



SWINDON HERITAGE STRATEGY

Our heritage defines who we are, where we have come from, and shapes our view of our future. Swindon has a rich and diverse heritage, much of which is unknown and hidden from view. Whilst our rich railway heritage is well publicised and known about, few people realise that the history of human settlement in the borough can be traced back to prehistoric times and there has been human settlement here ever since.

I am delighted that this strategy has been developed to raise the profile of heritage across the town and with our communities.

Below: Medical Fund Hospital

A clearer focus on our heritage will undoubtedly have a big impact on our regeneration plans; it will provide the backbone of our identity and can help us feel pride in our towns and villages. I believe it is vital that we find new and exciting ways to fund and engage with our heritage in all its different forms, from visiting museums, to enjoying our historic parks, protecting our special buildings and places and educating our young people about the history of their town.

Councillor David Renard

*Leader, Swindon Borough Council
and Chair, One Swindon Board*



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SWINDON HERITAGE STRATEGY

The Borough of Swindon was first formed in 1900 with the joining of the Old Town and the New Town under the first Mayor of Swindon George Churchward of GWR fame. In 1974 it was designated in its current extent as the Thamesdown District of Wiltshire, and became independent of Wiltshire County Council in 1997, as a new unitary authority. It is over 230 km² in area, bordering Oxfordshire to the north-east, Gloucestershire to the north-west and Wiltshire to the south and west.

Swindon Borough covers not just the town of Swindon, but includes the surrounding countryside from the River Thames in

the north to the Marlborough Downs in the south. The Borough boundary also includes the town of Highworth and the villages of Badbury, Bishopstone, Blunsdon, Chiseldon, Hannington, Hinton Parva, Inglesham, Liddington, Lydiard Tregoze, Sevenhampton, South Marston, Stanton Fitzwarren, Stratton St Margaret, Wanborough and Wroughton.

The heritage of each of these places is important, and helps to define their individual character. Taken together it is a reflection of the wider heritage, both natural and cultural, of much of the south of England.



Far left: The Evening Star
Left: Outside the GWR Railway Works
Above: Swindon Coat of Arms



It is the industrial heritage and history of Swindon by which it is best known; synonymous in many people's minds with the pioneering engineering works of Isambard Kingdom Brunel and the Great Western Railway.

As the Alfred Williams Society puts it:

“Railways are to Swindon what the Royal Navy is to Portsmouth and shipbuilding is to Belfast”.

But this history of industrial strength has continued to be written and developed over the years, with Swindon producing everything from Garrard's record players and Supermarine Spitfires, to computer chips and superconductors.

Today, Swindon still attracts state-of-the-art engineering, with the modern car industries of Honda and BMW, plus a multitude of other industries and their award-winning sites, such as the Cellular Operations building, known locally as the “Glass Banana”, and the Renault distribution centre (*left*), used in a James Bond movie and now given Grade II* listed status by English Heritage.



Type 21 Spitfire, LA198, built in Swindon

"The historic environment is central to Swindon's cultural heritage and sense of identity, and people clearly value it greatly for this reason. Whether through its traditional building styles, street patterns, historic green spaces and landscapes, its industrial past and 20th-century buildings, heritage provides the Borough's communities with a sense of continuity and a source of distinctiveness, giving meaning and quality to the place in which we live. The historic environment is a social and economic asset and a resource for learning and enjoyment. All these considerations should ensure that the Heritage Strategy sustains the borough's heritage assets for the benefit of present and future generations."

English Heritage response to Swindon Core Strategy and Development Plan Policies.



Lydiard House, Swindon

This is the first ever Heritage Strategy for Swindon. It recognises that responsibility for understanding and enhancing our heritage is shared by many different groups that have a valid interest, as well as by the Swindon Borough Council, English Heritage and Natural England, with their statutory responsibilities, and heritage bodies such as the National Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Indeed, the care and enhancement of the heritage of Swindon is a matter of interest and concern not just to Swindon residents, but also to those who work in Swindon but live beyond its boundaries, visitors to the Borough, and professional and business communities who appreciate the benefits to the public realm that flow from the inward investment that heritage can provide. The desire to communicate and consult with these different communities of interest and to encourage their active participation in the heritage of Swindon is one of the key drivers of this strategy.

Swindon is home to the National Trust, one of the largest conservation organisations in Europe, and to English Heritage. Additionally, the National Museum of Science and Industry has its national storage centre at Wroughton. The presence of these key organisations in the Borough provides a real opportunity for Swindon to develop a national centre of excellence in heritage services, if collaborative working arrangements can be developed, for the greater good of Swindon and the heritage sector. There are clearly significant opportunities in developing a strong partnership across these organisations as well in embracing the array of independent private and third sector heritage organisations in Swindon.

The Strategy has been developed by Swindon Heritage Board with input from key local, regional and national heritage organisations as well as different groups from across the community heritage sector in Swindon. A list of key stakeholders is given in Appendix V.



Left to right: Science Museum (and, above, one of the many artefacts stored there); English Heritage; National Trust.

VISION

“Swindon’s heritage will be celebrated and enjoyed by local communities, visitors and businesses alike. It will stimulate pride in and respect for places within the Borough, and lead to improved quality of life, enhanced sustainable development, a growing visitor economy and greater opportunities for and deeper understanding through learning and participation.”

Aims

1. To create and promote an exciting, informative and accessible heritage offer for all.
2. To establish a strong heritage sector in Swindon, developing and working in partnership.
3. To develop a greater understanding of Swindon’s Heritage, promoting its protection.

Objectives

- a. Develop a plan for a united museums offer across the borough.
- b. Develop the town’s reputation as a hub for heritage expertise with bodies such as English Heritage and the National Trust.
- c. Develop partnerships between voluntary, public and business sectors to develop the action plan.
- d. Promote Swindon as a heritage destination.
- e. Increase understanding and awareness of Swindon’s heritage for residents and visitors.
- f. Encourage the engagement of young people with Swindon’s heritage through activities and partnerships with schools and youth organisations.
- g. Promote Swindon’s heritage in development and regeneration.
- h. Create a deeper understanding of Swindon’s heritage assets, their importance, issues and ways to respond.



The definition of Heritage is everything of value that has been inherited from previous generations that we want to share today and pass on to future generations. It can include anything that contributes to a community or region's identity.

The term 'heritage' means different things to different people and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. The heritage of Swindon in all its different forms provides us with links to our past.

Whilst the value of some of our heritage is recognised and protected by being designated, be it at national or local level, much of our heritage is undesignated and requires identification, recording and additional support to ensure its protection.

A summary of the designated assets for Swindon is included at Appendix III.

The GWR Railway Village



THE HERITAGE OF SWINDON

The Strategy has not tried to draw a distinction between heritage and culture, recognising that the cultural attributes often associated with heritage, represent associated and sometimes intangible values that help to make a sense of place.

Nevertheless, the importance of Swindon's culture must not be underestimated, and needs to be identified, nurtured and encouraged. This must include the cultures of the many ethnic groups who live in and visit Swindon, as it has been since the GWR brought such a legacy of diversity to Swindon.

Part of this culture is represented by the number and diversity of voluntary heritage groups active within the Borough. This is a very positive advantage for Swindon and should be embraced to develop and contribute towards the outcomes of the Heritage Strategy. The role of local groups in decision-making is crucial and it is, again, the intention of this plan to promote that richness of experience in taking the plan forward.



Right: Mechanics' Institute
Far right, top to bottom:
Technical Schools; GWR Park;
Old Town station.

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This Strategy acknowledges the wonderful contributions of many local people, and the multitude of different events that have created Swindon's heritage. It also recognises the important collections of art, ceramics and local artefacts held in Swindon's museums and art gallery.

The Strategy also recognises the importance of Swindon's historic record, including the literary offerings of writers such as Richard Jefferies and Alfred Williams, and the eight hundred years of the borough's history captured in the archives held at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre.



Top row, left to right: the Duchess of Cornwall at Swindon's art gallery; David Murray John; Richard Jefferies; 'A Procession' by L.S. Lowry. Bottom row: Daniel Gooch; Egyptian mummy & Swindon Museum; Diana Dors; William Gosling VC; Garrards Record Player; Alfred Williams.

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Although much of our heritage requires recognition and protection to ensure that it can be carried into the future, new heritage is emerging and traditional industries such as engineering are continuing, albeit in new guises such as the motor car industry, alongside a growth in other industries such as IT and the Financial sector e.g. Intel, Allied Dunbar/Zurich Insurance and the Nationwide Building Society.

Swindon's culture is likewise growing and needs to be celebrated and developed. It is the intention of this strategy to promote opportunities for this through activities such as literary, art and music festivals, the rediscovery of historic events such as the GWR Children's Fete, Heritage Open Days, the national Festival of Archaeology, and through sporting activities. After all, Swindon Town Football Club has its own important history since it became professional in 1894.



Swindon Town FC 1910
and, opposite, the
Children's Festival in the
GWR Park



One Swindon is the primary strategic framework for Swindon. The *One Swindon* Board is made up of representatives from the voluntary, community, business and public sectors and has produced an overarching public service plan for Swindon with four priorities and an agreed set of principles (next page) that guide its development and delivery.

This strategy will adopt the same principles, and, through aligning to the overall vision, will play a key role in delivering the *One Swindon* priorities:

- 1. I like where I live**
- 2. We can all benefit from a growing economy and a better town centre**
- 3. Everyone is enjoying sports, leisure and cultural opportunities**
- 4. Living independently, protected from harm, leading healthy lives and making a positive contribution**

Bridge over the Wilts & Berks Canal in Swindon



Local and Lasting

We will focus on local and lasting benefits for communities and organisations in Swindon. We will ensure that long-term implications are fully considered in our local decision-making. We will encourage local people to get involved in decisions affecting their lives, to make the most of the opportunities available to them, and to help themselves, so they in turn can contribute to the place they live.



Stronger together

Organisations in Swindon like the Council, Police, NHS Swindon, Voluntary and Community sector are working together more effectively than ever before – but have to get even better. We are facing the most severe challenges to public sector funding in recent history and so *One Swindon* must drive joined up resource and investment decisions within and across organisations. Attention to an organisation or the public sector's role is just one piece of the puzzle though and we need to work more with businesses, communities and people in Swindon. It is the relationships between all of these contributions that will make a real difference.

Prioritisation & Leadership

One Swindon sets out our shared priorities and their delivery will require clear prioritisation and leadership in its widest sense. There are leaders in all areas of organisations in all of our communities and we must enable them to flourish. Leadership will be about being open minded, being flexible, showing humility and knowing when to let go as well as when to get involved. Collectively we need to be committed to our priorities and follow through on delivery, disciplined about how we use resources and honest at all times about the scale of the challenge.



Trust & Bravery

One Swindon signals our readiness for change. We know that bringing this about will require bravery alongside a shared and sustained commitment. Individuals, communities and organisations will need to trust each other and create a common purpose and shared endeavour. We need to open up opportunities for engagement, share our ambitions, respect our differences and build on the things that bind us together. Creativity, enterprise and the freedom to innovate must underpin the way we work.

Left: Medal presented to suffragette Edith New. Above: Road sign for Swindon's Magic Roundabout.

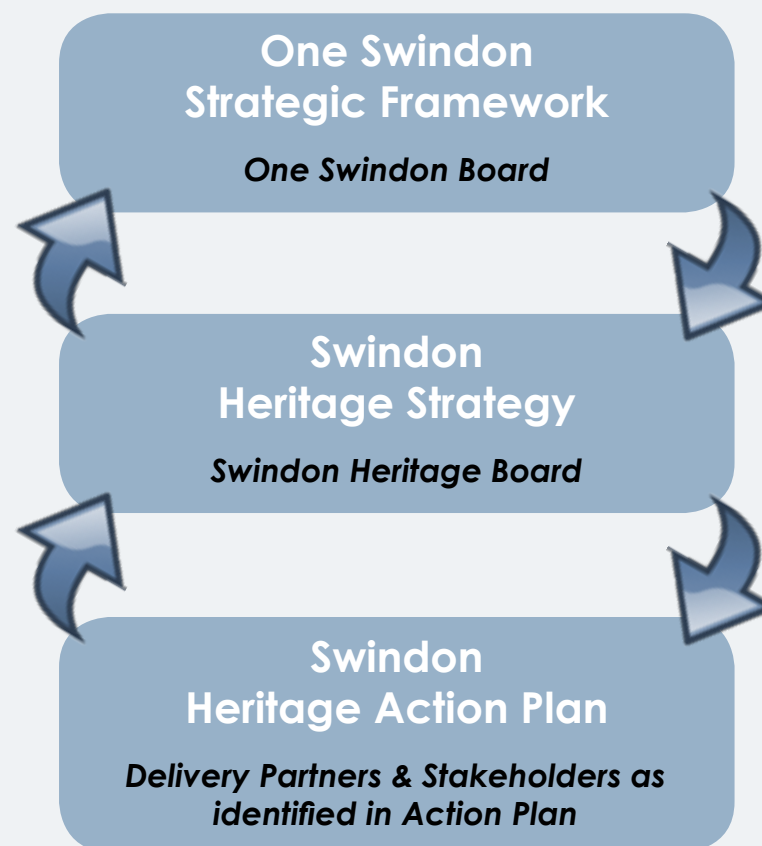
Swindon Heritage Board

The Swindon Heritage Board was established in 2010 to help steer the development of the Heritage Strategy. (Appendix VII Terms of Reference for the Heritage Board). Its membership aims to reflect the many communities of heritage interest in Swindon, with representatives of the national heritage bodies based in the Borough, Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council, Swindon and District History Network and local heritage organisations. The Board is committed to acting in an open and transparent way and will seek wide consultation on the development and implementation of this Strategy.

The Swindon Heritage Board will have responsibility for the overall development, monitoring and delivery of the Swindon Heritage Strategy and will develop stakeholder engagement plans to ensure delivery of the action plan.

The Swindon Heritage Board will report in to the *One Swindon* Board as necessary.

The Swindon Heritage Strategy will also be cross referenced to, and act as evidence for, other key documents and plans such as The Council led Local Plan, Community Infrastructure Plans, the Economic Strategy and any changes to Planning Guidance.



Strategy Review

It is anticipated that this strategy will be reviewed, revised and updated at least every three years or sooner if necessary.

The accompanying Action Plan will be continuously monitored and progress reported at the Heritage Board meetings.

Commitment to Equalities

A Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed for this strategy which is attached as Appendix IX.

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Action Plan

The Action Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Swindon Heritage Board, which will coordinate further development of the objectives and updating of the actions and involve consultation with community groups. It will continue to grow as priorities emerge.

For inclusion within the evolving action plan, projects need to be able to demonstrate that relevant criteria have been addressed:

- An appropriate project delivery team has been set up.
- An outline timetable has been prepared.
- An indication of resource requirements and where they are to be sought.
- Where Swindon Borough Council support is required, a Statement of Significance for straightforward cases has been prepared together with a Statement of Need in order to assess priorities.
- For cases that will be seeking grant support, e.g. from Heritage Lottery Fund, there will be a requirement for a Conservation Statement or a Conservation Management Plan.

Swindon skating rink



Ownership of the Swindon Heritage Strategy needs to be taken across the whole Swindon community and involve all Stakeholders through partnerships with the voluntary, public, private and business sectors.

However, Swindon Borough Council's responsibility is very considerable, with a number of key heritage assets in its ownership and operational management. These include the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, the Central Library with its important Local History Collection, the STEAM Museum and Lydiard Park and House. The Council also jointly funded the building of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, which houses the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, and continues to co-fund the service in partnership with Wiltshire Council. It also has key responsibilities to deliver benefits to all other communities of interest in Swindon.

Recent investments at STEAM and Lydiard (Park and Garden) have led to increased visitors, improved access and earned income potential. STEAM has a key role in promoting the outstanding industrial heritage of the town. Together they provide an excellent example of what investment in culture can achieve for a strong foundation on which to build a lasting heritage offer.

The Swindon Heritage Board is responsible for the development of and accountable for the Swindon Heritage Strategy, and will take responsibility for its coordination and development through the agenda of actions and timetable. It will however be essential that the Strategy is adopted by Swindon Borough Council following endorsement by the Board. Heritage initiatives identified in the Action Plan will be delivered on a project by project basis by all relevant stakeholders working together through the Swindon Heritage Board.



Local people engaged in their heritage

In addition to the initial actions identified under each objective, this strategy takes account of the following current immediate priorities for Swindon:

- Requirement to find a new home for the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery Collections.
- 'One Swindon' plan for Swindon public services.
- The ongoing financial challenge to reduce the cost of delivering services through innovation and income generation
- The rescue and future of our Heritage at Risk, such as the Mechanics Institution, needs to be urgently considered. This building offers many vital opportunities for the Heritage of Swindon and could potentially unlock other difficult issues.

As the Strategy was developed a SWOT Analysis was undertaken as part of a heritage community consultation event where representatives from across the Heritage sector came together to share ideas and develop a consensus of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities facing the sector. The analysis is included at Appendix IV.

This work identifies and recognises that there are tensions between stakeholders, given the scale of heritage requiring support and investment across the Borough, and a key to success for the delivery of the objectives within the Strategy will be how stakeholders can work together to define and support a programme of activity around our collective assets.



The Avenue at Coate Water Country Park