

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2007

www.swindoncivictrust.org.uk

Welcome to our Autumn 2007 newsletter. As we reach the end of a rather dismal summer the floods of July suggest that you would have to be pretty dim to build on a flood plain. However, it seems that this is exactly what is about to happen in Swindon so please read page 4 for an update from the Front Garden Action Group.

Also looking at Front Garden is Charmian Spickernell from the Campaign to Protect Rural England. On page 9 she discusses the merits (or lack of them) of a tunnel under the M4 and the resulting traffic chaos and environmental damage.

Roderick Bluh gave the Trust a very interesting update on the Town Centre regeneration at our September meeting. There were a lot of very positive noises about the new library, the possible reinstatement of the canal through the town and other imminent developments. John Monniot summarises Cllr Bluh talk on pages 2 and 3.

I would also draw your attention to the AGM on 22 November (see page 3). We are looking for some new committee members. The Swindon Civic Trust has been around for 5 or 6 years now and it is time for some new blood. I like to think that the big improvements that are happening in Swindon and highlighted by Cllr Bluh are in no little way due to the influence of the Civic Trust and its members. You can join our committee and have a big input in the future of Swindon.

For a visual record of Swindon see:

www.SwindonGallery.org.uk

swindon
civic
trust

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.

Donald Brunwin Brian Burrows
John Monniot Martha Parry

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.

SCT Events Programme Report

By John Monniot

On 10 September, the Leader of Swindon Borough Council, Roderick Bluh, spoke about the progress of town centre regeneration and the transport issues arising from Swindon's planned development. This was part of the Trust's programme of events for members and the general public.

Cllr Bluh reminded the audience that he had spoken at a Trust event a year ago about his vision for Swindon's development. Now was the time to report on action. He regarded the regeneration of the town centre as a 15 year project with 10 years to go. So physical developments should now be expected. He gave an up-beat assessment of the projects now moving forward:

The new Central Library – this is expected to be completed by Christmas and open in July 2008. The town hall, which the new library adjoins, is currently being refurbished.

The Wyvern Theatre – following refurbishment, including the installation of air conditioning, this would re-open imminently.

Regent Place – this development, centred on the Granville Street car park, had received planning approval and compulsory purchase action was proceeding. The 2 ½ year build phase would provide a new shopping centre and would feature the return of the Baptist Tabernacle façade. Cllr Bluh clearly regarded the latter as a personal triumph.

Swindon College Site – subject to an imminent planning decision (permission subsequently granted) an almost immediate start was expected on this project which would provide housing, leisure facilities, including a

cinema and an up-market supermarket.

The Exchange – this project, to the North of Fleming Way, would primarily provide offices. This was SW England's largest commercial site and Cllr Bluh expected it to take 15 years to complete, as it could only proceed as demand developed. Nonetheless, he expected an initial planning application soon.

Wharf Green

A £3m public realm enhancement was due to start in October, funded by the SW Regional Development Agency. This will include seating and a very large TV screen to be provided by the BBC. Cllr Bluh hoped that this would set the tone for the rest of the town centre regeneration.

The Railway Village – Cllr Bluh conceded the view, expressed many times by the Trust, that it was extraordinary that the Railway Village had been excluded from plans to redevelop the town centre. The Council was now developing a plan to restore the Village's character.

In my view, this is a real hot potato as the area under consideration includes both the Mechanics Institute and the Health Hydro. And these are adjacent to the former Railway Museum from which the Mechanics Trust is to be ejected so the Council can establish a "leading edge" youth facility. The Trust will need to make sure that this study involves thorough and timely public consultation.

University

Following Bath University's welcome withdrawal from the Coate proposal, a press announcement was expected shortly about a prospective town centre solution. Subsequently, it was announced that the University of the W of England was proposing a 3,000 student campus at N Star.

Old Town – The Locarno redevelopment was proceeding at last but, worryingly for Old Town, the Goddard Arms was now closed.

Science Museum

The proposed Science Museum development at Wroughton was internationally important. Funding depended on a Lottery bid for £50m, subject to a public vote on 6 December.

Canal

The Council was studying a report by Halcrow on the feasibility of routing the canal through the town centre rather than skirting the town. Cllr Bluh said that there appeared to be no technical “show stoppers”. He said English Partnerships supported the idea and its realisation was now a question of will.

Transport

Cllr Bluh spent relatively little of his time on the issue of transport developments. However, he did say that transport was the prime issue in achieving the Council’s growth agenda for the town. The Council accepted the Government’s view that Swindon should become a regional growth centre but insisted that high quality infrastructure was a prerequisite. Otherwise, gridlock was a real possibility.

The Council had produced a transport vision and sought public views on it. Whilst the Council was not anti-car, alternatives were needed and he hoped that the Government would be prepared to finance these in Swindon as demonstration projects.

Reintroducing the canal to the town centre would have the beneficial effect of stopping circulatory traffic around the town centre.

Discussion

Our events usually finish with a very lively discussion between the audience and the speaker. On this occasion, there was a lengthy discussion but it largely concerned questions of detail rather than a debate about fundamentals.

Future Events

We have two more events planned:

On **22 November**, we will be holding the Trust’s AGM at 7.00 pm followed at 7.45 by a talk by the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust on its project to restore the canal. This will take place at the National Trust HQ, Heelis.

On the evening of **6 December**, there will be a report on “Night Vision” a joint study conducted by the Borough Council and Civic Trust consultants of how to limit alcoholic over-indulgence in the town centre at weekends. Time and location have yet to be decided.

Suggestions for events will be welcomed by the Events Subcommittee and should be addressed to john.monniot@gmail.com.

Your Committee

A new SCT committee will be elected at the AGM on 22 November. The existing committee is composed entirely of founder members and is now somewhat depleted. We urgently need new blood and ideas. **There is a very real danger that the Trust will become moribund unless new people get involved in taking it forward.**

If you feel you could make a contribution please contact info@swindoncivictrust.org.uk. If you don’t want to make the formal commitment of becoming a trustee initially, you can be co-opted to the committee on a trial basis.

UPDATE ON THE FRONT GARDEN DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

By the Front Garden Action Group
(August 2007)

The detailed "Design Code" for the first of the three proposed villages (East Wichel) was agreed by the council on 9 January 2007, subject to some further discussion with the developers on some points including climate change measures. Design Codes for the other two villages (Middle and West Wichel) will be submitted to the council in about October 2007. Once Design Codes are agreed detailed planning applications can be submitted, and these are then subject to public consultation before the council consider them. Applications will be received from various developers, and may cover about 15 – 50 dwellings at a time over a two year period, so the public will need to be very keen eyed and efficient to note each application and comment by the various deadline dates!

The first seven detailed planning applications for plots 3,4,7,10, 13, 33 and 34 in East Wichel covering 171 dwellings, were registered in August and can now be seen at Premier House. If you have any comments on them please write to the Planning Officer, SBC with a copy to FRAG as soon as possible.

Meanwhile applications have been approved for the approach roads leading from Croft Road and from Red Posts Drive. No approval has yet been given for the Southern Relief Road M4 tunnel route as this has not yet been agreed by Wiltshire County Council. It is also the subject of many objections from various organisations and authorities. A route under or over the railway onto Great Western Way has been suggested instead as that would be a true relief road and would

avoid Junction 16 and approach roads to Wroughton.

The Front Garden Action Group have continued to raise several contentious issues with the developers and the council including:

- The inadequate width of internal roads which, at 4.8 metres or less, will not permit passing of heavy vehicles such as fire engines, refuse lorries, furniture vans, etc., any two of which can be between 5.57 and 6 metres wide.
- Disappointing targets for climate change measures. Only 5% of dwellings (about 225 out of 4,500) will be to an "excellent" ECO standard.
- Wildlife protection has been largely ignored. For instance the regulation 500 metres foraging zones for the six remaining great crested newt ponds have been cut in most cases to only 50-100 metres. The council and English Nature have been asked to follow this up.
- The likelihood of increased flooding, due to climate change and intense development, has been all too readily dismissed. The extensive flooding on 20/21 July should cause the council and developers to reassess the dangers, and stop building on flood risk areas.
- Health dangers, due to ingestion of fine particulates from motorway traffic, have recently been highlighted in two studies and are being taken seriously by central government and medical authorities. FRAG have recommended to the council and PCT that the 3 primary

school locations be moved to at least 500 metres away from the M4, and that this problem be considered in all future planning applications.

FRAG continues to monitor every stage of the proposed development. We encourage the public to maintain a close interest. Any comments or suggestions will be welcomed by the 12 strong FRAG committee and should also be given in writing to local councillors or the Leader of the council.

Our website is www.swindon.org.uk/frag and our contact telephone number is 01793 487154.

The Richard Jefferies House and Museum

The Museum is now only open on the second Wednesday of the month from 10am to 4pm until the new Spring season.

Anyone who can help in the gardens will be more than welcome. Please contact Jean Saunders on 783040 or e-mail jeanadsaunders@tiscali.co.uk

Credit Unions now available to everyone in Swindon area

People living or working anywhere within the Borough of Swindon can now benefit from the services of a Credit Union. Expanding the common bonds of both Clivey & Steam Ahead Credit Unions in Swindon has been made possible thanks to Co-operative Futures.

Credit Unions are financial co-operatives providing ethical savings and affordable loans. It costs £1 to join and after saving regularly for a qualifying period, you could apply for a small loan on which the interest is fixed at 12.68%. That's the difference that Credit Unions make; as there are only a few places that you can borrow only a small amount from. Most banks and financial institutions offer much larger loans secured against property.

Julie Allen, Co-operative Futures Credit Union Worker told us "To people without access to mainstream banking services, Credit Unions are a lifeline. Being able to borrow a small amount, just enough to fix the car for instance, means that people are in control of their debt.

"People save for a variety of things; weddings, holidays, car repairs, home improvements, we've even got one member who saves with the Credit Union so he can have a new pair of fashionable spectacles each year!"

The Swindon based Credit Unions are inviting people to join and become involved. "We always welcome new members and volunteers, and we are especially interested in getting some new collection points in the villages around Swindon."

More information can be found on www.swindoncreditunions.co.uk or telephone 01793 848899

SAVE COATE BATTLE RAGES ON

By Jean Saunders

Jefferies Land Conservation Trust

www.jefferiesland.org.uk

In August 2007 Persimmon Homes and Redrow Homes submitted new planning applications for the Coate site despite the loss of support from the University of Bath and the Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust. The Trust are making their own arrangements to expand the Great Western Hospital at Commonhead whilst Swindon Borough Council are pushing for a university campus in the town centre. No other university is interested in Coate.

The current Swindon Local Plan policy (DS3) for Coate calls for up to 1800 houses, at least 60 hectares of land for a university campus and up to 23 hectares of offices. The policy was written to accommodate the University of Bath's wishes. The new planning application for Coate includes 1800 houses, about 44 hectares for the university and a 14-hectare business park.

The truth of the matter is that building works are highly constrained by the existence of many important environmental features at Coate and Badbury Wick whilst a recent archaeological study has revealed that there are even more "no go" areas than previously detected. As a result, the house-builders are showing their true colours - the new proposals are nothing more than another HOUSING ESTATE for Swindon. From Coate Water, the developers offer you glimpses of the countryside between the buildings. How generous!

The Save Coate! battle is not yet won. Swindon Borough Council has stated most emphatically - NO UNIVERSITY - NO HOUSES. But Redrow and

Persimmon Homes will try every trick in the book to push through their proposal.

33,000 people have signed a petition asking for a substantial buffer of countryside to be left around Coate Water to protect its national designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, to protect its wildlife and to safeguard the views to and from Liddington Hill and the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Moreover it is a landscape treasured by Victorian nature writer, Richard Jefferies (1848-87) born at Coate, who drew inspiration from it.

The Jefferies Land Conservation Trust seeks to acquire the proposed development area, particularly around Coate Water, in order to enhance the nature reserve and to keep Coate Water as a COUNTRY park.

Take Action Now

Write to Ian Halsall, Planning Department,* Swindon Borough Council, Premier House, Station Road, Swindon SN1 1TZ stating why you object to development next to Coate Water Country Park. Quote reference number SO7/1688-1689 (see opposite page).

**The deadline for objections
is 30 October 2007.**

Letter of objection to new planning applications

Mr Ian Halsall
Planning Department
Swindon Borough Council
Premier House
Station Road
Swindon SN1 1TZ
e-mail address: sbcddc@swindon.gov.uk

Objection to outline planning applications SO7\1688 & SO7\1689 - Swindon Gateway proposal for land at Coate.

Dear Mr Halsall,

I wish to lodge a formal objection to the outline planning applications submitted by Persimmon Homes and Redrow Homes to build 1,800 houses, a university campus including accommodation for students, offices and community facilities on countryside at Coate and Badbury Wick.

Whilst I appreciate that land at Coate has been allocated in the Swindon Local Plan for mixed-use development incorporating a university campus, the policy was drawn up to meet the needs of the University of Bath who are no longer interested in developing the site. As no new university partner has come forward, it is premature to consider the planning application given that the elements of the proposals must relate to each other and cannot proceed until the requirements of any future university partner, if any, are met. Currently, the planning applications conflict with Swindon Local Plan policy DS3 and should be refused planning permission.

The planning applications also conflict with many other requirements of policy DS3.

The rural views out of Coate Water Country Park have not been respected offering glimpses of countryside between the buildings is not in the spirit of the policy.

The height and layout of buildings do not respect the views from the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, particularly those in the business park, and do not provide a soft urban edge to Swindon.

The provision of at least 60 hectares of land for a university campus has not been met (DS3a) - there is barely 44 hectares of land set aside for a campus. The land allocated for the university campus falls within the area that Natural England believe should be protected and enhanced to secure the conservation value of Coate Water Site of Special Scientific Interest. The proposed buildings next to Coate Water nature reserve are too close, too concentrated and too high.

Whilst the policy calls for the provision of up to 1800 houses, this was conditional on there being sufficient land suitable and available for development. This is clearly not the case given that a buffer of at least 300m is required at the north- east boundary of Coate Water to protect the rural setting of the Country Park and archaeological features whilst the old landfill site is also proposed for house-building contrary to government planning guidance.

The setting of the listed buildings in the area has not been considered. These include the Richard Jefferies Museum, Day House Farm and the milestone along the old Coate lane - all have Grade II listing and their rural setting is also important given the context of their importance to Richard Jefferies' writing. Indeed, there has been no environmental impact assessment of the proposals on the literary landscape value of Jefferies Land - a unique feature in Swindon that has been grossly under-rated by both the borough council and the developers.

The transport infrastructure is inadequate to cope with the increased traffic that would pour out onto Marlborough Road. The residents of Coate should not be forced to live on a plot of land that acts as a roundabout. The underpass at Coate roundabout regularly floods - the sewage infrastructure is already inadequate whilst any increase in flow in the Dorcan Brook and the River Cole will increase flooding incidents elsewhere.

Day House Lane is regularly flooded as are the fields to the south-east of Coate Water.

This area of Swindon is very special to me and should be protected at all costs. With the pressures on Swindon to get bigger, this last remnant of local countryside next to Coate Water, along with its historic and literary connections with Coate-born writer Richard Jefferies and the varied extensive archaeology dating back to the early Bronze Age, is even more valuable as an educational and recreational facility than ever before.

The buffer proposed around the Country Park, is insufficient to protect and enhance the wildlife interest of the Coate Water Site of Special Scientific Interest and the rural landscape setting of the park. It is too narrow to be of any value and there is no indication that building work will be delayed for several years until after newly created habitats have had an opportunity to mature. In some places there is no buffer proposed - merely a row of trees that will ultimately block out the treasured views from Coate Water across to Liddington Hill and the Downs.

The scale, nature and location of the different elements of the proposed development will reduce wildlife movement, drastically reduce feeding areas and habitats for protected species such as hares, badgers, bats, otters and endangered birds both within and outside the nature reserves. Human intrusion and predation from household pets could further destroy the wildlife value of the area forever.

The impact of the buildings on the landscape will be indescribably awful and totally unacceptable. The new hospital - one kilometre from Coate Water - has been a good marker to show just how badly a modern building can ruin the views from the Downs and Coate Water.

The university campus should be located in the town centre near the railway station as originally proposed. There is already provision to build thousands more houses whilst empty industrial units and offices litter the Borough. We don't need more.

Coate Water is my favourite place in Swindon. Its value to the town is beyond price. Please refuse planning permission and protect this area for future generations to enjoy as much as I have.

Please keep me informed about any decision that is taken.
Yours sincerely,

M4 TUNNEL CONTROVERSY - CONTINUING DEBATE

By Charmian Spickernell. CPRE
(August 2007)

When the Front Garden was originally put into the Structure Plan, one of the factors that caused the Inspectors to recommend it over land to the east of the A419 was that it would bring forward the Southern Relief Road crossing the railway.

When the planning application came in, instead of the rail crossing, it proposed the tunnel under the M4. This was before the new access road for the Front Garden was in the development plan.

The tunnel route provides a new road into the principal urban area of Swindon, with direct links to the motorway. It is already proposed to use this road for traffic to the Park and Ride in the Front Garden and thence by bus along Hay Lane to the Science Museum. This, and through traffic from east Swindon, would add considerably to the traffic generated by the Front Garden development.

In these days of climate change and the need to reduce CO2 emissions, the tunnel would generate many more long-distance journeys and longer local journeys. Traffic from the Front Garden wanting to access north and west Swindon would have to travel through the tunnel and through Junction 16.

There are safety problems with the contra-flow proposed at Junction 16.

There are also problems with congestion on local roads and the provision of cycle and pedestrian routes on the Junction.

Cycle and pedestrian routes and a link with Swindon could be provided with a much-needed rail crossing.

The Highway Authorities have not yet found that the changes proposed for M4 Junction 16 (with a contra-flow) will meet Condition 99.

If this Condition cannot be met, it will follow that the tunnel route will not work. Indeed, the whole development could be back to square one. There is a lot of push from the developers to find that the Condition can be met but so far the Highways Agency and Wiltshire County Council are holding out, we think for good reason.

Condition 99 of the Outline Planning Application for the Front Garden states:

'No dwellings shall be occupied until details of the proposed alterations at Junction 16, and improvements to the B4005 Hay Lane and Wharf Road have been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Highways Agency, Wiltshire County Council and Swindon Borough Council as highway authorities. Such details will need to ensure that the proposed alterations are safe and legible for all road users, and will need to incorporate specific features to facilitate use by public transport, pedestrians, vulnerable users and cyclists. These features shall be provided with appropriate street furniture, lighting, traffic signal control equipment, signage and road markings. Such works shall be provided with environmental mitigation measures as agreed with the Local Planning authority in consultation with the relevant Highway Authorities. For the avoidance of doubt, the details illustrated on the submitted plans shall not be taken as agreed and any amendments shall be carried out in accordance with the latest technical requirements as set out in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges or other standards and technical requirements considered appropriate by the Highways Agency.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to ensure that the operation of the junction is safe and not impaired by the additional traffic generated by the development.'

How you can help?

Voice concerns to your own Borough Councillor.

Write a letter to the Swindon Advertiser.

Because of public concern, Wiltshire County Council have taken delegated powers back from the officers and the Cabinet will consider it. The date of their meeting has slipped from 25 September to **30 October**. Perhaps Swindon Borough Council can also be persuaded to take the matter back to their Cabinet or Planning Committee?

There are detailed applications in for housing at East Wichel. This seems to be a good time to raise the issue of Condition 99 and future transport planning for Swindon?

If the university goes to North Star, how good it would be to have a rail crossing.

For further information, please contact Charmian Spickernell - 01672 562742 (cspickernell@aol.com)

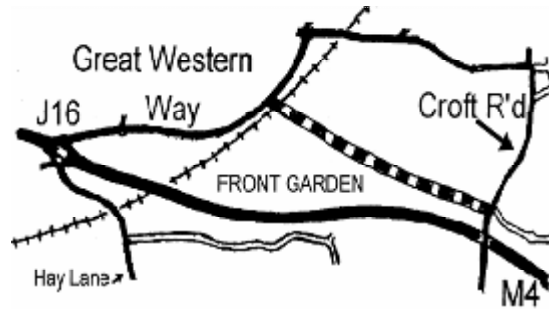
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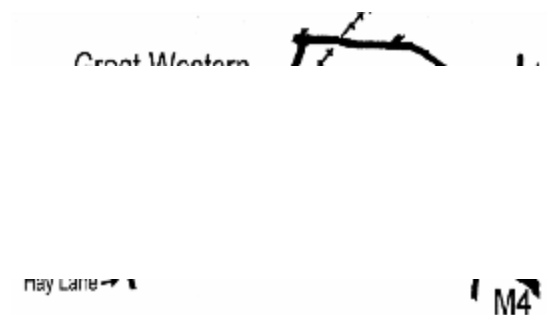
One road begins and ends in Swindon, connecting the Front Garden with the town.

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 (crossing the railway)



Croft Road to Hay Lane Link (tunnel under the M4)



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 2008 if you have paid your subscriptions for
the year 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008)

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 / Renewal

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 (deleted 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

Gift Aid Declaration

The Swindon Civic Trust is a registered charity and if you are a taxpayer 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 February 2008 and the deadline for submissions is 31 December 2007. 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.