

9. Swindon Borough Council – the Old Town Hall & Corn Exchange – joint work to bring forward a long derelict listed building in the town centre

Swindon Borough Council's role in providing vision, ambition and leadership in collaboration with Swindon Corn Exchange Limited is driving forward the transformation of a complex and problematic site in the town centre.

The Old Town Hall and Corn Exchange buildings (known locally as the Locarno), are extensively fire damaged grade II buildings on a prominent site in the centre of Old Town, Swindon.

A viable, acceptable scheme for the redevelopment of this key regeneration site had previously proved elusive. So Swindon Corn Exchange Limited and the Council leadership agreed in early meetings that a fresh approach to finding a deliverable scheme would require the active participation of both the council and developer acting together.

A working group of council planning and conservation officers, Forward Swindon Limited (the council's regeneration and economic development company), English Heritage and the prospective developer was set up. The group appointed a number of consultants to provide advice and develop options for the site.

The working group drafted a planning brief for the site taking particular account of the historic context and the recent Town Centre Masterplan. The purpose of the brief is to provide a framework and detailed guidance to ensure that a commercially sound and appropriate development can come forward, and crucially, be delivered within a reasonable timescale.

Community engagement in the development of the planning brief was actively encouraged and a public exhibition attracted widespread participation. The brief was approved by the planning committee and adopted on November 2013. It provides a key step in setting out a clear set of planning requirements for the successful development of the site and by confirming that the Council is fully supportive of the evolving process.

The delivery of a regeneration scheme on such a complex site involves land assembly, development agreements and resolution of viability issues, which are material considerations in decision making.

The next steps are already in progress, including scheme refinement, marketing and discussion with landowners to secure development agreements. Swindon Corn Exchange Limited expects to submit a detailed planning application early in 2014 and there is confidence that the project can proceed to implementation.

"I have been delighted by the proactive work of the Planning Officers in helping deliver a viable Development Brief. This is a difficult site where no-one has found a solution in 30 years, but working together, we have and secured widespread public support. Officers have been critical to its success"

Cllr Dale Heenan, Lead Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability, Swindon Borough Council