

Appendix 1 – Petition Wording

Swindon has dilapidated historical buildings which are falling into wrack and ruin. Insufficient commitment to their restoration and continued use has been made by Swindon Borough Council, despite its apparent priorities. It is unacceptable, then, that a new-build Art Gallery and Museum costing £22 - 25 million has been designed, with a £10 million application made to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Swindon Borough Council has committed £5 million plus the £2 million cost of the land. This museum and gallery could be better placed in the old GWR Carriage Works.

The Heritage Lottery Fund needs to know that the proposal they're being asked to support is historically unsympathetic and does not enjoy wide public support. Swindon certainly needs a bigger Museum and Art Gallery to house its impressive and extensive collection of art, but this could be more appropriately done by restoring buildings already important to Swindon's heritage. For example, the 1870 listed Carriage Works on London Road could easily serve this purpose. The nearby Mechanics' Institute could thus be a complementary cultural and theatre facility, as detailed in recent plans released by the Mechanics' Institute Trust.

The location of both the Carriage Works and Mechanics' institute is ideal. There is ample parking available near to both, and the proximity to The Steam Museum, the Outlet Village, Milton Road Baths and the Town Centre make it an ideal location. The Carriage Works is also clearly visible from the train line and from the Mechanics' Institute. It is also nearer artery roads, the train and bus stations than the new-build site. The Carriage Works has a courtyard space facing the train line for sculptures and signage to really show off Swindon's cultural offerings to passers-by. It is notable that this area is exactly the area that Swindon Borough Council was recommended to make a cultural area in a study SBC paid over £70k for in 2006.

Insufficient expert and wider consultation was taken before the new-build in a cramped former car-park near to the Civic Offices was decided upon. The claims that this new-build enjoys public support, as made in the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, are unsubstantiated, as are the projected footfall figures of 90,000 people per annum. Only four location options - including the Mechanics' Institute - were presented for consideration, and the Carriage Works was not even considered! This omission is bewildering as the Carriage Works are now owned by SBC. Also, Forward Swindon - a Swindon Council funded body - has just released outline plans for the Carriage Works and clear examples of how the building could be self-sustaining. The Forward Swindon plans include the Carriage Works use as an arts area which seem to contradict the idea of Swindon's planned 'Art Quarter' in the new-build area. We ask that the new-build plans be abandoned and that more concerted efforts are made to create a new Swindon Art Gallery and Museum in a more historically-appropriate location.