



Swindon+ Bridging Regions

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This is an Expression of Interest which centres on delivering increased housing numbers, greater economic growth and public service transformation, by exploring the opportunity of devolution and through further collaboration with neighbouring authorities and LEPs, whilst securing improved financial stability for the local authority.

Swindon has an ambitious Vision for growth and increased prosperity; our priorities include:

- Well managed housing growth
- Improved infrastructure for a rapidly growing city
- Developing a workforce that meets the needs of business
- Transforming public services to meet the increasing needs of a growing population

As the latest Centre for Cities report <http://www.centreforcities.org/publication/cities-outlook-2015/> highlights, we are:

- The city with the third highest population growth in the UK (more than double the national average)
- The city with the fourth highest growth in the number of businesses
- The city with the second highest growth in the number of homes
- The city with the third highest employment rate
- The city with the second highest proportion of private to public sector jobs.

Over many years, Swindon has consistently delivered high growth in terms of both housing numbers and economic output. The Council has supported this through the strength of its relationships with the private sector companies who have made their home here. This has been enhanced through our commitment to the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP), where we have successfully made our case for infrastructure investment, helping to unlock further housing and economic output.

Our recent innovative work towards a joint venture at the Wichelstowe development (up to 4,500 homes), has shown how the public sector can more effectively leverage its assets to drive positive changes in the house building market, whilst at the same time creating new income streams. We are keen to apply this capability to the UK's largest urban extension, Swindon's Eastern Villages (over 8,000 homes) and to continue to share our learning with Government. We are also committed to ensuring that, through new house building, we can continue to support elderly and vulnerable members of our community, with the greatest possible dignity and independence.

Our Expression of Interest is based around a simple premise that Swindon's continuing, sustainable growth is in the best interest of our town, region and the UK as a whole. We know there is more to do to develop our partnerships in order to turn this Expression of Interest into delivery. We see devolution as a means of helping realise our ambitions at pace and we are keen to enter into dialogue with Government on how a partnership approach can deliver our shared objectives of more and better quality development, effectively backed by a strong economy and sustainable public services.

Our ambitions and influence range beyond our LEP and administrative boundaries. Sitting at the heart of the M4 and the Bristol and Cardiff/Paddington rail links, Swindon is keen, via the SWLEP, to bring together the common interests of the West of England and Thames Valley LEPs, seamlessly bridging the economies of the South East and the South West. This will enable us collectively to leverage our combined economic power and potential in order to drive increased national and international investment.

As one of the fastest growing towns in the UK, Swindon has successfully exploited its physical location and connectivity to major urban areas particularly to the west, north and east where transport links are strong. While Swindon's position naturally bridges the South West, South East, and West Midlands regions, it is surrounded by rural countryside and naturally isolated from other large urban areas. This has hindered our ability to date to form strategic alliances with similar growing towns and cities.

Swindon is committed to the SWLEP and sees the LEP reaching out to other LEPs as critical to its future growth interests. We will work hard to develop these alliances.

We have several areas of interest which we would like to explore further:



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1. Facilitating more private sector delivered housing

Swindon's future growth will need to be across historical administrative boundaries with particular pressure to the West. Consequently we would like to develop a conversation with Wiltshire Council, to facilitate increased housing numbers as part of the Swindon and North Wiltshire economic area. Swindon's objective is to form a combined strategic planning body with Wiltshire, to accelerate housing growth and give Swindon a greater say on development around its western borders. We would also like to explore with Wiltshire the possibility of forming a jointly owned development trust, this would utilise Swindon's capability around new financial models and joint ventures to drive growth faster and better and to provide new income streams for the two authorities. A common barrier to successful, sustainable housing development is the lack of up-front investment in the local infrastructure necessary to transform a development into a community, including village and district centres. This is particularly difficult to achieve in the large-scale (4,000 + properties) greenfield expansions around Swindon, as the total cost of infrastructure is so great, that a borough-wide CIL contribution that includes these developments, cannot be justified. Enhanced New Homes Bonus payments for such developments which are few in number across the country, would give Swindon the ability to financially support early delivery of such infrastructure, promoting sustainable communities and accelerating the rate of development.

Our ask of you:

- a) Support for and authority to pursue a combined strategic planning body with key strategic partners
- b) Additional New Homes Bonus payments for large-scale, greenfield developments

Our offer in return:

Accelerated delivery of a greater number of houses and communities in Swindon's Eastern Villages and its other planned extensions. We'll bring forward Swindon's next generation of new homes, a large number of which are likely to be accommodated in strategic developments outside our boundaries.

2. Increasing public sector housing provision

Whilst we see the private sector as being the main provider of new homes, as a local authority we are keen to build more "smart" Council Houses that secure more independent living. We have identified suitable land within our ownership where this could happen. New properties will generate additional rental income, dependent on initial rent levels as well as future rent increases. However, we are currently unable to fund the initial outlay due to the HRA borrowing cap, without limiting our ability to invest in existing stock.

Additional headroom in the borrowing cap would enable more residents to share in the benefits of our on-going economic growth and have the opportunity to live in properties that best meet their individual needs. A modest raise in the HRA borrowing cap of £25m would enable us to build a further 200 council homes with an emphasis on housing for people with care and support needs.

We would also like Government to consider authorising the establishment of a municipal housing company for Swindon, which would have no borrowing constraints, giving us more flexibility in the tenure of housing developed, and protecting the HRA from on-going revenue consequences.

Our ask of you:

An increase of £25m to the HRA borrowing cap and support in discussions to develop a Municipal Housing Company (MHC)

Our offer in return:

200 additional council homes with the potential for additional mixed development on council land.

3. Local combined skills commissioning

There is strong evidence that the supply of appropriate skills is a key factor to achieving economic growth. The SWLEP area has priority sectors that are critical for further economic growth. Through our well-developed links with business, we can jointly better commission skills provision to meet the current and future needs of employers.

Through a joint commissioning approach, not only can we better target skills development, but we can ensure high quality employer led, apprenticeship programmes, as well as integrated employment, skills and health provision for more effective and efficient support for those in need.

Our ask of you:

- a) Devolution of FE and Adult Skills, Adult Community Learning Budgets and Apprenticeship Grants for Employers to the SWLEP
- b) Devolve employment programmes to enable integrated employment, skills and health provision for disadvantaged people

Our offer in return:

- a) We will seek to work with Wiltshire Council and business to develop a Joint Skills Commissioning Board to respond to the demand with intelligent brokering of supply and demand
- b) Improved employment outcomes for residents
- c) A prioritisation of apprenticeship funding to meet the demands of employers

4. Public Services Transformation

Swindon has for many years engaged with its public and private sector partners through our "One Swindon" partnership. This has been the platform upon which we have driven major public service reform, including being one of the first authorities to implement integrated commissioning with health in both children's and adult services.

It is our ambition to drive the integration of the health and social care budget further by fully pooling our collective resources by April 2017. Our record and quality of relationships, combined with our integration of Public Health, enables us to move towards deeper integration in this arena, at pace. We would also like to work with you on yet further integration of the public health function into a fully combined health and social care model, which will further reduce health inequalities, enabling more people to be fit for employment. It will also allow us to target a greater number of troubled families, reduce delayed discharges and hospital admissions and enhance community healthcare.

In response to the scarcity of qualified social care and health workers, we will develop an integrated workforce strategy with our private and public sector partners. In addition, we will develop a stronger higher education offer for potential and current social care and health workers and believe this could be an area of opportunity with other neighbouring local authorities. This would be enhanced through utilising the proximity of Bath and Bristol Universities, where we would create strong training and employment opportunities and pathways. We believe that this would provide a stronger and resilient work force to cover the full range of care services where currently we are seeing much recruitment pressure and avoidable cost.

We can better manage welfare budgets in a way that gets more people back to work, linking welfare more effectively to reducing demand on social care and the NHS, targeting welfare where it is most needed at the very vulnerable.

Our ask of you:

- a) To authorise us to expand the remit of the Health and Wellbeing Board to include welfare, with an accompanying devolution of Swindon's welfare budget to the Board, and for the H&WB to have a stronger role in providing assurance of the performance of the Clinical Commissioning Group against national and local requirements, reducing bureaucracy on the system.
- b). To support us in our attempts to achieve greater sharing of DWP data
- c). To enable us to pool CCG and Social care budgets across a wider range of services, removing the need for a an annual Better Care Fund
- d). Multi-year funding settlements for both the council, CCG and public service partners including a four year budget settlement for Swindon Borough Council and Swindon CCG for 2016-2020 (from year 2 to include primary and specialised care funding allocations).
- e) Ability to develop a local tariff and capitated budget rather than the national tariff for acute care
- f) Flexibilities in relation to procurement for health and adult social care, enabling NHS and social care to use most competent provider framework as outlined in NHS guidance .

Our offer in return:

- a) Through the utilisation of a pooled budget, this would enhance the integration of acute, community and social care across both commissioning and the provider landscape through implementing integrated provider models, leading to reductions in emergency admissions to Hospital and residential care and delayed discharges (DLOC) and reduce the costs of duplication within the system. Phase 2 would be to replicate this work across mental health services.
- b) Increase the employment of individuals with Learning Disabilities and Mental Health
- c) Through stronger linkages with Welfare and DWP, to better manage the dependency culture of benefits, through innovative health incentivisation and increased employment opportunities



5. A sustainable local authority

As a low funded, mid-size-unitary, with a large growth agenda (housing, economic, people), Swindon has embraced innovation and change for many years in order to create enough financial headroom to successfully deliver its huge agenda. Understanding and taking appropriate risk has been at the centre of our approach and we wish to explore this further with government in terms of our future funding. With continuing core funding reductions, Swindon needs to be able to generate more income in order to sustain its contribution, and as a significant exporter of business rates, we would like to look at a risk/reward approach involving a higher business rate retention in return for increased housing and economic growth.

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Our ask of you:

- a) Support our application for enterprise zones across the SWLEP area
- b) Allow us to retain a much higher proportion (currently 25%) of the business rates we collect

Our offer in return:

- a) We will significantly increase our investment in housing and commercial development that, together, enhance the Swindon economy
- b) We will forego our future entitlement to RSG

