

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2005

www.swindoncivictrust.org.uk

swindon
civic
trust

Welcome

The Civic Trust would like to welcome you to our Autumn Newsletter and a packed edition it is too. Thanks to everyone who has taken the time to send contributions. So, what have got for you this time?

We discuss the rejection by the University of Bath of our Town Centre proposals. It would be a tragedy to lose not only Coate Water but also the opportunity to revitalise our town centre.

Jean Saunders sets out her Vision for Coate and reminds us that we have until 7 October to object against the Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan.

We are launching a Swindon picture gallery where you can upload photos of Swindon from your digital and phone cameras onto a new website. See page 3 for details.

Our events programme has included a visit to Gloucester Docks and a fascinating tour around the nearby Blackfriars Dominican priory. We have also held our AGM and hosted an inspirational talk by George Ferguson.

We have a number of events in our "What's on" section and hope that you find some of them of interest. We are always happy to promote relevant events in our newsletter and would be pleased to receive news from other groups and organisations.

Swindon is on the dawn of a new era and we want to help you to be part of it. We must take this opportunity to make sure that we get it right - it is very, very important.

Objectives

- To promote environmentally sustainable, high quality standards in local planning and development in Swindon.
- To protect and improve special features of historic and public interest in Swindon
- To help local people to inform themselves about Swindon's geography, history, and communities, as well as the decision-making processes which affect the built environment
- To encourage participation by community groups, and by individual Swindon residents, in fulfilling these aims.

The New Committee

We are always looking for people who want to help us fulfil our objectives so if you are interested in helping then please contact one of the committee.

Kate Brailsford	Donald Brunwin
Brian Burrows	Alan Hayward
John Monniot	Martha Parry
Jason Reeves	Roger Smith

Community Crossroads
Faringdon Road
Swindon SN1 5BJ

Tel: 01793 520592 or E Mail:
info@swindoncivictrust.co.uk
www.swindoncivictrust.org.uk

**Copies of this newsletter
are available in large
typeface.**

Swindon Civic Trust Press Release - August

Trust's Town Centre University Proposal Rejected by UoB

Swindon Civic Trust (SCT) has learned that the Trust's Town Centre University Proposal, published in January of this year, has been rejected at a Council Meeting of the University of Bath (UoB) primarily for marketing and operational reasons. The minutes of the meeting show that the UoB are opposed to a central campus "particularly because a distributed campus was incompatible with the current brand of the University".

At the meeting, the UoB Council ignored one of SCT's options, which was not to have a distributed campus, but to accommodate the majority of the university's requirements in the North Star area. This was the original location when the campus was first mooted in 2001 and also a part of Swindon Borough Council's successful bid submission for funding the New Swindon Company.

The University Council unanimously agreed "that the University will not develop a town centre distributed presence in Swindon as an alternative to the Coate Campus."

Alan Hayward, spokesman for the Trust said, "This confirms our view that the University are not interested in being part of Swindon, they are purely using our town and our open countryside at Coate as a vehicle for their own commercial ambitions. The 'University of Bath' brand is obviously more important to them than a 'University of Swindon' one."

Alan continued, "What is also now very clear is that the Trust were right in the proposal in that any campus can be accommodated in the town centre as the university's council did not dispute this. This completely undermines the reason for building at Coate and shows that Government

Planning Policy guidelines have been flouted and that the university's sequential testing reports are just plain incorrect. Marketing, operational and cost considerations are subordinate and irrelevant to the planning process. It must be in the town centre - if the UoB do not wish to do this for commercial reasons, or cannot engineer it, then Swindon should either do it for itself or look to another university which is interested in this opportunity."

SCT's University Proposal can be found at <http://www.swindoncivictrust.org.uk/Resources/SCTTownCentreUniversity.htm>

The minutes of the meeting can be seen at <http://internal.bath.ac.uk/council/minutes/130505mins.doc>, and the relevant minute is:

The Swindon Civic Trust had published their 'Town Centre University Proposal'. This made the case for a distributed campus in the town centre of Swindon (instead of the Coate Campus proposed by the University). The University's Executive Committee had concluded that it was not appropriate for the University to develop in the way proposed by the Swindon Civic Trust, particularly because a distributed campus was incompatible with the current brand of the University and would be very costly. The views of Council on the option of distributed development in the town centre were sought. Council was opposed to town centre distributed development for, amongst others, the following reasons:

- administrative inefficiencies involved;
- the detrimental impact of a distributed campus on the student experience;
- limited opportunity for future expansion;
- incompatibility with the current brand of the University;
- the higher costs of constructing and operating a distributed campus;
- the disruption which would be caused to the centre of Swindon during construction of a distributed campus.

AGREED - unanimously - that the University will not develop a town centre distributed presence in Swindon as an alternative to the Coate Campus.

Launch of New Web Site to get you involved in new Swindon viewpoints

By Roger Ogle, *The Link*

Swindon has some interesting, ground breaking buildings, like the new environment friendly National Trust headquarter at Churchward. It has some truly awful boxes like the Western Gate development at Hillmead. There are some fascinating features such as the bandstand in Old Town, as well as grubby corners like the line up of dumpsters on show at Holbrook Way (off Fleet Street).

In a new project to be launched in September by the SCT and sponsored by *The Link*, we are creating a visual record of the town and we want your help to look at the town in a different way. We need you to get out there with your digital and phone cameras to record the best and the worst of Swindon and everything in between – from whole buildings to the fine detail to be found on them, from every angle.

Civic Trust chairman, John Monniot said, “the town has a fascinating history and a tremendous future, but a record of decisions being made from the top down. The Trust is bringing influence to bear on how these decisions are made and the web site project is a new way for local people to both understand our built environment and also contribute to improvements. The site is not only about buildings. We also want to feature festivals and community events.”

The Link has started the site off by contributing around 200 images from the archives. Publisher Roger Ogle said, “I’ve been taking pictures for over 20 years mainly of people and groups, and also recording buildings and events. I’ve barely scratched the surface; there are dozens of photographers around Swindon who can contribute to this project. We also

want to recruit the massive number of people who have bought digital cameras over the last few years. And with the quality of images captured on mobile phones improving every few months, this is a fantastic opportunity to exploit your talent and the potential of the kit you’ve bought.”

So, here’s your chance get out there and focus on Swindon like you’ve never done before.

The place to look is:

www.SwindonGallery.org.uk

The site should be ready to upload images by the end of September. Register your interest by mailing: editor@swindonlink.com

Talk on Urbanism by George Ferguson

Swindon Mayor Ray Fisher introduced our guest speaker, George Ferguson.

George, President of RIBA chose the theme “It’s the people, stupid” to show convincingly that successful sustainable communities need to be designed at high densities around the needs of people rather than motor vehicles. His presentation was inspirational and the audience hung on his every word. He dealt with questions formally, every questioner thanking him for a fantastic talk. George then joined us for drinks, nibbles and debate.

So thank you George, we all feel much more positive and are assured that things can be done differently and that we are right to aspire to greater visions.

Thanks to Tony Hillier who provided this impromptu rendition after George's talk:

Tony Hillier's impromptu rendition

Well Placed

an MP*
recently
called Swindon a dump
Well, we didn't get the hump
we called in Architect George
who was a breath of fresh-air-brick
he showed us two slides at once
designed peopled spaces
not on back of an envelope
almost on back of a fag factory
successfully on roof of car park
he mixed his metaphors
didn't get mixed up when Martha blew
a fuse
he advanced mixed development the
Mars way:
one place, where Swindonians can
work
rest
and play
a people space
- not so stupid either

TRIP TO GLOUCESTER

On 31 July 2005 a small group of Swindon Civic Trust members was met by Les Dalton of Gloucester Civic Society. Les gave us a tour of the Docks and some interesting recent history of the Docks and the involvement of Gloucester Civic Society in part of the regeneration.

There was plenty to do in our free time over lunch. Some went to the National Waterways Museum, some to the Antique Centre and others went further a field to explore the city centre.

At 3.00 we joined our guide Phil Moss for a fascinating one hour tour of Blackfriars Priory. It is hidden away

between the Docks and the Town Centre and Phil was certainly able to bring alive the history of this wonderful building.

Best line - "The Dominican Monks slept in their clothes. It was just a habit they got into"

News from other Organisations

Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan

by Jean Saunders, Swindon Friends of the Earth, Save Coate!

Objection deadline Friday 7 October, 5pm

The deadline for objecting to modified development policies for Coate in the Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan is 7 October 2005. Late objections will not be accepted.

The immediate objective is to delete new policy DP10C [Ref: PM7] and reference to 'Development at Commonhead' on the key inset diagram [Ref: PM13].

The proposed modifications to the Structure Plan policies are now available as an Adobe Acrobat reader file. This includes the official objection sheet. Go to:

http://www.swindon.gov.uk/pdfforms-proposed_mods_consultation_document-2.pdf

New reasons to object:

The scale of development proposed policy cannot be accommodated at 'Coate'/Commonhead without destroying the very qualities that make this area special and unique. To do so would be in conflict with government policy to protect special sites.

Development of the area cannot enhance and protect the existing environment and, as such, is in conflict with modified policy DP4 whilst it is also in conflict with making provision on previously developed land and with policy to regenerate the town centre for higher order activities such as education that generate high levels of movement.

There is NO obligation to allocate Coate for housing or employment land.

The policy is in total conflict with the vision proposed by the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust that places Swindon squarely on the map as a literary heritage site, a place for visitors to enjoy a special rural climate, and a centre for study of the environment and historic landscapes by creating a major wildlife sanctuary. [See separate article]

This vision would satisfy over 25,000 people who have signed the Save Coate! petition calling for a one kilometre of undeveloped land around Coate Water in order to protect these unique features.

The new Swindon Area insert map is available here:

http://www.swindon.gov.uk/pdfforms-proposed_mods_swindon_inset_map.pdf

The Coate package is depicted as a star "Development at Commonhead".

Objections should be sent in writing to:

Strategic Plan Manager
Strategic and Countryside Planning Group
Environmental Services
Wiltshire County Council
County Hall
Trowbridge
BA14 8JD

or by email to:

structureplan@wiltshire.gov.uk.

Our Vision for Coate

By Jean Saunders

Jefferies Land Conservation Trust

The Swindon Advertiser ran a feature on the Swindon Gateway developers' vision for Coate [18 August] that got everyone up in arms again.

The Jefferies Land Conservation Trust is working on its own vision for the alternative use of the area that would retain the ecological, landscape, literary, recreational and archaeological merits of the area for future generations.

The main elements of the Trust's Vision are to:

- maintain the landscape setting of Coate Water in the countryside.
- enhance the biodiversity of the Site of Special Scientific Interest and the nature reserves at Coate Water, Day House Copse and Burderop Wood North. Extensive new habitats and wildlife corridors will be created, stressing the ecological value of streams, ponds trees and hedges.
- provide a centre to study and appreciate literary landscapes as an inspiration to UK writers; the history of British nature writing; and to include a special focus on Richard Jefferies' key role in this evolution
- demonstrate traditional crafts and environmentally sensitive alternatives that reduce man's impact on the land, including managing the land organically as an educational tool and for local food production
- feature the archaeological qualities of the area dating back about 3000 years and the links to others at Liddington Hill and Barbury Castle.

The Trust is supported by the Save Coate Coalition that includes Swindon Civic Trust.

For more information about Trust or the Save Coate campaign, contact Jean on 01793 783040 or e-mail Jefferies_lct@tiscali.co.uk.

Help us to SAVE COATE!

Learn more about the proposed development on this beautiful and much loved land bordering Coate Water Country Park and nature reserve in Swindon, Wilts at:

www.savecoate.org.uk

Visit our blog for up-to-date news and views at:

<http://savecoate.blogspot.com/>

Sign our online petition at:

<http://www.petitiononline.com/savecoate/petition.html>

Show YOUR support, print out a poster or download a web/email banner from:
<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/jo.dunningham/TEMP/JD05TEMP.html>

You can also collect posters from the Cafe at Coate Water 7 days per week, EVERY day of the year, 12.00-3.00 (winter) or 10.00-6.00 (summer)

Find out more about Coate Water at:
<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/coatewater>

Countryman - August 2005 BETJEMAN'S BATTLE IS BEING FOUGHT

There is a tragedy taking place at the Coate Water site, near Swindon – an intended plan to build an extension of Bath University. It seems shortsighted, ridiculous and even negligent. By ignoring the outrage of many well intentioned and responsible citizens, Swindon Borough Council is foolishly overlooking and wasting an exceptional opportunity. Why build a common old bricks-and-mortar university, when an Open Air University is sitting right in their lap.

The prospect of raising the profile of Coate Water area into a site of national recognition and importance seems obvious. It is the birthplace of Richard Jefferies. This linkage to Jefferies makes Coate Water an ideal place to develop a unique centre of learning, dedicated not only to the proud history of country and wildlife writing, but also to the evolution of this movement.

John Betjemen launched a high profile and successful campaign thirty years ago, to save Coate farmhouse buildings that the former Swindon Borough Council sought to pull down. And here we are again, further down the road of forgetfulness.

Why are these councilors settling for the mundane when a centre for ecological studies is within their grasp – a centre to record and examine evolving conflicts between human needs and nature.

Patrick Esmonde,
Shanigan Lake,
British Columbia,
Canada

The following article appeared in a recent edition of Architect's Journal.

Unfortunately, the quote from Swindon Civic Trust is incorrect. It is our National Body, the National Civic Trust who have been campaigning. The Swindon Civic Trust will be discussing this at a future committee meeting.

Iconic Renault at Risk

By Rob Sharp, Architect's Journal

Norman Foster's distinctive Renault Centre in Swindon has come under a fresh threat, the AJ can reveal.

The 1982 building's new owner, Burford Properties, has met with Swindon Borough Council to discuss a potentially substantial redevelopment of one of Foster's earliest and most-lauded pieces of work.

Burford director Mark Boyes this week confirmed his meeting with planning officers, and his instruction of ESA Architects along with local planning consultants to consider options for the site.

Beyond stipulations by the council to 'incorporate elements of the existing building' into a new development, it seems that anything is fair game.

Crucially, Boyes refused to rule out the possibility of demolishing parts of the building, which is unlisted. He said: '[Burford] had had an initial conversation with planners about how we could utilise the building for different uses. The planners don't want a Costco or an Ikea there - they think the building's quite iconic.

'Any redevelopment would have to incorporate elements of the existing building. We have to think, what can we get from retaining the existing structure?'

'The glass front is attractive, as are the yellow suspension supports,' he admitted. 'It would probably end up being a mixed-use development.'

Nick Sampson, a director with ESA, confirmed his instruction: 'One of the things we'll be doing is looking at how we can work with the rhythm of the building and how this can be extended across the site.'

The architect will be returning to the council with design ideas in a month's time.

Twentieth Century Society caseworker Cordula Zeidler claimed that because the building is now under threat, she was 'absolutely confident' that it would be spot listed - at Grade II* - by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Alan Hayward, a spokesperson for the Swindon Civic Trust, which has campaigned for the building's listing along with the Twentieth Century Society, speculated that 'the market's simply not there for industrial space'.

Repeated threats to the building have surfaced over the years. Originally designed by Foster as a bespoke distribution centre for Renault, it has remained empty since the car maker moved out in 2001.

Its interim owner, the Irish-based Green Property, failed to let the building, despite spending £1million on its refurbishment, because of its location in the heart of west Swindon and its inappropriately located loading bays.

Burford Properties bought the centre from Green Property at the beginning of 2004 as part of a wider portfolio acquisition. When the council was contacted, it declined to discuss the confidential talks it had entered into with Burford.

News from other Organisations

Which Road for the Front Garden?

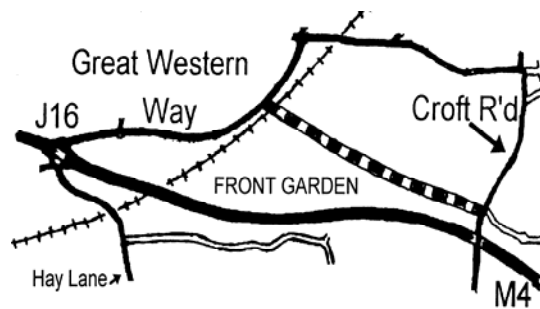
By Charmian Spickernell, CPRE

The Croft Road to Great Western Way crossing the Railway or the Croft Road to Hay Lane tunnelling under the M4?

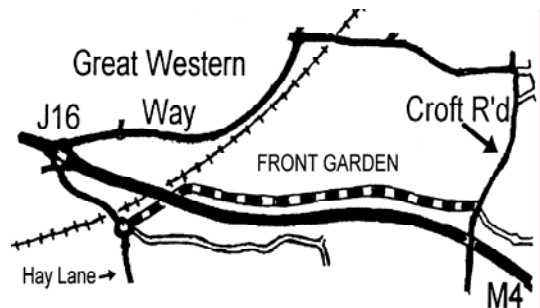
One road begins and ends in Swindon, connecting the Front Garden with the town.

The other road has one end in Swindon but the other end goes out to the countryside beyond the M4.

Croft Road to Great Western Way



Croft Road to Hay Lane Link



Why was the route changed?

Originally, Swindon Borough Council argued that bringing forward the Southern Relief Road to Great

Western Way was a major reason for choosing the Front Garden rather than land to the east of the A419. It would benefit traffic in Old Town. Then suddenly, the Croft Road to Hay Lane Link appeared with the developer's application for the Front Garden. The Borough Council agreed this road. The application was not called in by the Secretary of State. Benefiting the traffic in Old town was deleted from the Local Plan.

Procedures for new roads

When a road is Government funded there are many tests it has to go through, including a public inquiry. However, this is a developer funded road and it

- was not consulted on widely in the area outside Swindon's Boundary where the road will have an impact
- was not allowed to be discussed at the Examination in Public for the Structure Plan 2016
- had one afternoon session at the Inquiry on the Swindon Local Plan after much pressure from CPRE and others for this to be allowed
- was given planning consent before the Inspector could write his Report on the Local Plan Inquiry

Which route is best?

Pros and cons of the two routes appear not to have been drawn up. At the Local Plan Inquiry, Swindon agreed with Transport Consultants Scott Wilson, on behalf of CPRE, that the route crossing the railway is feasible. Scott Wilson also pointed out reasons why this route is more sustainable, providing shorter travel distances, less pressure at Croft Road, not putting local traffic through a motorway junction, less traffic in Swindon between the M4 Junctions, less traffic along roads outside the Front Garden.

What now?

In an early release of the Inspector's Report on the Front Garden, the Inspector says planning permission has been granted and he is now "faced with matters as they stand today". However, he has left the way open for the route across the railway. This is the time to use every democratic process to ask Councillors to have the route changed back to the route to Great Western Way.

Still to go:

1. Wiltshire County Council and the Highways Authority have to confirm their agreement regarding traffic arrangements at J16 M4.
2. The Croft Road to Hay Lane Link is still to be adopted in the Wiltshire & Swindon Structure Plan 2016
3. A further 32,000 houses are being proposed for Swindon to 2026 needing both a very large strategic site and smaller greenfield sites in three directions, east, northwest and southwest. However, Swindon's town centre needs renewal first and the Regional Spatial Strategy is still draft.

New Mechanics' Institution Preservation Trust Ltd

by Martha Parry (tel: 01793 520592)

It looks like the Public Inquiry into the proposed hotel on top of the Mechanics' Institute will actually go ahead at the Civic Offices on 28-30th September.

A formal submission has been made by the Mechanics' Trust, which also expects soon to receive Listed Building Consent for its own alternative proposals for the future use of the building. The Mechanics Trust's proposals would preserve all the major architectural features, and permit uses that are broadly mapped out as being consistent with the past social, educational and recreational uses --

serving the modern community as well as the Institute did in the past.

The Mechanics Trust will be supported in its submission at the Inquiry by The Theatres Trust and The Victorian Society. The Borough Council will be taking a neutral position, since it recently indicated that it opposed the glass tower on a number of grounds, although it has agreed that a hotel would be a permitted use. The Mechanics Trust maintains that any hotel, or commercial investment driven use, would have to be on such a large scale that it would overwhelm the historic building.

The Mechanics' was never a commercially profitable enterprise, and its layout is suited well to a range of cultural uses which Swindon sorely misses.

We hope to see the building in charitable ownership, to be achieved by a negotiated purchase from the owner or by a Compulsory Purchase Order via the Government.

Any supporter who wishes to speak at the Inquiry must be present at 10am at the Civic Offices in Euclid Street on 28th September.

The Inquiry will not go ahead only if it is postponed by the withdrawal by the owner of his application.

The Trust hopes that the Inquiry will go ahead, and that the Inspector's decision will shed light and hope upon a process that has been stalled since 1986, when the Council was gazumped by a private developer, while it was in the process of considering acquiring the Mechanics' for £1.

The Mechanics' project qualifies for Heritage, Arts, and now Big Lottery funding; and the Trust is focussed upon seeing through the campaign it began with over 2000 local members in 1995.

What's On

Public Inquiry – Civic Offices

Proposed Hotel on top of the Mechanics Institute

28 - 30 September

Any supporter who wishes to speak at the Inquiry must be present at 10am at the Civic Offices in Euclid Street on 28th September

Friday 7 October – 6.45 pm

Wootton Bassett Memorial Hall

Public meeting to discuss the alternative routes for access to the Front Garden and their impact on the town centre.

Sunday 9 October - 11am start (registration between 9.30am and 10.30am).

Westonbirt Walk Together, The National Arboretum at Westonbirt, Tetbury, Gloucestershire. 5km or 10km. For more details contact 0117 962 2516 or

www.cancerresearchuk.org/breastcancer.

South West Civic Societies Conference

Saturday 29 October

at the Somerset County Cricket Ground based in Taunton

Inland Waterways

Cost £17. To book online:

www.tauntoncivic.org.uk/con2005.htm

Send a cheque payable to Taunton and District Civic Society with your name and contact details to TDCS, 82 Lisieux Way, Taunton TA1 2LF

Blue Plaque Visit to Devizes

Devizes Civic Society

Saturday 22 October

Swindon Civic Trust is currently seeking the necessary permissions to place its first blue plaque on the Villet house in Cricklade St. We are also planning a visit to Devizes to learn from their longstanding blue plaque scheme.

£4 plus transport costs.

Anyone interested, please contact 01793 520592

Standing Order Form

Details of Your Bank:

To: The Manager

Bank:

Address:

Post Code:

Account Name:

Account Number:Sort Code:

Your Details:

Name:

Address:

Post Code:

E Mail:

Date:

Signature:..... Date:

Instructions to bank:

Please pay to:

The Co-operative Bank plc
Stockport, Business Direct
PO Box 250
Skelmersdale
Lancashire WN8 6WT

For the account of:

Swindon Civic Trust
Account: 65126518
Sort Code: 08 92 99

The sum of £ Date of first payment:

(Insert tomorrow's date or 1 April 2006 if you have paid your subscriptions for the year 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006)

And thereafter annually on 1 April until further notice

NB: You can cancel a standing order at any time by writing to your bank or building society. Please also send a copy of your letter to us.

Please post this form to Swindon Civic Trust at Community Crossroads (former railway museum), Faringdon Road, Swindon SN1 5BJ

New Members

All Members receive mailings and may vote at General Meetings. Membership is renewable on 31 March each Year.

"I wish to support the Swindon Civic Trust" Registered Charity No. 1095031:

Signature:

Name:

Address:.....
.....

Postcode:

Telephone:

E Mail:

I enclose (delete those inapplicable):

- £5 for Annual Membership
- £2 for Unwaged Annual Membership
- £ donation

I am a new member/renewing member
(delete as applicable)

Please make cheques payable to:

Swindon Civic Trust

Community Crossroads
(former railway museum)
Faringdon Road
Swindon SN1 5BJ
Tel/Fax: 01793 520592
E Mail:
membership@swindoncivictrust.co.uk

giftaid it

Gift Aid Declaration

The Swindon Civic Trust is a registered charity and if you are a tax payer you can help us by signing the declaration below. This will allow us to claim tax back from the Government on the membership and any donation you have paid (28p in the pound).

Name:

Address:

Post Code:

I want the Swindon Civic Trust, registered charity 1095031, to treat the annual membership fee and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as a gift aid donation.

Signed:

Dated:

Next Edition

The next edition of the newsletter will be issued in January 2006 and the deadline for submissions is 14 January 2006. You can send these to the Community Crossroads at the address above or e-mail them for the attention of Rob Brailsford at info@swindoncivictrust.org.uk

We would be pleased to hear your comments on the Newsletter or from anyone who wishes to contribute to the debate over the future of Swindon.