

# NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2005

[www.swindoncivictrust.org.uk](http://www.swindoncivictrust.org.uk)

swindon  
civic  
trust

## Welcome

This newsletter is our summer newsletter and as I write this in the garden at 8.00 in the morning bathed in warm sunshine it does feel as though summer has arrived. However, thundershowers are predicted for the afternoon and I'm going to see Elton John at the County Ground this evening. Isn't it great that an artist of his standing is coming to Swindon?

These aren't the only dark clouds gathering over Swindon. You will read in this edition of bad news over the Front Garden, Swindon Borough Council's intentions for the former railway museum, the threat to Coate Water and the decline of citizenship.

There has been much talk of the decline in democracy in recent months and we must ensure that this is not replicated in Swindon. So many decisions seem to be made against the wishes of the people but it is important that we keep on telling the powers that be what we do want. Terry King has never given up on the Front Garden and without FRAG there would probably be houses all over it now. This is an example to us all.

One of my favourite quotes is "All that it takes for evil to succeed is for good men to do nothing". We know that you are good so don't fall into the trap of doing nothing. Read this newsletter and join us in trying to make Swindon a place we can all be proud of.

**STOP PRESS: Please remember to submit your objections to the Outline Planning Application for Coate Water by 30 June.**

## 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 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
Terry Iles	John Monniot
Martha Parry	Roger Smith

Community Crossroads  
Faringdon Road  
Swindon SN1 5BJ

Tel: 01793 520592 or E Mail:  
[info@swindoncivictrust.co.uk](mailto:info@swindoncivictrust.co.uk)  
[www.swindoncivictrust.org.uk](http://www.swindoncivictrust.org.uk)

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

## **A Threat to Citizenship**

**by John Monniot**

Former Nottinghamshire MP and renowned political thinker and writer, David Marquand, talked in Swindon 9 May about his recently published book, "The Decline of the Public: The Hollowing Out of Citizenship."

Marquand has divided human activity into three areas – the market domain of trading, buying and selling, the private domain of family and friendship and the public domain of citizenship. According to him, the market and private domains grew naturally in society, whereas the public domain has been constructed artificially. The public domain should not be confused with the public sector, it is the field where people work for the public good and are accountable publicly. The public domain is a relatively recent invention having been created by the Victorians and built up throughout most of the twentieth century. The building of Swindon's Mechanics' Institute through public subscription and the creation of the NHS are a local and a national example of the public domain in action.

David Marquand believes that the public domain has come under attack in the last two decades and is in serious danger. He blames Thatcherite "marketisation" and centralisation and the target culture under New Labour for sapping the public service ethic and demoralising those working for the public good in many fields including

local government, the civil service and health. This has been worsened in recent years by the obsessive use of "spin" by government in attempts to manipulate public opinion.

Marquand argued that this has caused declines in the effectiveness of public services and a dangerous public distrust of government and politicians and an unwillingness to be involved in the democratic process, explaining recent falls in election turn-outs.

The talk was part of the Swindon Festival of Literature and was co-sponsored by Swindon Civic Trust. It took place in the former railway museum in Faringdon Road. This proved to be an ideal venue for such events and played its part in sustaining the lively discussion with the audience which followed David Marquand's witty but serious presentation.

One point to emerge from discussion was the effect of globalisation. There are now major public domain organisations – working in fields like environmental protection and disaster relief – which are effectively outside democratic accountability.

From my perspective as a Swindonian and Chair of the Swindon Civic Trust, David Marquand's views about the threat to the public domain resonated strongly. The way in which plans to develop the land around the Coate Water Country Park seem to be being steam-rolled through, in the face of a massive public outcry and alternative proposals for a university campus in the town centre, explain why citizens feel

powerless and disaffected. And have Swindonians been consulted about the Council's apparent decision that the former railway museum will no longer be available as a performance and exhibition space?

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### **Talk "Power of Place"**

**George Ferguson – President of RIBA**

**15 September – 7.30 p.m.**

The next talk scheduled in Swindon Civic Trust's event programme is by George Ferguson, the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects. His talk is entitled "Power of Place" and is about Urbanism. Urbanism is an approach to urban design, which promotes high densities, mixed uses and less dependence on the car, effectively a return to the traditional form of development in towns and cities prior to the zoning approach of town planning after World War II. His talk will be held at 7.30 pm on 15 September, in the former railway museum if still available.

Further details about Swindon Civic Trust and its events programme are at [www.swindoncivictrust.co.uk](http://www.swindoncivictrust.co.uk).

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### **Gloucester Civic Society**

#### **Tour of Blackfriars Priory, Gloucester**

Gloucester Civic Society is hosting this event. It is a full day tour meeting in Gloucester on Sunday 31 July at 10.15 a.m. and leaving at 4.15 p.m.

The day will include a guided tour of Gloucester Docks in the morning, free time for lunch and

exploring, and a guided tour of Blackfriars Priory in the afternoon.

*"Blackfriars Priory, best preserved Dominican Priory in Great Britain, from 1231 to 1539, then the home and factory of Sir Thomas Bell, best scissor braced roof with original timbers bequeathed by Henry III. Fine cloister buildings, reputed first Library in England, see the carols where Friars worked, later associations with the Robert Raikes family of Sunday School fame"*

The Priory is only open 10 days a year, so this is a special opportunity to view, with an excellent Civic Trust guide and historian.

For more information or to book a place contact Kate Brailsford by **20 July** on - 01793 495479, or e mail [Info@swindoncivictrust.org.uk](mailto:Info@swindoncivictrust.org.uk)

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### **New Membership Year**

Subscription renewals are now due and the rate remains at £5 (or £2 for the unwaged). This includes a copy of our quarterly newsletter and the right to vote at our AGM.

We are gradually receiving more standing order forms. It would be most helpful if more of you chose this option when renewing your subscription. Once completed, the form should be posted to us. A record is kept by the Trust that you are paying by Standing Order and the form is forwarded on to your bank.

It is not only the subscription that is important to us. We need more people to register as members. Your support in principle can help others to make a difference, and a strong membership can help in our role as a campaigning organisation.

## Swindon Local Plan Inquiry

by Alan Hayward

Swindon Civic Trust made verbal representations at the Swindon LPI in several sessions and also submitted our Town Centre University Proposal as an exhibit. On 20 April, Bath University tabled evidence which attempted to refute the Trust's document and that the siting of any university in the town centre rather than at Coate was unviable.

The evidence consisted of a site-by-site analysis of the proposal, along with explanations of the meaning of "development density". Following the study of the Bath documents, SCT responded to the Government Inspector by the agreed deadline with a strongly worded letter, which pointed out the inaccuracies in the evidence along with the re-emphasis that a central campus would be possible given the will to achieve it and with the co-operation of Swindon Borough Council.

Given that the Inspector had set the last date for responses, the Trust was surprised to receive a copy of yet another letter sent to the Inspector, dated 10 May. This had been written by the Council, which it turns out, had been responsible for the earlier Bath evidence, in partnership with The New Swindon Company and endorsed by the University. The letter again set out to undermine the Trust's position.

At an SCT meeting, the committee decided to let the matter rest and leave the subject with the Inspector. The Trust question whether it is right and proper for the Local Planning Authority, i.e. SBC, whose Plan is under independent scrutiny at the Inquiry, to be involved in actively disputing the evidence of participants.

The Inspector's report is due to be published in the Autumn.

## Regional Spatial Strategy

by Alan Hayward

The Cabinet Member for Environment presented the First Detailed Proposals for the Swindon Joint Study Area as part of the South West Regional Spatial Strategy to 2026 to Council Cabinet on 1 June. Following a public consultation of several months, these proposals are the first iteration of a long-term planning and development strategy for the region which is replacing the current Regional Planning Guidance and Wiltshire & Swindon Structure Plans. The body responsible for the RSS, the South West Regional Assembly, had suggested that Swindon should look at future housing numbers over the ten-year period between 2016 and 2026 of 16,000, 20,000 and 24,000 new dwellings. The proposal submitted covers an area stretching from Devizes to Burford and from Chippenham to Wantage. The recommendations were that:

- 16,000 new dwellings over the period (i.e. the existing planned rate up to 2016) would be the most sustainable level, but would require substantial external infrastructure funding to meet this ambitious target, particularly in the areas of transport, water supply and wastewater treatment.
- The preferred strategic direction of growth for Swindon should be to the east, in the area between Blunsdon and Wanborough.
- That the surrounding towns and villages only grow to meet local needs.

The recommendations were accepted by the Cabinet and the Proposals now go forward to the RA for consideration. The First Draft of the RSS for the Region will be published for review later this year.

# Behind the Scenes

by Kate Brailsford

As you know we are a relatively small committee and we use this newsletter as a vehicle to keep you up to date with our progress. Generally, a number of things are going on “Behind the Scenes” and members are helping us either on a regular basis or with ad hoc projects providing their own particular field of expertise to help raise the profile of the Trust. The Committee would like to pass on their appreciation for the time given by three members who have made a difference.

- **Ted Browning**

Ted is a member of our Planning Sub Committee. On a weekly basis he visits the Community Crossroads and Premier House to make sure that the Trust are aware of any important Planning Applications.

- **Paul Bearne**

Paul helps us on an ongoing basis with advice, support and update of our website. At a recent committee meeting we decided to allocate part of our funds to purchase Acoustic Equipment which would enable us to continue to use the Community Crossroads for our Events Programme and overcome the acoustic difficulties of the main hall.

Paul has researched, recommended and purchased the equipment for us on E Bay. Paul set up and tested the equipment ready for our David Marquand event.

- **Kate Parsons**

Kate is a local graphic designer and member of the Trust. Kate designed a set of 3 posters to help in promoting membership of the Trust and highlighting our key issue at this time, which is why a University belongs in the Town Centre and not at Coate Water Country Park. We would also like to thank Copy Color Limited for donating the printing of high quality and durable posters.

The posters are large, eye catching and well designed. The Committee is absolutely delighted with this contribution from Kate. We intend to take these posters to other locations to publicise the Trust, but in the meantime, why not call in to the Community Crossroads where they are currently on display.

## Coate Water Country Park

**Deadline 30 June**

Object to the Outline Planning Application for a University, **1800 houses and a business park** at Coate Water Country Park. Full details of the plans can be viewed on [www.savecoate.org.uk](http://www.savecoate.org.uk). Objections should be sent to:

Ms Vivien O'Connell  
Environment and Property  
Swindon Borough Council  
Premier House  
Station Road  
Swindon SN1 1TZ

Reference: Planning Application  
SO5/0475 and SO5/0476.  
Email: [vo'connell@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:vo'connell@swindon.gov.uk)

Swindon Civic Trust firmly opposes the Outline Planning Applications for Coate Water Country Park, and will be submitting a comprehensive objection based on the following:

- Swindonian's Favourite Place
- Negative Impact on development of the Town Centre
- Transport Implications
- Danger that lack of University Funding would leave Swindon with housing estates and business park at Coate Water
- Loss of highly valued amenity
- Lack of need for housing
- Lack of need for additional Business Park with existing surplus office space
- Landscape/Wildlife/ecology/SSSI/Literacy/archaeological
- Dangerous landfill site close to Junction 15 has been specified for housing
- Precludes further expansion of Coate Water as a park, or the expansion of the hospital
- Loss of good agricultural land

## News from other Organisations

### South West Regional Assembly

**26 July 2005 - Workshop**

by Jean Saunders

SWRA are organising a workshop based on their strategy document (not yet available) that essentially hits Swindon as an accelerated growth area.

You will remember that SBC recently agreed to advise the Regional Assembly that 16,000 additional houses could be accommodated at Swindon between 2016 to 2026 (this is an unprecedented high figure on top of all the other allocations for the Northern Development, Front Garden and Coate) on the grounds that this was the lowest figure on offer to them (up to 24,000 had been suggested). The Borough Council's preference for growth is east of the A419 taking up farmland between Blunsdon and Wanborough.

Both CPRE and Swindon Friends of the Earth have regularly complained to the Regional Assembly that none of their consultation events are ever held in Swindon yet it is a key target area for growth.

## News from other Organisations .....

It would appear from the following agenda for the next Regional Spatial Planning and Transport Group Papers - 21 June 2005, that Swindon will be included in the next consultation exercise.

See [http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/swra/ourwork/planningandtransport/RSPTG\\_meetingpapers.shtml](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/swra/ourwork/planningandtransport/RSPTG_meetingpapers.shtml) link

These are listed as:

Plymouth	20 July
Dorchester	21 July
Swindon	26 July
Taunton	27 July
Bristol	22 or 25 July (provisional)

So keep Tuesday 26 July free to attend - it is likely to be a day-time event.

You can register for the Swindon vent by telephoning 01823 270101 or emailing [swra@southwest-ra.gov.uk](mailto:swra@southwest-ra.gov.uk)

The draft Regional Spatial Strategy is still programmed for publication in the autumn.

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## New Mechanics' Institution Preservation Trust Ltd

by Martha Parry

### What is Happening with the Mechanics?

Everyone seems to be asking this question. As for the building itself, nothing much seems to have moved since last November. As for the Trust, by the time you read this, we will have submitted our revised application for Listed Building Consent, with the expectation that it will be approved within 2 months.

The proposals reflect the consultation we have repeatedly undertaken with our Members, and displayed widely over the years.

1 May was the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mechanics' opening. 2005 is also the 10<sup>th</sup> year since the Trust was founded. 2500 people have signed up as Members over the years, and we plan to launch a renewed Membership and fund-raising campaign at the AGM on 7 July, 7.00 p.m. at the Community Crossroads.

### 28 September is 'D-Day'

The Public Inquiry regarding the current owner's proposed hotel will commence at 10.00 a.m. at the Civic Offices. A further newsletter from the New Mechanics' Institution Preservation Trust will be circulated before that date. Everything turns upon this date .... Unless something else happens first!

## **Community Crossroads**

For two and a half years the New Mechanics' has been developing the former Railway Museum as a community cultural crossroads, along the lines we still hope to pursue with the Mechanics itself.

Using a legacy of £11,000 from founder member Dave Backhouse, we have shown the potential of this central heritage premises to meet some of the frustrated need for activity space, and as offices for the Trust, the Swindon Civic Trust, and Swindon Youth Council.

Two regular user groups bring in enough income for us to meet the costs of operation. However, Swindon Council has recently decided they would prefer to alter the building and use it as offices.

Even though these offices would be for a range of local advice organisations, the Trust believes this is a waste of a fine crossroads location, and an insult to the character of the building itself.

We will turn to arguing our case with the Council once the AGM is past. Any letters of support, or offers to circulate our petition, would be most welcome.

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### **Update on the Front Garden**

by Terry King

On 19 May, Swindon Borough Council signed the legal agreement which allows the developer to present his detailed proposals to build 4,500 dwellings, and other

buildings, on the Front Garden, starting in 2006/7 and ending in about 2022.

This approval was given without waiting for the Inspectors Report on the Local Plan 2011, which will include his findings on Front Garden Issues as well as the Southern Relief Road, Coate Water Proposals, and many other matters affecting Swindon's Future. It seems undemocratic, illogical, and even underhanded, to agree to an expensive and comprehensive Public Inquiry but then take fundamental decisions without waiting for its result.

Meanwhile, there are other issues which may yet prove stumbling blocks to this unpopular and dubious development. Flooding remains a major factor, not only for its obvious effects on the ground and dwellings, but also because insurers are becoming increasingly reluctant to insure buildings or contents in flood risk areas. Now the water authorities and the Environmental Agency are stating that water supplies and sewage facilities will not be able to meet future demands in a rapidly growing Swindon without major and costly investment. Who pays? How long will it take?

However, apart from some preparatory work on site entrances and wildlife conservation areas, the developer can not begin building until design codes and detailed plans have been submitted, subjected to further public consultation, and agreed by the Council. This will take several months and much can happen in the meantime!

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## What's On

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### **Planning Together for a Better Future**

**Tuesday 5 July – 10.00 - 1600**

A conference organised by Swindon Coalition of Disabled People to be held at University of Bath, Swindon

£10 – Full members – refundable on the day  
£20 – Associate and Corporate Members  
£45 – Commercial and Statutory bodies  
(Discounts available for additional delegates)

Speakers and Workshops will consider planning issues from national and local perspectives

A registration pack is available from:  
**Post:** SCODP, Pembroke Centre, Cheney Manor, Swindon, SN2 2PQ  
**Tel:** 01793 430045  
(minicom users please dial: 18001 01793 430045)  
e mail: [office@scodp.co.uk](mailto:office@scodp.co.uk)

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### **New Mechanics' Institution Preservation Trust**

**7 July – 7.00 p.m. AGM**

Community Crossroads, Faringdon Road

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### **SaveCoate!**

Help is needed at Coate Water most weekends with the Save Coate stall. Offers of help can be passed to Sue Birley on 01793 790438.

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### **Picnic at Shaw Forest**

**10 July – 2.00 p.m.**

Informal picnic at Shaw Forest hosted by Swindon Forest Protection Group.

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### **Summer Holiday Event**

#### **Dragon Hunt around**

#### **Coate Water Country Park.**

Families can take part in a search for clues and test their knowledge of the area. Entry forms can be picked up from the café at Coate Water from July. More information contact Jean Saunders on 01793 783040.

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### **Regional South West Assembly**

**26 July 2005 - All day workshop**  
Regional Spatial Strategy  
See Main article for more details.

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### **Day Trip to Gloucester**

**Sunday 31 July 9.15 a.m.**

Organised by Swindon Civic Trust and hosted and guided by Gloucester Civic Society.

For more information contact Kate  
Tel: 01793 495479 or e mail  
[info@swindoncivictrust.org.uk](mailto:info@swindoncivictrust.org.uk)

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## **What's On .....**

### **The Third Annual Children's Fete**

**GWR Park – Faringdon Road**

**Sat 13 Aug - 12.00 - 9.00 p.m.**

For more information contact the New Mechanics Institute Preservation Trust with ideas, stalls and offers to perform.  
Tel: 01793 520592

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### **Canal Walk**

**Sunday 21 August 3.00 p.m.**

### **Meeting at Kings Hill Garage**

Guided walk along the canal from Kings Hill Garage to the M4 with a member of Wiltshire and Berks Canal Trust.

The emphasis of the guided walk will be the future canal plan, wildlife opportunities, and commercial opportunities.

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### **Swindon Civic Trust AGM**

**Monday 5 September 7.00 pm**

### **Community Crossroads**

Followed by video at 7.45 p.m. "Jefferies Land' produced by John Webb of the Richard Jefferies Society.

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### **Talk**

**15 September – 7.30 p.m.**

### **Community Crossroads**

Swindon Civic Trust event. Talk by George Ferguson, president of RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) entitled "Power of Place" about Urbanism.

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## **Blue Plaques Scheme – Award for 42 Cricklade Street**

Swindon Civic Trust have submitted a Planning Application to SBC to place a Blue Plaque on the former Townsend's building, at 42 Cricklade Street, Old Town.

English Heritage introduced the Blue Plaques Scheme in 1986 to recognise buildings in which a remarkable person lived or worked at some point in history.

Sir John Betjeman said of 42 Cricklade Street, "this house, built in 1729, is one of the most distinguished town houses in Wiltshire". Later, Pevsner said, "Here, Number 42 is the best house in Swindon by far". It was occupied by Robert Harding who died in 1770, then it was occupied from 1773 by the Vilett family, owners of the Eastcott Estate.

The full cost of this project will be £800 and we would be delighted to hear from anyone who may be interested in acting as sponsor.

This is the first building in Swindon to be proposed for a Blue Plaque, and Swindon Civic Trust look forward to hearing ideas for other properties in which a remarkable person lived or worked.

## 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**

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## New Members

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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](mailto: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 September 2005 and the deadline for submissions is 14 September 2005. 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](mailto: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.