

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

Author:	Cabinet Member for the Town Centre, Culture and Heritage Director of Economy, Growth and Place
Wards:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress being made on the Cultural Quarter feasibility study and makes recommendations for taking the project forward. The report also makes recommendations on the location of cultural assets to maximise the social and economic benefit of the project.
- 1.2 The Council recognises that Swindon's cultural assets, such as the Wyvern Theatre, are reaching the end of their operational life and cultural audiences and producers need new facilities to thrive. This sits against a backdrop of significant change happening in high streets and town centres across the country, both pre and post pandemic, impacting footfall and thus the viability of retail led centres.
- 1.3 This report details how investment in Swindon's cultural offer represents an opportunity to address these challenges by driving footfall in the town centre and allowing other amenities and businesses to prosper.
- 1.4 The report proposes a portfolio of four cultural projects: a new theatre, a renewed Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, Media Production Centre and Dance Centre to enhance cultural provision in the town centre and support its renewal, delivering substantial economic, cultural and social outcomes. Their realisation will involve significant investment from a number of sources.
- 1.5 This project addresses Pledge 15 of the Swindon Borough Council Pledges which states that: The Council is committed to safeguarding Swindon's heritage and making the best use of our assets by working to secure a viable and sustainable future for our key heritage assets.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the preferred approach of pursuing four cultural projects consisting of a new theatre, a renewed Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, Media Production Centre and Dance Centre as set out in the Feasibility Study and 3.25 in the main body of the report to enhance cultural provision in the town centre.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Samuel Rackham, Direct Dial Telephone Number: 07970205646, SRackham@swindon.gov.uk.

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

- 2.2 Approve the preferred location of the new cultural quarter offer to be Kimmerfields, a mixed-use area of office, residential and culture.
- 2.3 Approve the preferred option for a new build theatre rather than a refurbishment of the existing Wyvern Theatre as set out in the Feasibility Study.
- 2.4 Approve the delivery of an Investment Prospectus by March 2021 to set out potential funding options as detailed at 3.43
- 2.5 Approve that the Swindon Museum & Art Gallery remains closed until social distancing is no longer required and that re-provision options are developed during the time that it is closed, noting that this is whilst work on the longer-term potential for relocation to a new venue is pursued.
- 2.6 Approve work on a masterplanning exercise for Princes Street

3. Detail

Background

Town Centre

- 3.1 The town centre has experienced the recent wide ranging changes to retail and while footfall held up compared to other locations, spend has reduced over time. These issues have intensified as coronavirus restrictions have accelerated trends towards online shopping, reducing footfall and affecting the vitality of high streets up and down the country. Swindon has a largely mono-use town centre focussed on retail, which limits its operational hours and ability to adapt.
- 3.2 A long-term strategy is required to help the town centre recover, making it an attractive place to live, invest, work and play.
- 3.3 The Council is working with key landowners and stakeholders including owners of The Parade and The Brunel Centre, to consider how best to contract and evolve the town centre. It is important to recognise that the Council is a minority landowner with over 95% of the retail heart of the town centre in private ownership. The Council can only enable, influence and support major landowners in their endeavours to sustain viable centres.
- 3.4 There is a clear set of projects and activities being delivered in the town centre over the next 10 years. These include developments such as the proposed Premier Inn hotel at Aspen House, the recent securing of Signal Point by Network Rail and Zurich's new flagship offices at Kimmerfields, the first new office development in 20 years. This will help build a market for a broader range of town centre business, many of them based on experience and leisure as opposed to shopping.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Samuel Rackham, Direct Dial Telephone Number: 07970205646, SRackham@swindon.gov.uk.

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

- 3.5 Furthermore, the Local Plan Review signals to the market that areas of secondary retail, such as Bridge Street and Fleet Street should change to residential to provide much needed housing and new town centre communities. S215 enforcement notices were prepared for a dozen properties which are negatively affecting public amenity and perception of this area and these will be progressed when possible due to the Covid pandemic.
- 3.6 The Cabinet member has been clear that the Council must continue to focus its limited resources and investment on fewer, impactful developments, which can stimulate future private sector interest, investment and demonstrate momentum on regeneration.
- 3.7 The area around the railway station has emerged as an 'arc of opportunity', an area of investment potential across both the public and private sector which could provide a critical mass of change and investment.
- 3.8 Appendix 2 demonstrates how this investment in the town centre radiates out from the railway station, and indicates a transformational opportunity to build on the momentum and change happening in the town centre by incorporating culture at Kimmerfields, the town centre's flagship mixed-use regeneration scheme.
- 3.9 Kimmerfields is a strategically important regeneration scheme for Swindon town centre, delivering up to 450 homes and new office space. It supports the wider ambition of the Council to develop Swindon into a vibrant, modern place that is fit for purposeful growth with excellent access to the town's heritage and green space at its heart.
- 3.10 In March 2020, the Council purchased land owned at Kimmerfields by Homes England. This means that for the first time Kimmerfields is in single ownership and this provides a number of new opportunities to progress regeneration.
- 3.11 Zurich have started work on their flagship new office at Kimmerfields, set for occupation from summer 2022. We also expect an announcement shortly on Future High Streets funding for the Fleming Way Bus Boulevard, building on our investment at Wellington Street in 2019. Network Rail have regained possession of Signal Point, Hampton by Hilton have completed works to the Paragon Laundry listed building and leaseholders First Investments have invested in the Tri Centre to create an attractive commercial offer based around Newbridge Square.
- 3.12 Kimmerfields provides easy access to The Outlet Village and Swindon's Railway Heritage Area, which through the Heritage Action Zone the Council is working with Historic England and other partners to regenerate. Projects include investment in the Health Hydro, the Carriage Works and finding a viable new use for the Mechanics Institute, one of the most important cultural assets of the town. The Cultural Heritage Institute by Royal Agricultural University completed in September and plans are progressing to

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Samuel Rackham, Direct Dial Telephone Number: 07970205646, SRackham@swindon.gov.uk.

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

deliver the remaining London Road units by early 2022 following a successful bid to the Getting Building Fund by MHCLG.

Culture

- 3.13 Culture is a powerful force in creating a strong identity and sense of place. Major cities such as Liverpool, Sheffield, Birmingham, but also more provincial cities such as Leicester and Derby, have all drawn on their unique culture and heritage to recapture the city's civic pride and to help drive regeneration.
- 3.14 The most accessible and vibrant parts of any town are their centres. It is appropriate that Swindon Town Centre should provide the cultural focus of Swindon. Swindon Town Centre has a number of cultural assets but currently these assets are not complementing each other.
- 3.15 The adopted Town Centre Masterplan (2013) identified Princes Street as the location for a new cultural quarter.
- 3.16 Following the unsuccessful Heritage Lottery Fund bids for the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery in 2015 and 2018, it was important to reset and harness the broad range of cultural stakeholders within Swindon to establish our future ambitions.
- 3.17 March 2019 Cabinet report. SWLEP funding was made available to fund feasibility for culture in Swindon, for which the Council is thankful.
- 3.18 In January 2020, Swindon Borough Council convened an Advisory Group comprising funding bodies, cultural community leaders, local private sector stakeholders and National Portfolio Organisations. (A full list can be found at Appendix 3).
- 3.19 Harnessing the experience and passion of those active in the cultural community in Swindon will be essential in shaping a cultural provision that will be sustainable in the long term as well as being inclusive, accessible and commercial. The Advisory Group have been hugely supportive and informative throughout the process so far and will continue to play an active role as detailed plans are developed.
- 3.20 Swindon's cultural assets require a clear strategy for investment. Utilising the funding provided by the LEP, the Council commissioned a Cultural Quarter feasibility study. This was carried out by cultural experts David Clarke Consulting and a multidisciplinary team of architects, theatre designers and cost consultants, and it proposes a flexible offering that combines public space, workplace and residential neighbourhoods focussed around a cultural hub at Kimmerfields.
- 3.21 In order to complement the critical mass of investment outlined above, architects and masterplanners identified the opportunity to combine our cultural aspirations with our commitment to pursue new residential and office development at Kimmerfields. By

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Samuel Rackham, Direct Dial Telephone Number: 07970205646, SRackham@swindon.gov.uk.

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

relocating the theatre to Kimmerfields, creating a new home for the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery and the potential to provide a new Media and Arts Centre and Dance Centre, it will transform the centre of Swindon whilst improving connections across the town and creating a dramatically enhanced gateway to the town centre from the station.

- 3.22 The Swindon Town Deal Board has signalled to government through its Town Investment Plan that culture is a vital part of our town centre vision. Investment here will complement wider investment in the area producing a positive transformation and perception shift. This investment includes, but is not limited to, the Future High Streets Fund, Towns Fund and Getting Building Fund.

Feasibility Study

- 3.23 The feasibility study, supported and approved by the Advisory Group, focused on the potential and options for the creation of a new cultural quarter at the heart of the regeneration of Swindon town centre.
- 3.24 The study also researched existing provision and the views of local groups. Research and consultation revealed the existence of a vibrant version of the three-legged stool of provision (consumption, participation and production) that towns and cities seek to develop as a balanced portfolio of cultural development. For more detail on these three aspects see Appendix 1 and 5.

Building Blocks – The Four Main Projects

- 3.25 Early thinking considered a fully integrated facility with all uses under a single roof. However, the feasibility study demonstrated that with the diverse outputs and audiences of each building block, there are key benefits to treating them as individual and discrete projects to give them the best chance to be commercially efficient and sustainable. It will also be important to allow projects to move at their own pace subject to their business case development and funding availability, allowing the delivery model to remain flexible. This could accelerate the delivery of certain building blocks whilst attracting a diverse range of funding to the portfolio.
- 3.26 The feasibility report consequently identified a vision for a new cultural heart to the town based on four main projects referred to as building blocks. More detail on these building blocks can be found in Appendix 1:

New Theatre

- 3.26.1 A new theatre is required at a scale and quality befitting the town's size and ambition. The present building is poorly equipped with deteriorating condition and restricted capacity of 625 seats. There is evidenced market potential for a

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

larger capacity of c.1200 seats, which would enable much increased economic and cultural impact alongside improved operating economics.

New Dance Centre

3.26.2 A Dance Centre of national reach and renown is needed to train and engage the regions' future dancers. The current Swindon Dance building in the Town Hall does not meet need and ambition going forward with overcrowding and poor accessibility. Investment in new dance facilities is strategically desirable.

Media Production Facility

3.26.3 A new home for media, digital and arts production and consumption, will reflect the innovation that characterises Swindon. These buildings combine workspace, training and production studios for creative businesses alongside co-working and social spaces. For consumption, independent cinema and social spaces are strong drivers in UK cities and towns including Watershed in Bristol and Home in Manchester. These facilities drive day and night activity, engaging young people in consumption and personal development. This aids the retention and return of talent whilst having an economically viable operating model.

Museum and Art Gallery

3.26.4 New facilities are required to display and celebrate the town's nationally significant collection of art and its heritage. It will bring the art collection together with a regionally ambitious programme of touring and changing exhibitions. This art gallery element could be located with, or independent of, the heritage element of the current Swindon Museum & Art Gallery and would be an extension of the well-received 'Art on Tour' programme.

- 3.27 The feasibility study considered how these building blocks could be located in the town centre. The Town Centre Masterplan (2013) identified Princes Street as the location for a new cultural quarter. Following detailed exploration of the original Princes Street site and the consideration of a temporary theatre to allow transition between venues with no break in production, the project team proposed the relocation of cultural assets to Kimmerfields.
- 3.28 The Kimmerfields site can include a mix of complementary uses that can respond with greater flexibility to a changing economy for a more adaptable town centre supporting the rest of the high street. This would generate a critical mass of change in the town centre and deliver social and economic benefit to the area as a whole.
- 3.29 This location capitalises on close proximity to transport hubs such as the train station, Bus Boulevard and the Eastern and Western flyers, encouraging sustainable access to town centre amenities and driving higher footfall. The proposals provide connection

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

between the transport hubs and the town centre, revitalising shopping and surrounding residential neighbourhoods by providing active public spaces.

- 3.30 This option became possible through Council acquisition of land from Homes England in March 2020. It also benefits from infrastructure funding committed to the site through borrowing and Towns Fund grant (Cabinet report Feb 2020 refers). This concentrates Council investment in a focused area, enabling delivery of the whole site.

Cost, Funding and Economic Impact

- 3.31 The feasibility study suggests that, at today's prices, the indicative combined cost of the scheme is approximately £79m. This is inclusive of 10% contingency and exclusive of public realm and other infrastructure.

Table 1 New Museum and Art Gallery indicative costs

Building Block	Cost
New theatre (1200 Capacity)	c. £47m
Gallery/Museum	c. £6.95m
Media and Arts Facility	c. £11.25m
Dance Centre	c. £13.5m

- 3.32 The feasibility conducted to date provides evidence that cultural quarter development delivers excellent value for money in the context of the ongoing liabilities and challenges that the Council face given the extent and state of current infrastructure.
- 3.33 The Wyvern Theatre is over 50 years old and in a state of advanced physical decay with its podium facing structural issues and a limited life span. The town hall occupied by Swindon Dance has issues with both condition and accessibility. Further detail on the state of existing infrastructure can be found in Appendix 1.
- 3.34 At today's prices, refurbishment of the Wyvern theatre with no increase in capacity would cost c. £19.9m. Increasing capacity to c. 900 would cost over £28m. Both options would require closure of the Theatre for approx. 4 years to allow works to take place. Temporary theatre provision during this period at Princes Street would cost an additional £3m.
- 3.35 The feasibility study suggests significant potential economic benefit to new cultural provision based on increased spend of visitors, crew and performers, overnight stays and through procurement and production. The initial Economic Impact Appraisal

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

calculations from the study show that the four building blocks generate direct and indirect economic activity of £35m per annum with over 1,200 jobs created after allowing adjustments for displacement, deadweight, leakage and optimism bias. The new build theatre alone accounts for £20.8m of this figure. For further detail, the Economic Impact Appraisal can be found in Appendix 1. Given the potential economic and place-making benefits, this report recommends the next stage focus on the new build option.

- 3.36 Due to Covid-19, most funding systems for cultural projects and capital infrastructure are on hold. Although we expect new schemes to be announced from late 2020, funders have not been in a position to confirm what these schemes will be. However, the consultant team and the Council expect there to be a period of investment in projects that will drive economic recovery post pandemic, with the next stage of the project mapping a route to funding and delivery by March 2021.

Princes Street Site

- 3.37 With a proposed move to Kimmerfields, there is a need to address the Princes Street site, to ensure there is an alternative strategy in place for its future regeneration.
- 3.38 Early development appraisals suggest that whilst there is limited land value, there is an opportunity to create a sustainable urban community with significant regeneration and place-making benefits for the town centre. The sites proximity to the centre creates a market for local amenities and offers excellent accessibility for residents. The site would then soften the transition between neighbouring residential areas and the town centre.
- 3.39 This development proposal has the potential to attract a wide range of demographics through a diverse housing offer. A focus on quality of development is paramount in such a prominent location.

Apsley House

- 3.40 Given the challenges and complexities the physical space which the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery operates within at Apsley House, it is recommended that the venue remains closed until social distancing is no longer required. At Apsley House, we are not able to put in the required measures to ensure the wellbeing of staff and visitors due to the limitations of the building. It is recommended that officers look at alternative forms of delivery for the Swindon Museum & Art Gallery, which include relocation or re-provision options during the time that it is closed to ensure accessibility to the Swindon Collection. As part of the re-provision we would continue to deliver 'Art on Tour', and a similar form for the Museum collections 'Museums without Walls', which could include a relocation and community exhibition options, and that officers work on the longer term potential for relocation detailed in this report.

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

Next stages

- 3.41 Work streams up to March 2021 will progress projects individually through specialist working groups (involving key cultural stakeholders). The main deliverable of this next stage of work will be an 'Investment Prospectus'.
- 3.42 The Prospectus will determine ownership, partnership options and potential funding sources for each of the four projects. It will set out the implications for procurement, governance, operation, financial viability and responsibility for the development and delivery processes.
- 3.43 Design specifications will be developed for each building block with the input of potential partners or sector advisors in order to understand the implications of the plan for buildings, sites, capital costs and development. This Prospectus will inform a future business case.
- 3.44 The Council and partner organisations will seek to secure investment necessary for these projects using the Prospectus.
- 3.45 Engagement with stakeholders will continue with the Advisory Group, wider community consultation sessions and one-to-one consultations until the end of the feasibility study stage. Detailed work will be produced with the project working groups.

Timelines

- 3.46 Appendix 4 sets out the wider indicative project timeline. This indicative timeline is for guidance only and may change on development, and there remains a significant risk of Covid affecting the ability to secure positive funding decisions. The Investment Prospectus development will continue through to March 2021. Projections currently indicate that detailed design and financing development will follow up to 2023 leading to full planning applications. A procurement process for each project is estimated to take place from 2023 after financing, funding and partnership agreements have been finalised.
- 3.47 The current projects that are underway, or waiting on successful bids from Government for funding, such as the Future High Streets fund, mean that the earliest commencement on site for the Theatre is 2025. Based on similar projects, it is expected that construction of the theatre would take approximately three years leading to a projected completion in 2028.
- 3.48 There are very limited opportunities for construction of the Theatre to be accelerated but the timing means that there is a logical progression to regeneration. The bus station represents c. 20% of the developable land at Kimmerfields and construction can only

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

proceed when this Bus Station land is released, when the new Fleming Way Bus Boulevard opens.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to progress improvements to the cultural offer in Swindon. Not implementing a strategy for the long-term sustainability of Swindon's cultural offer risks compromising the cultural environment that contributes to social development and civic pride.
- 4.2 Without a planned strategy for a cultural future, the Council could be in a much weaker position when cultural assets such as the Wyvern Theatre require urgent refurbishment or replacement.
- 4.3 The Council could decide to continue to explore development options at the Princes Street site rather than Kimmerfields. For the reasons previously outlined, the Council should consider the substantial stakeholder support and significant wider regeneration benefit to the town centre of locating in Kimmerfields.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There is no requirement for additional funding as a result of the recommendations in this report. All current work is funded through existing SWLEP grant.
- 5.2 Not proceeding with the recommendations, and adopting a do minimum approach, will require Cabinet to make a decision as to whether to fund a refurbishment of the Wyvern Theatre at some point in the future.
- 5.3 Potential funding sources will be identified through the Investment Prospectus which will then be shared with funding bodies in a bid to secure grant funding. Capital funding sources will be identified as part of any future business case to Cabinet.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.4 All legal and human rights considerations have been taken into account in preparing this report and it is considered that the proposals within this report are compatible with Convention Rights. The progression of these proposals will contain legal issues which will be considered at the appropriate time.

Climate Change Impact

- 5.5 This report is a strategy and there is no direct Climate Change impact. Officers will work through the requirements to mitigate any adverse carbon impact as proposals are developed.

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.6 The recommendations in this report support the long-term redevelopment of a key part of Swindon's Town Centre and are intended to provide a focus for an enhanced and up to date cultural and civic offer. A new theatre, dance centre and home for museum and art gallery will ensure their long-term sustainability and viability.
- 5.7 It is not anticipated that the recommendations in this report would have any significant impact on staff, health, rural issues or crime and disorder.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.8 Diversity issues have been considered in the options work that has informed this report. A DIA is available on request to support the recommendations of this Report.

Risk Management

- 5.9 By planning for future cultural development, the Council is ensuring physical infrastructure is delivered in a manner that is affordable to the public purse.
- 5.10 A Risk Register has been prepared for the project, which ensures that all risks are appropriately managed through the delivery process in line with Council objectives.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Feasibility Study has been subject to regular engagement with stakeholders with the Advisory Group monitoring, steering and providing approvals where necessary. The Advisory Group has given unanimous approval for the relocation of cultural assets to Kimmerfields.
- 6.2 The adopted Town Centre Masterplan identifies the potential for the development of a cultural quarter. The Town Centre Masterplan was subject to wide ranging public consultation, and adoption by the Planning Committee.
- 6.3 The Corporate Director of Finance and Assets (s151 officer) and Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 Swindon Cultural Quarter – Towards a Vision and Business Case (Feasibility Study)
- 7.2 Planning Swindon Together - A Masterplan for the Town Centre (March 2013)

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Swindon Cultural Quarter – Towards a Vision and Business Case (Feasibility Study)

The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Cabinet

Date: 21st October 2020

8.2 Appendix 2 – Swindon Town Centre Development Opportunities

8.3 Appendix 3 – Advisory Group Members

8.4 Appendix 4 – Proposed Project Development Programme

8.5 Appendix 5 - Towards a Vision and Business Case (Feasibility Study) - Appendices

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan

9.1 This is not a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for October 2020.