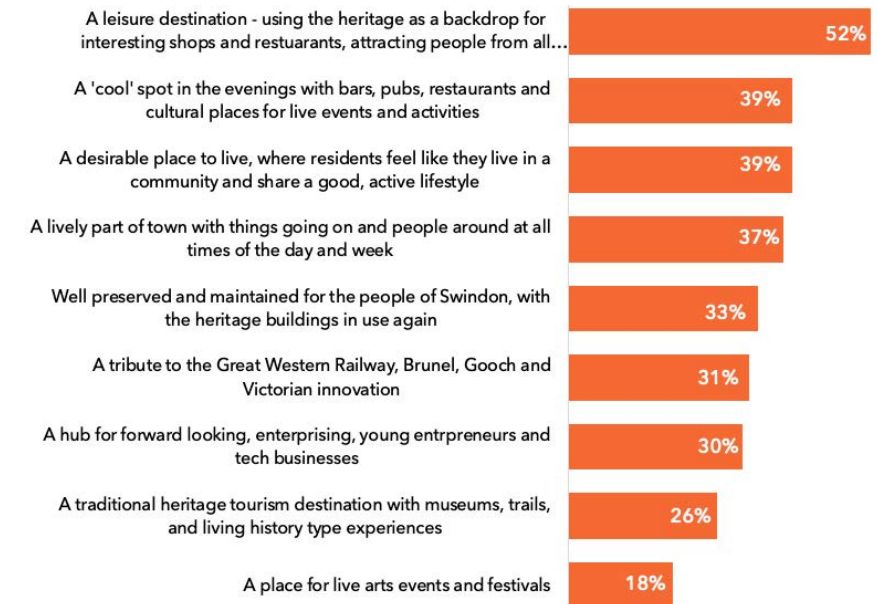
This is the real opportunity - respondents of course recognise the destination shopping/leisure potential of the area - that is what motivated the significant minority (40%) to be in the area - but they can see its potential as a place to live, work and build community.

Whilst it isn't fully there 'yet', the following responses are some of the strongest endorsement across the survey, showing the sense

of and over time and successful development the hope would be to see these improve yet further.



And they broadly match the sense of future aspiration and priorities for where respondents through the HAZ could be in five years' time. Again the leisure destination appeal is strong - but done in a way which has texture, variety, interest and appeal to different people at different times of the day - or life stage.



There is real resonance in the survey amongst less well informed / engaged respondents - with the aspirations of more informed and engaged stakeholders and the community. Relatively 'low' rankings for a place of 'work / enterprise' and arts / festivals is as likely to be through lack of current association and visibility as desire and interest.

This limited engagement with the business aspects of the area and for a future filled with tech innovation and entrepreneurs may be reflective, at least in part, of the type of businesses currently operating in the area. Currently there is only limited awareness or belief that "there are exciting new business coming into the area", but for the future, 30% of people can see the area as "*a hub for forward looking, young entrepreneurs and tech businesses*". It is also noted that those who work in the area are more likely to be those who say they are 'bored' (26%) and 'disinterested' (22%), potentially reflecting a lack of amenity and choice.

Better ongoing communication of developments, successes plans will make a difference. Much of the investment in the HAZ is happening out of public sight, behind walls or for sector clusters such as start-ups or students.

FURTHER REFERENCE DATA: DETAIL

The Supporting Role of Heritage

The history and heritage of the area is recognised by some, but is not a leading descriptor overall. Similarly, the area is not generally recognised as currently communicating its industrial heritage.

However, the historic buildings are identified by many people as one of the best things about the area, but this is tempered with a perception from many that those buildings need more looking after:



For the future, people do want heritage to play a part, with "A leisure destination - using the heritage as a backdrop for interesting shops and restaurants, attracting people from all over Swindon / Wiltshire and beyond for days out" being the most selected priority for the next 5 years. This vision for attracting visitors to the area was selected by 52% of the people taking part in the survey overall and by two-thirds (66%) of those aged 55 years and over.

Only 26% wanting the area to be a "A traditional heritage tourism destination with museums, trails, and living history type

experiences" in the future, suggesting they want more than just a heritage-only / living museum type place.

The use of heritage to support the offer for local people was less popular, though still a third of people selected "Well preserved and maintained for the people of Swindon, with the heritage buildings in use again", reflecting the concerns expressed around the current state of the buildings, though again this does have greater importance to older people with 45% of those 55 years and older selecting this option.

A similar proportion (31%) expect the area to be "A tribute to the Great Western Railway, Brunel, Gooch and Victorian innovation", perhaps reflecting the desire for a wider portfolio offer than just the heritage/history positioning.

Overall, the data suggests that heritage is a very important part of the current and future positioning of the area, but as a conduit to support a wider offer, rather than necessarily the leading message.

Shopping and more

40% of those taking part in the survey were shopping in the area, illustrating the importance of retail to the current offer in the area.

The quality of the shopping experience is generally viewed quite positively and those who are shopping are more likely to say they are 'inspired' by being in the area.

There are some comments about closed stores and vacant units, reflecting the impact that Covid has had on the retail sector and

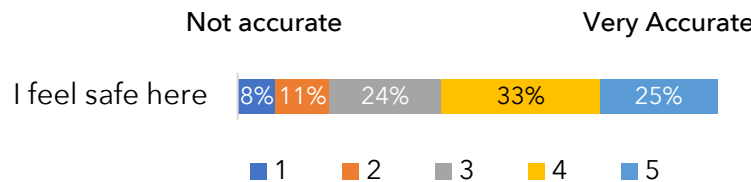
perhaps indicative of the continued challenge to encourage people to visit stores.

Visitors are positive about the variety of shops and the shopping centre itself in terms of layout, design and parking. Around the shopping areas visitors are generally positive about the cleanliness and the majority saying they feel safe in the area.

There are mentions of small elements such as flower baskets and the positive impact they can have on how an area is perceived.



Concerns around cleanliness and safety tend to exist in small numbers and may be linked to the comments around the condition of some of the buildings.



The most popular vision for the future "A leisure destination - using the heritage as a backdrop for interesting shops and restaurants, attracting people from all over Swindon / Wiltshire and beyond for days out" includes retail as a core element. Retail is expected to be important going forward, but perhaps with an even greater emphasis as a more rounded experience rather than just mission shopping.



Lively and Buzzy, maybe in Moderation

Currently, despite being recognised as a good place to study, that can often be linked to vibrancy, the area is not particularly seen as a vibrant, buzzy place.

- It is a little more likely to be described as an interesting environment to explore
- More people say they are relaxed' or 'curious' in the area than 'excited'

People do not generally perceive the area as currently having plenty to see, though when specifically asked, half of people will rate the amenities as good or very good.

- The parks and green spaces are mentioned by people as an aspect of the area that they love.

For the future, 39% of people want the area to be "A 'cool' spot in the evenings with bars, pubs, restaurants and cultural places for live events and activities" and 37% a "A lively part of town with things going on and people around at all times of the day and week".

- Only 18% see it as "A place for live arts events and festivals", suggesting there is 'limit' to the level of 'buzz' people can currently envisage for the area in the coming years as a move forward from what is currently in place.

Community Pride

There are mixed views expressed on whether the area is an attractive place to live, but is widely recognised as a good place to study, even by those who are not students themselves.

Some feel there is a sense of community, but 37% do not see this as an accurate description of the area.

Among those who live in the area more say they are 'excited' but less they are 'inspired' or 'impressed'.

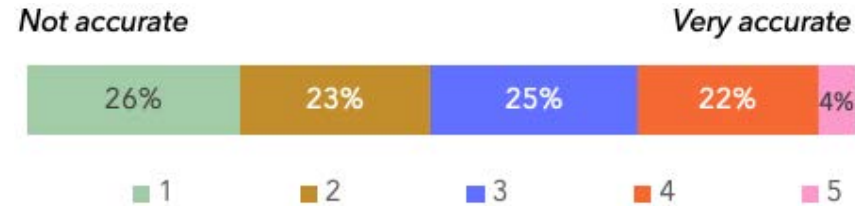
Accessibility and ease of getting around are seen as a key strength of the area by 80% of participants in the survey.

It is good news that 44% believe there is a sense of pride in the area and in terms of positives about the area there are several references to the community cohesion.

This is then reflected in 39% seeing the vision for the future as "A desirable place to live, where residents feel like they live in a community and share a good, active lifestyle".

Opportunity to Realise Business Potential?

Currently there is only limited awareness or belief that “there are exciting new business coming into the area”, likely impacted by the Covid restrictions.



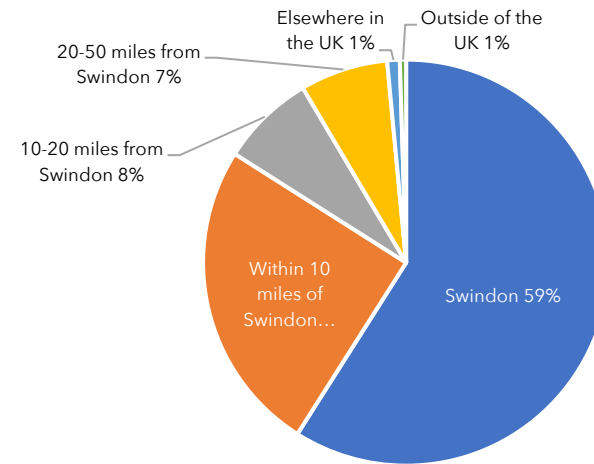
It is noted also that those who work in the area are more likely to say they are ‘bored’ (26%) and ‘disinterested’ (22%), though this may well be reflective of the job they are doing rather than the area itself. For the future, 30% of people can see the area as “a hub for forward looking, young entrepreneurs and tech businesses”.

- only 24% of people who work in the area see this as vision for the future.

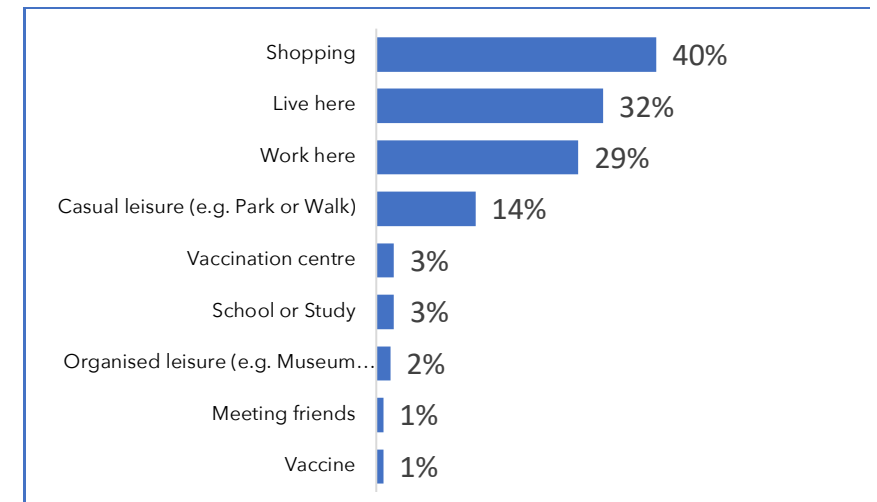
This limited engagement with the business aspects of the area and for a future filled with tech innovation and entrepreneurs may be reflective, at least in part, of the type of businesses currently operating in the area.

It may also require strong messaging of the connection with heritage. We have seen four in five people are interested to know that the area was “once a centre of engineering innovation and a pioneering model for community life and wellbeing” and so was a leader in the past and can be again in the future?

Demographics of sample



Reasons for visiting



Key Differences across Population Groups

Age

Older people are less positive than younger people. In particular:

- 55% do NOT feel the regeneration is relevant to the people of Swindon.
- 71% do NOT believe there exciting new businesses coming to the area.
- 52% disagree that the area is vibrant and buzzy.
- 43% disagree that it is quality shopping destination.
- They are more likely to express 'sadness', 'frustration' or 'anxiety'.

Workers

Workers feel less positive - 26% 'bored' and 22% 'disinterested'. They less interest in the shopping area, though their aspirations for the future are more centred on a 'cool spot in the evenings', suggesting a willingness to remain in the area after work if the right experiences are on offer.

Residents

Those who live in the area are little less positive than visitors to the area. In particular:

- They are more likely to express 'sadness' or say the feel 'uncomfortable'.
- The score lower for several attributes:
 - o Interesting environment;
 - o Amenities;
 - o Good place to study.

- They are less likely to say they feel connected to the history of the town.

They are more likely than others to want to see the heritage of the area play an important role in the future:

- A tribute to the Great Western Railway, Brunel, Gooch and Victorian innovation (36%).
- Well preserved and maintained for the people of Swindon, with the heritage buildings in use again (36%).

Dissatisfied People

Those people who score negatively for the majority of ratings for the area, have more muted expectations for future of the area. They are more likely to feel 'sad' 'frustrated', 'anxious' 'bored' or 'disinterested'.

- 47% want it to be a desirable place to live;
- 42% want it to be a lively part of town.

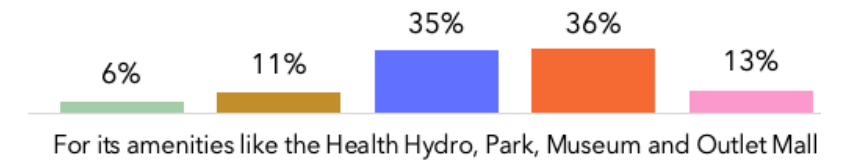
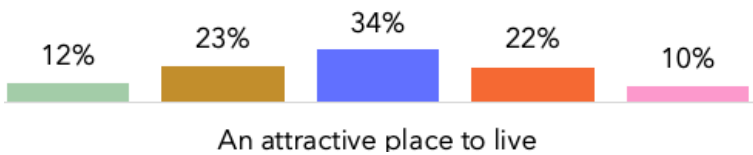
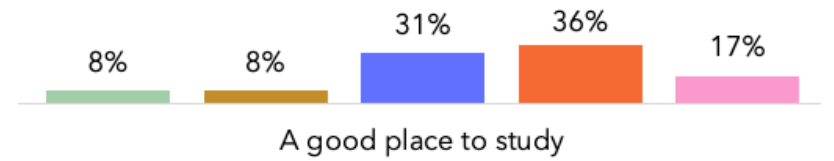
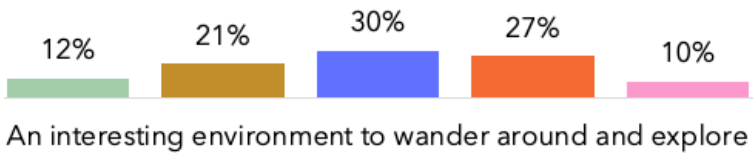
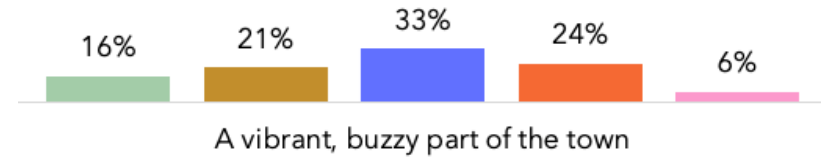
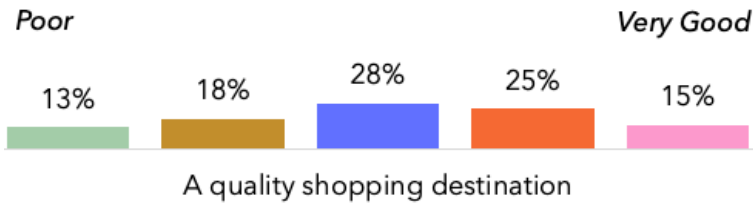
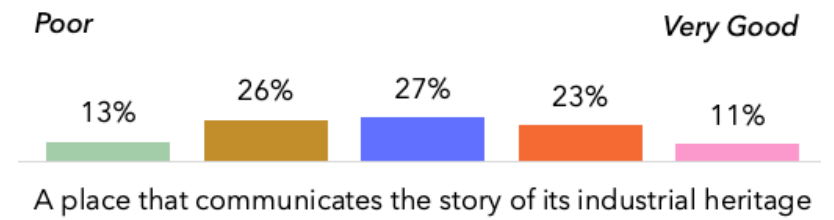
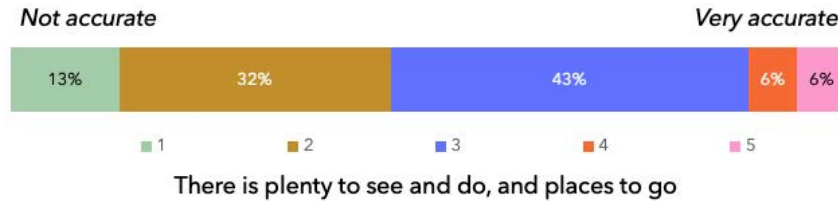
Proud, Inspired or Impressed

People who have pride in the area or are impressed/inspired score much more positively for:

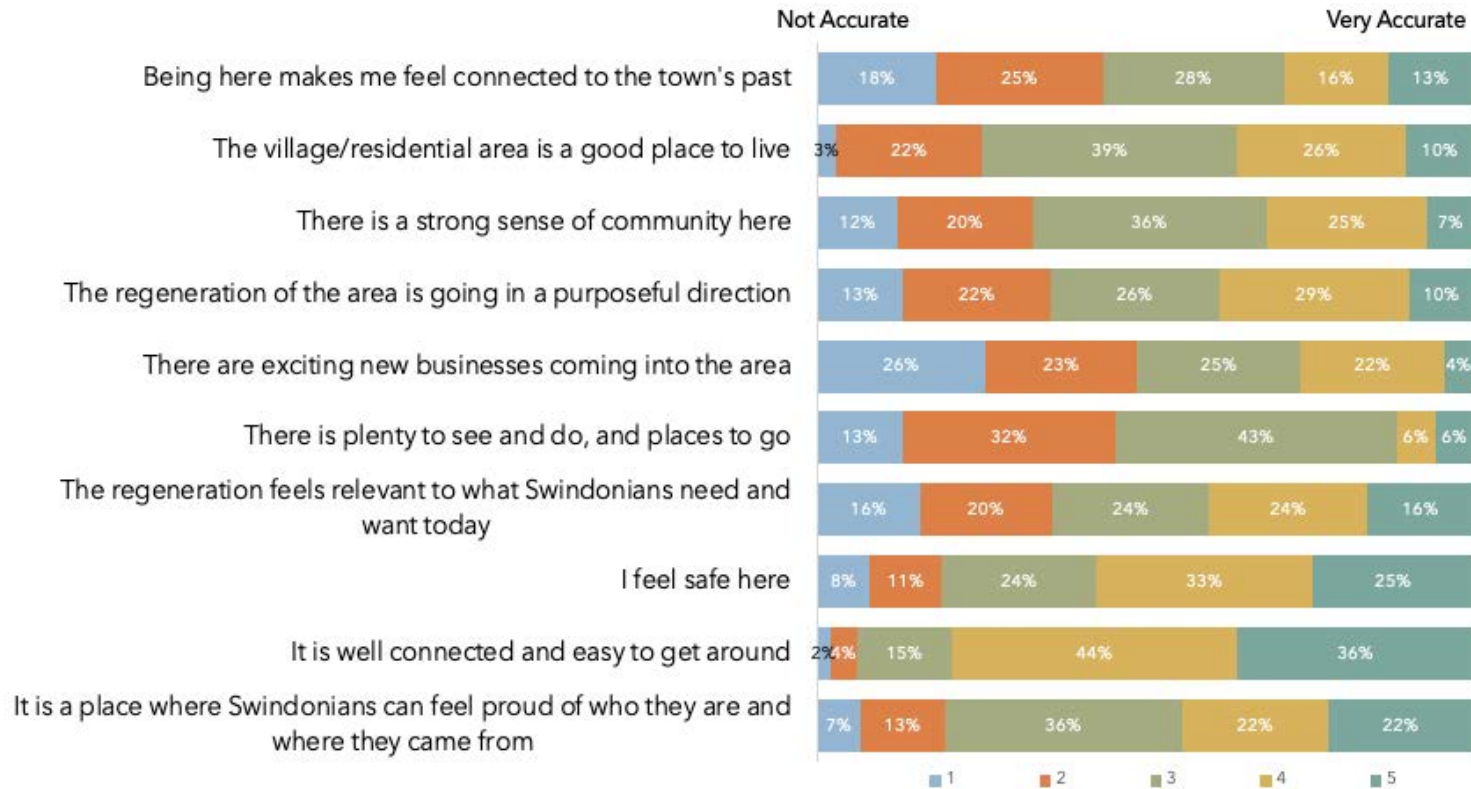
- Feeling safe;
- Feeling connected to the town's past;
- Feeling proud of who they are.

They are even more likely than average to want the area to be a leisure destination and a cool spot in the evenings. They are particularly positive about the area as:

- A quality shopping destination;
- An attractive place to live;
- An interesting environment to wander around.



Descriptors



Feelings

Feelings are generally quite consistent across various groups within the sample. The main areas of difference are driven by age, with older people less positive about the area.

Words selected	Total	Swindon residents	Under 35s	45 - 54s	55 & over	Male	Female	Live here	Work here	Shopping
Relaxed	40%	39%	44%	38%	36%	40%	40%	39%	47%	37%
Sadness	24%	28%	13%	27%	38%	28%	19%	32%	26%	22%
Curiosity	24%	26%	29%	23%	15%	24%	23%	23%	17%	22%
Impressed	19%	19%	24%	18%	11%	20%	17%	14%	17%	19%
Inspired	19%	13%	16%	19%	21%	16%	22%	12%	16%	23%
Frustrated	18%	20%	11%	16%	32%	18%	18%	20%	12%	18%
Bored	18%	14%	20%	15%	17%	19%	16%	19%	26%	14%
Anxious	15%	13%	11%	11%	28%	14%	16%	16%	17%	12%
Disinterested	14%	15%	14%	19%	6%	18%	9%	17%	22%	10%
Uncomfortable	14%	15%	18%	11%	13%	13%	15%	25%	12%	15%
Pride	14%	16%	11%	15%	15%	13%	15%	16%	22%	8%
Excited	12%	10%	19%	10%	4%	13%	11%	19%	12%	8%

B4. Sentiment Research

Introduction

When you generally search online with 'Swindon' what comes up (at a point in time - major news and events have a huge bearing on this)? What leads in terms of story themes - transport, shopping, emptying the bins, business, community, sport... heritage? Sentiment research is a tool to track and inform planning that can influence this.

Sentiment analysis - the measurement of context in aggregated social media posts - can provide insight into how citizens and organisations feel about a place and what this might mean for their intentions and activity on the high street. For the purposes of this study, tabulated data on search and comments will not be especially illuminating, for a number of reasons:

- The HAZ is only one part of the wider 'place' - Swindon;
- The HAZ is relatively new and lacks a single set of 'go to' platforms online;
- The HAZ is predominantly non-public facing;
- Within the HAZ are many distinct component elements, who often have a stronger historic presence as organisations on social media.

The advent of social media in the past 15 years has provided the opportunity to analyse what people say about places by measuring the positive or negative tone of language in the content they post.

Understanding sentiment about a place - at any given point in time - can enable place stakeholders to evaluate how key

constituencies (and the general public) are feeling about their place and the plans they might have in development and in the public domain.

View from select platforms

Search terms referenced:

Swindon | Swindon heritage | Swindon rail heritage | Swindon Heritage Action Zone | Visit Swindon | Swindon Old Town | New Swindon | Swindon Town Centre | Swindon Cultural Quarter | Swindon Railway Quarter | Swindon GWR / GWR Park | Swindon Faringdon Park | The Health Hydro | The Railway Village Swindon | Carriageworks / Workshed | STEAM Museum | Festival of Tomorrow | McArthurGlen Outlet Village Swindon | The Mechanics Institute (Trust) Swindon | Central Community Centre | The Pattern Church | UTC Swindon | Cultural Heritage Institute / Royal Agricultural University Swindon | National Trust Swindon | Historic England Swindon / Great Western Way / Visit Wiltshire

There are many more potentially, including hyper-local, businesses and event based. It could get overwhelming, so focus and timing is important. Only do this type of analysis when you can use the insights it generates - unless you can create ongoing research and reporting through shared tracking tools.

Local issues - including heritage ones - get very specific and detailed in nature so go beyond the scope of pure sentiment research. The most prominent HAZ resident on social media is the

Outlet - in fact its presence dominates - not least as they are very active and responsive.

Search platforms:

This is very much a general overview. It did review platforms including: web search, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TripAdvisor, Swindon Advertiser etc.

Response by sentiment

The survey findings chime with much of what can be found online, especially when the professionally positive media content and hyper-critical voices are removed.

Sentiment research needs to measure something tangible and as specific as possible, e.g. response to a campaign, hashtag, event. The HAZ does not yet really exist in the minds of visitors and users, and as such sentiment overlaps largely with the town. Below are a very few samples of the wide range of responses that the town (including HAZ assets) gets - varied but not actually that many.

Positive and proud

"Could not believe how great this [STEAM] visit was. There was so much to see. Spent just over two hours and loved every minute. The gentlemen who greeted us had so much knowledge and really set us up to go in. Drove the train and worked the signal box. Even walked under an engine. Really good value for money."

"Swindon is a good city to stay and relax, away from traffic and crowd, one can enjoy good time here and can visit Railway Museum which is one of the best place to visit while in Swindon and then can do some shopping in nearby Designer's outlet. The

life in Swindon City centre is awesome and at its full mood during weekend."

"Nice selection of shops in clean, friendly environment. Nice selection of fast food and restaurants also. Some nostalgia from the remaining remnants of the GWR workshop still in place - blends nice architecturally and reflects heritage. Not the same calibration as Bicester - so don't get excited. More the regular high street shops."

Negative and vocal

"I returned to the UK a few days ago, and we had to go to Swindon to pick up some clothes. It was a grey, horrible and cheap city, not having anything decent to look at. The people there were the same."

"Just received notice of a driving violation for driving in a bus lane at the Swindon Designer Outlet. Having now done a little research, this is a notorious trap and has caught literally thousands of unsuspecting visitors to the Outlet Shops yet the Council refuses to upgrade the signage. I really like the shops but this pretty much erases any discount achieved at the Outlet Shops. Swindon has choices. You can make it inviting or rip off visitors once and they won't come back."

A note on how to look at sentiment going forward

As and when Swindon and the HAZ are in a position to do more on sentiment analysis, e.g. generating and applying data insights to inform planning, communications and decision-making, there are some useful places to get help. Aside from HAZ resident partners, the High Streets Task Force (highstreettaskforce.org.uk/courses/understanding-place-

sentiment/) is supporting better collective modelling of sentiment research, albeit with a focus weighted to retail and commerce (but also tourism).

72% of the UK's population spend over three hours on social media every day. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger and YouTube remain the biggest platforms, but there are thousands. It is very easy to spend time and budget on sentiment research, so focusing is important - on key audiences through key platforms. This is allied to the ability to respond to social media activity. It is not just somewhere to monitor of course - if you are online, be active online. If collectively, you can generate the volume of data to justify analysis (which can require regular budget), it can be worthwhile. Otherwise, a lighter touch monitoring to capture the essence of what people are saying, where, and with what frequency will suffice.

This is also not about creating a tracking hashtags - start by looking at the name of the place. Which in the case of the HAZ

creates an immediate challenge, and where a singular, shared name (which can then be a hashtag too) be useful. It shouldn't try to replace the keywords and name-checks used by STEAM, McArthurGlen, National Trust, Workshed, UTC, Community Centre etc. The digital engagement the HAZ community wants to create is layered, with each player mentioning lots of the elements which make up the place - generosity gets rewarded online with engagement - per post, gaining followers, volume and quality of content, volume and focus of what is being said, and so on. Decide what measures are important to you, and use them. For example, retail, higher education and heritage tourism / leisure will have different interests and processes for assessing sentiment. The HAZ can learn from these more developed and sophisticated models to find the mix of measures and media that will work for the place and place partnerships as a whole. The goal is for local partners, stakeholders and businesses talking about the HAZ and Swindon with consistency and a shared sense of purpose (and shared activity) - sentiment analysis can help to inform this.

C1. Looking Ahead

A number of key insights have emerged as this process has progressed. They will all feed directly into the next stage of development for the place brand, but interestingly they have to some degree - perhaps unsurprisingly - also informed the wider HAZ programmes.

Swindon HAZ has tremendous heritage, stand-out tenants, space and flexibility in its development opportunities and proximity to the town centre and transport hubs (of course). It also has a relative lack of visibility, challenges with the railway village and its connectivity with the rest of the HAZ / town, and a number of key players having to work very hard through the pandemic - notably workspaces, education, tourism and events.

The question we need to address now is how not to be a.n.other successful provincial town built on its industrial past with new industry and hi-tec sectors. Swindon - including through its HAZ - has some powerful assets that other towns would love to have - GWR, Outlet, major employers and HQs, commitment to a cultural quarter, on the doorstep of the Cotswolds, connectivity to name a few. But a mix of perceptions and reality often overshadow these for residents and those engaging with the town from outside. The HAZ **cannot** solve this, but it can be a part of the solution by becoming a strong, singular proposition.

The challenge is to mitigate the weakness over time with the strengths of the HAZ and the town (centre), creating opportunities for growth in heritage, leisure, business, community, education, place-making and so on.

The strengths we've touched upon need to be seen in the image that people have of this part of Swindon - and therefore influencing perceptions of the wider town.

There are **positives**.

- There is a pride in the area that can be supported and built upon to drive perception. This comes from residents - despite some negative external images of social housing - as well as key stakeholders within and around the HAZ.
- Heritage and education employers have been joined in recent years by smaller business from different sectors, thanks to developments like the Workshed. An upward trajectory is by no means guaranteed, and further investment in the offer and its marketing is essential. Also important are reasons to be based / start-up in the HAZ. It's heritage environment is attractive, but it requires animation - places to eat and drink / socialise, events and a programme that connects different part of the area. The findings of our engagement is that workers will stay if the offer is there.
- The retail offer - manifest in the dominant presence of the Outlet - is seen as a quality offer. It also has the added bonus of connecting into the heritage storytelling in how it has been sympathetically designed with its GWR historic surroundings front of mind.
- People want it to be a lively part of town - locals, worker / commuters. Visitors. The animation through small, regular events and larger-scale programmes could start to make

- this a destination for a number of different user types and markets.
- Visitors are largely positive overall (admittedly led by the retail experience), something which is supported by sentiment research. The challenge - the opportunity - is to attract the retail visitors to divert their day from car park-shops-car park to discover more of the HAZ. Signage and information will need to be supported by joined-up programming and developments.

And there are **negative** views.

- There is a pride in the place and its rail heritage that has yet to translate to positivity for the area or its regeneration plans.
- ‘Heritage’ has not yet connected to communities through the activity of the HAZ and its / Council’s regeneration programme. This can be mitigated through communication and visible engagement. The invitation needs to be extended to get involved continuously, something which is now starting to happen proactively with resident, heritage and stakeholder communities.
- It is worth noting local (HAZ) residents in particular. They live in the railway village or their street - not the HAZ. It has little to no awareness for most and therefore not much meaning. The current offer and amenities across the HAZ can be disconnected from them, and so are not currently motivators to engage. As documented in this report, local / older people tend to be less positive about the regeneration plans. This will not be helped by the ability to point to the Mechanics Institute as a symbol of stifled progress.

- The HAZ is very central to the town, but small and sometime barely visible boundaries and borders can and do have a big impact. The inner ring road dissects the HAZ from the town centre, and the rail pedestrian tunnel can act as a conduit during the day and a barrier at night. When coupled with public and private transport routes and patterns, this presents some major issues for the integrity and functionality of the HAZ.

Economic regeneration is important, working closely and creatively with heritage conservation, housing, transport and so on. Regeneration is not the goal, but the means to deliver a quality heritage experience (engaging and dynamic interpretation) for locals and visitors, and a healthy, thriving community.

There is need for a balance and a stronger connection between residential and corporate - and heritage can be part of that active bond. The image of the HAZ must become something that engenders a sense of place and a sense of pride. The challenge is the diversity of the area - village, works, station, public realm, corporate - so partnership thinking and delivery across these potentially disparate parts will be critical. The place brand can provide a shared place to do that.

Swindon deserves to have all of its heritage back where it belongs - owned by Swindonians whose ancestors created it, and welcoming the new residents, workers, families and visitors who will contribute to the future of the HAZ and the town.

We mentioned a healthy community earlier - this is important. The origins of ‘betterment’ and ‘good, purposeful living’ shines

through the heritage - the Health Hydro, the Mechanics Institute and Faringdon Park, through to the Workshed, UTC and Cultural Heritage Institute today. This is part of this place's DNA and should inform the place brand narrative accordingly.

The AIDA model (awareness > interest > desire > action) applies here for the place brand. The heritage story and its relevance to people (especially local) needs more visibility to build buy-in in principle and then in practice. This takes time, but the numerous exciting HAZ development programmes can show local people what this means, and how they can benefit as well as get involved.

What is now the HAZ was an active, living partnership, to a notable degree co-designed with the community it served. The HAZ area has and will continue to evolve - buildings have found new uses, new communities and businesses have made a home here. People welcome change, but a key difference is that the local community has little power currently over the place it calls home. Consultation and engagement is a useful tool but not the answer - which is more about co-ownership. The HAZ should aspire to be a 'place' where the public discourse is enabled, spaces are co-programmed rather than purely preserving the heritage that

remains. The vision for the HAZ can and should help it to be a place where people are listened to - critiquing and contributing to plans and helping in their realisation.

Whether that is capital development, landscaping, art projects, joint working, public programming... the place brand can and should provide the sense of direction for all stakeholders to see how they can make the HAZ their HAZ.

For more details contact

Alex Saint

Managing Director

alex@ctconsults.com

+44 (0) 161 228 7512

ctconsults.com

creativetourist.com

culturehosts.co.uk

ctconsults.