

Swindon Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Bulletin

Bulletin: Economic Strategy – Land and Infrastructure

Key Points:

- Capacity constraints on Swindon’s road and rail network pose a threat to securing sustainable growth, and are exacerbated by an over-reliance on the car for local journeys.
- Swindon needs to identify and deliver up to 100 hectares of suitable employment land by 2036.
- Over the last 5 years the council has not delivered enough houses to meet its local plan target.
- Swindon has one of the highest CO2 emissions per capita for an urban authority in the south.

A JSNA helps us to understand:

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- What we know about the current economic situation
- How the needs of Swindon’s economy are currently being met
- What we think the future needs of the economy are likely to be; and
- How future needs can be met.

The JSNA process involves many different partners and is maintained by the Economy team. Understanding Swindon’s changing population, the factors that affect economic growth, the town’s assets and the implications on future growth are vital in setting priorities and planning future services.

This JSNA is part of a suite of documents to understand the needs of businesses and residents in Swindon. It provides a brief summary of the full JSNA which is a comprehensive and detailed analysis of all aspects of the local economy.

Who is affected?

In 2015 Swindon had an estimated population of 217, 200, of which 114,000 are in employment. Employment is expected to

increase by 15,000 before 2026, and our population is expected to grow by over 40,000.

Swindon is home to 8,665 local business units and 6,985 enterprises. The borough has more than double the number, 0.7% (50), of large companies (over 250 employees) than the south west average; although the overwhelming majority of our businesses (82%) are classified as “micro” (employing less than 10 employees).

Challenges upon economic growth

Transport

Data from the 2011 Census shows that Swindon residents are more reliant upon private cars and vans to get to work (68%) than the national urban average (64%), even though a relatively high proportion (75% of our residents) work within the borough. Conversely, fewer people use public transport (9%) to travel to their place of work compared to the national urban average.

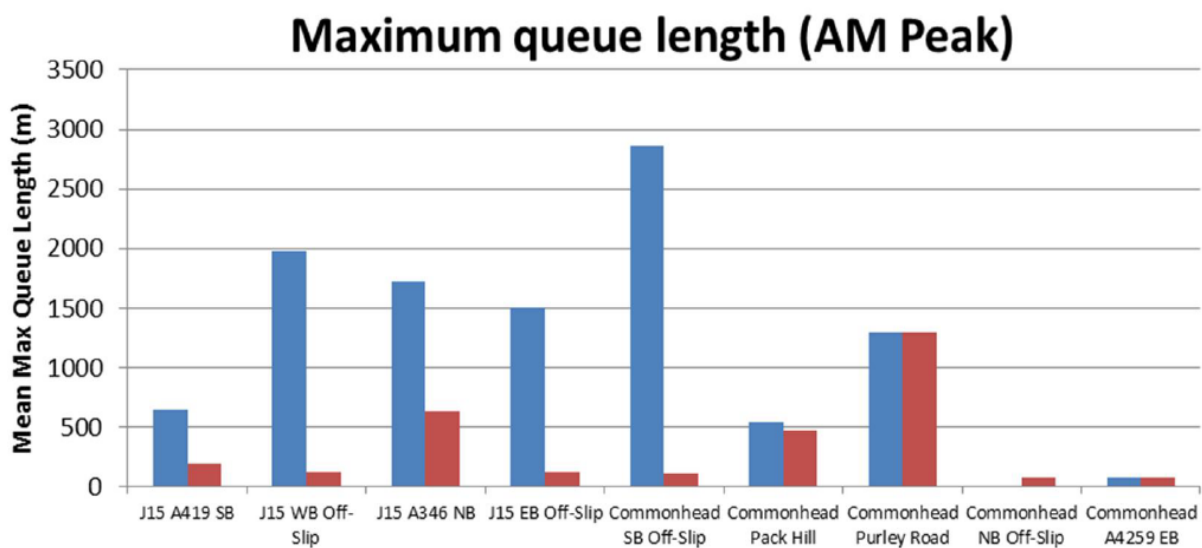
In Swindon, 68,123 residents work in the borough, 21,252 leave to work elsewhere and 20,798 people commute to work in the borough. The census also shows us that considerably more people commute from West of England LEP, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire to Swindon than from our eastern neighbours. In contrast more Swindon

residents commute to Oxfordshire and Berkshire than Gloucestershire and the West of England LEP.

Traffic data shows that many roads within Swindon are over-capacity during peak periods, especially radial routes into the town centre. This results in congestion, which can in turn reduce the reliability of local bus services making them less attractive to use, as well as contributing to poorer air quality.

The capacity issues extend beyond the urban area with the major motorway junctions

struggling to facilitate the growth that Swindon is expecting. Intervention on Junction 15 of the M4 could have the ability to reduce journey times on the south bound approach of the A419 from 1200 seconds to just over 400 seconds, which could save the commercial sector up to £100,000 a year, through travel time reductions and reduced vehicle operational costs. This is in addition to the consumer benefits also estimated to be around £100,000. The graph below is able to demonstrate the severity of current



constraints around junction 15.

Junction 16 is equally at full capacity with modelling estimating that intervention on the junction could reduce the average delay by half from 75.5 sec/pcu (per car user) to 35.5 sec/pcu. This delay would increase by 20 sec/pcu come 2026 if there was no intervention based upon current population forecasts.

Whilst Swindon currently has no declared Air Quality Management Areas, the Kingshill area has been identified as having high NOx levels that could trigger a future Air Quality Management Area declaration. Close monitoring of traffic and air quality levels is continuing at this location.

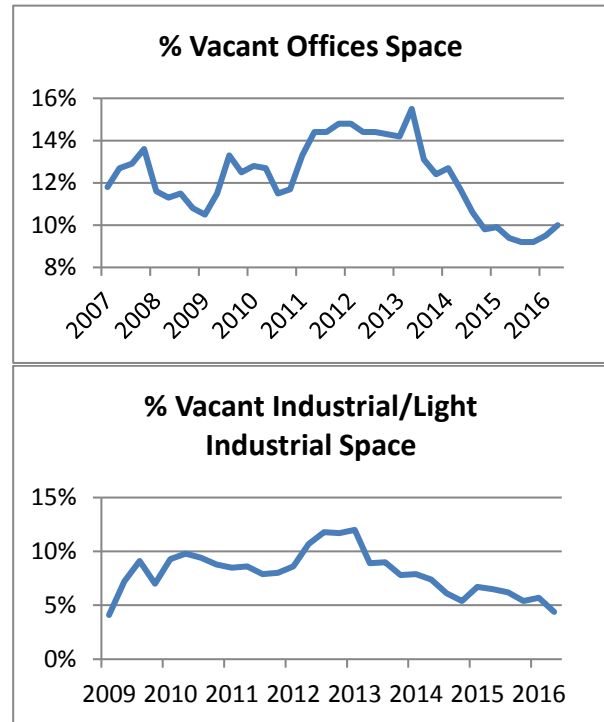
Swindon railway station is the 3rd busiest station in the south west with 3,580,540

entries and exits over 2015-16. This has increased by over a million in 10 years and the number of interchanges has almost doubled in the same time, to 242,000. The government has announced its support of a project to regenerate the rail station and its surrounding land to “maximise and enhance” the regeneration of the town centre. Network Rail is progressing the electrification of the GWR main line between London Paddington and Cardiff, meaning that Swindon will be connected to London by new electric-powered trains by the end of 2018. The outcome will reduce travel times and emissions, as well as increasing the passenger capacity of the trains. As part of the electrification, Swindon will gain an extra service to London every hour, from 4 currently to 5.

Employment Land Supply

Swindon's Employment Land Needs Assessment (2016-36) has recently been completed as part of the evidence base to influence the economic strategy and the next iteration of the local plan. This has been focused on looking at the needs of the borough's economy to 2036, ensuring that we have sufficient employment land to accommodate the needs of businesses, given our anticipated population and business growth. The review has identified the need for Swindon to allocate up to 100 hectares of new employment land. This consists of up to 50 hectares of B2 and B8 usages, 10-20 hectares of B1 usage and 30 hectares for 'other uses'.

The Swindon Office Market Review (2016) by Lovedays provides a good overview of market conditions, and reports that 2015 was the most active commercial office market in Swindon since accurate records began. There was over 226,000ft² of office take up by 2015 Q3. This reflects strong demand from both corporates and small and medium sized enterprises. Office availability in the town has reduced to around half the total at the peak of the recession and now stands at just below 600,000 ft². The lack of good quality stock is manifesting itself in a steady and sustainable increase in rents. The majority (75%) of commercial take-up is in out of town business parks which command a rent premium. Some of the sites allocated in the Local plan to 2026 are facing barriers to delivery due to a number of factors; including access to road infrastructure and general location. Despite no evidence on what a good vacancy rate is, the quality of vacant commercial properties in Swindon indicate that we need more supply.



Source: Costar

Housing Supply

The local plan of 2014 committed to unlocking land for the delivery of 22,000 houses before 2026. This averages approximately 1467 houses a year. After 5 years of its implementation the borough is behind its target by 1556 houses. When the borough fails to meet its 5 year housing supply the local plan risks challenge from developers wanting to build in locations not accounted for in the local plan. Any large housing developments that are not supported by the Local Plan pose threats to local infrastructure networks, thus existing residents and businesses.

Broadband and utilities

Data from 2017 highlights Swindon's weakness of superfast broadband coverage across the borough. Only 85% of properties in the borough had access to the higher speeds compared to a national urban authority average of 92.4%. A large portion of this failure is down to the lack of coverage to housing north of Thamesdown Drive and remote villages.

New technologies are constantly evolving from wired networks to wireless. The digital infrastructure expectations within the local economy will evolve with the technology (i.e. 5G, Ultrafast broadband), it is therefore important that over the economic strategy period new digital infrastructure is supported and installed.

Low Carbon

Swindon has one of the highest CO2 emissions per capita for an urban authority in the South at 5.7tons, this is 1.5tons higher than Bristol and Reading and 0.9tons higher than Oxford. Researchers from Stanford University estimate that the economic damage of carbon dioxide emissions is up to \$220 per ton, this can occur due to harm to human health, lower worker productivity and decreased agricultural yields, all related to climate change. This suggests that Swindon's economy could be suffering as much as \$330 per person more than Bristol or Reading.

What strategies and operations already exist?

Local Growth Funding

Growth Deals provide funds to LEPs for projects that benefit the local area and economy. Swindon has received £94m towards projects such as; infrastructure projects for New Eastern Villages, access to the Wichelstowe development, Junction 16 of the M4 and a new Bus Exchange in the Town Centre. There have been a total of 3 rounds of funding to date with more expected in the future. Other funding and strategic partners such as Highways England and Homes & Communities Agency are central to this infrastructure development.

Local Plan

The Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 is the principal planning policy document for Swindon Borough, providing the

development strategy to deliver sustainable growth to the year 2026. It sets out how much development the Borough needs and identifies where, when, and how development will take place in Swindon Borough. It also includes a set of more detailed development management policies used to assess planning applications in the Borough.

Housing Supply

The council is looking at developing municipal housing companies to develop more housing in the existing urban area. Where possible the council encourages higher density housing to maximise the use of land, where building densities have traditionally been low.

Super-fast broadband roll out

As part of the councils vision and pledge one the borough had a target of delivering 95% coverage of superfast broadband by summer 2017, this project is on track to reach its target thanks to a contract with UK Broadband.

Low carbon initiative

SBC has a corporate target of 200MW renewable energy to be generated in Swindon by 2020. The total currently stands at 167MW. The Council's wholly owned power company, Public Power Solutions, is tasked with developing solar schemes and is delivering these through a variety of innovative financial models. Work is also under way to look at various new technologies as power sources within Council assets and in the wider borough.

Bids are being developed for a number of UK and European funding streams (Innovate UK, Office for Low Emission Vehicles, European Regional Development Fund, Horizon 2020) which will support projects generating renewable energy and reducing emissions.

A review has also taken place of the Council's use of energy across its assets, and a plan is being

developed to increase efficiency whilst looking at alternative sources of energy to further reduce emissions.

A wider strategy for energy across Swindon is being developed alongside the Economic, Transport and Waste Strategies

Travel Choices

Swindon Travel Choices is a project to support the regeneration of Swindon Town Centre by promoting different travel choices to the people who work in the town centre and live in the borough. Sustainable travel initiatives undertaken locally have been shown to reduce car use and increase the amount of walking and cycling, with attendant carbon reduction benefits. A Personal Travel Plan project in West Swindon, for example, is estimated from survey data to have saved around 3.25 million kilometres of travel by car, equating to a carbon reduction of around 425 tonnes.

What do People Think?

Focus groups were conducted with the business community to discuss the overarching themes of the economic strategy. At this event Infrastructure was agreed as a headline theme.

Consultations have taken place on a variety of different projects including Broadband, the employment land review, rapid transit and more.

Recommendations

The JSNA has identified 5 strategic objectives (listed below) to be explored by the Economic Strategy to 2036 and 20 specific actions.

1. Enhance Swindon's strategic connectivity by securing investment in targeted network improvements.
 - a. Ensure delivery of the committed programme of investment in transport network improvements including the NEV and Wichelstowe Transport Packages, Town Centre Movement Strategy and Bus Exchange, Sustainable Transport schemes, and motorway junction improvements.
 - b. Work in partnership with Network Rail and GWR and other partners to deliver the Swindon Station regeneration project
 - c. Prepare the new Swindon Transport Strategy (STS) setting out the pipeline of future transport projects on the strategic and local transport networks required to deliver future growth.
 - d. Use the STS to secure resources and lobby transport network managers and service operators to deliver the pipeline of projects including influencing Highways England and Network Rail to deliver improvements on the strategic road and rail networks.
2. Improve key gateways into the town centre
 - a. Ensure delivery of the new bus exchange and traffic management proposals identified in the Movement Strategy
3. Strengthen digital connectivity
 - a. Encourage delivery of Superfast and Fibre Broadband to deliver superfast broadband coverage to 95% of commercial and domestic premises in the borough by 2017.

- b. To make a business case to present to government to establish the case for early adoption of 5G in the borough
- 4. Develop Swindon as a nationally significant player in the UK's energy sector, with particular strengths in the low carbon energy generation sector and application of hydrogen technologies.
 - a. Launch financial instruments (Bonds, ISAs) to finance local supply schemes
 - b. Develop a model for viable heat networks
 - c. Match demand and supply for solar schemes, incorporating storage solutions
 - d. Deploy low carbon combined heat and power units in residential and non-residential buildings across the borough (Target: one fuel cell CHP unit)
 - e. Develop a waste to energy solution
 - f. Develop low carbon transport solutions which provide a viable alternative to fossil fuel vehicles
- 5. Unlock high quality employment land
 - a. Complete Swindon employment land needs assessment 2016-36 study
 - b. Consult owners of industrial employment sites to establish investment need
 - c. "Call for employment sites" as part of the Local Plan to 2036
 - d. Identify and analyse historic and current market demand for employment land by use class, sector and location
 - e. Encourage landowners to intensify development on existing employment sites, and regenerate under-performing sites
- f. Construct business case for industrial site regeneration and renewal programme
 - g. Create business case to enable Swindon Borough Council to bring forward own land and acquire new land for employment uses

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the officers, stakeholders and businesses who contributed to and gave their time to help inform this needs assessment.

Where to find more information

More information about all Swindon's JSNAs can be found on the JSNA website: <http://www.swindonjsna.co.uk/>

If you have any queries (or would like to contribute to needs assessment activities in Swindon) please contact: JSNA@swindon.gov.uk

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