

RTPI Awards Entry for Carriage Works

RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence

Submission Category: Excellence in Planning Delivery

Site: Units 3B and 5B of the Carriage Works, Sheppard Street Swindon SN1 5DE

Development: Refurbishment of existing GWR carriage works for use as office space (Class B1) and associated works including partial demolition, alterations and new access from London Street

Developer: Forward Swindon Ltd

Local Planning Authority: Swindon Borough Council

Architect: Metropolitan Workshop

Planning application Reference: S/16/1806

Listed Building Consent Reference: S/LBC/16/1807

Summary

Swindon Borough Council and Forward Swindon Ltd are submitting the first phase of the carriage works redevelopment for consideration in the Excellence in Planning Delivery category.

This restoration of Units 3B and 5B is the first phase in the restoration on the Carriage Works buildings to provide business incubation, cultural and educational uses.

The first phase comprises converting an under-used Listed Building into flexible workspace.

This development is an example of how a vision for an area can be delivered on the ground, and in a way that best utilizes the distinctive opportunities of the area.

Site History

The former GWR works and nearby Railway Village contain the most significant surviving railway establishment of its time in the world and are internationally recognised as an exceptionally intact example of a planned railway development of the Victorian age.

The former Royal Commission on Historic Monuments of England (RCHME) has called the area "one of Britain's finest monuments to the early days of the railway age."

The Swindon Great Western Railway Works closed in 1986. The Railway Village and Railway works are designated as Conservation Areas in 1975 and 1987 respectively.

The Carriage Works buildings are sited in the Railway Village Conservation Area. Built around 1876 as part of Brunel's Great Western Railway, these buildings were once the largest carriage works in the country. Renovation of the Carriage Works aims to transform Brunel's legacy for use in the twenty-first century.

The planning application

This Phase 1 development occupies 1,340 sqm in area.

The application sought permission for physical alterations to the structure of the building (installation of rooflights and new cowls for ventilation) and an upgrade to the building's thermal properties to enable the building to be used for flexible workspaces. Meeting rooms and a tea/refreshment area. On land outside the building, consent was sought for a new landscaped area to provide outdoor seating and cycle storage.

The application was accompanied by a comprehensive Heritage Assessment and other supporting evidence.

At the time of submission the Carriage Works buildings were owned by Network Rail. Ownership has since transferred to Swindon Borough Council following a land swap deal.

Phase 1 of the Carriage Works regeneration was granted planning permission and listed Building Consent (Ref S/16/1806) on 3rd Feb 2017. Phase 1 of the scheme is now complete.

Development Aims

Built around 1876, as part of Brunel's Great Western Works, these buildings were once the largest carriage works in the country, standing at the very forefront of Victorian industrial innovation. The Carriage Works restoration aims to transform Brunel's legacy into the twenty-first century and beyond.

The Carriage Works will provide a home for knowledge-based businesses to base themselves in Grade-II listed buildings close to Swindon's town Centre and Rail Station.

An integral part of ambitious plans to regenerate Swindon's town centre, Carriage Works will be home to a new innovation incubator hub – a flexible managed workspace, nurturing new economy businesses.

Phase 1 is now complete and provides an attractive contemporary open plan workspaces complement a number of enclosed office spaces and meeting rooms; all served by modern facilities. The objective of the workspace is to foster a community of entrepreneurs based in Swindon who will thrive from the 'cluster-benefits' of being co-located, and having access to a wide range of existing investor networks and other businesses/agencies that provide start-up services in Swindon. Tenants can further benefit from a flexible range of options and tariffs – from co-working 'desk share' arrangements through to dedicated offices.

Additional project aims comprise:

- Re-animates an under-utilised heritage building with a strong identity on key route
- Attract more skilled workers to Swindon
- Supports local economy by driving additional footfall to the Railway Heritage Quarter
- Provide a spring board to the western side of Carriage Works

Future Plans

3 future phases are planned.

Phase 2 will see the remainder of the West Shed being redeveloped to create modern workspaces alongside a range of complementary services, within a positive 'campus' environment. The Council has reserved funding for Units 7, 9 and 11 (around 15,000-20,000 sqft), with construction works expected to commence in late 2018.

Phase 3 will deliver the refurbishment of the East Shed in order to provide around 60,000 sqft of workspace for a similar mix of businesses, tech companies, start-ups and SMEs needing affordable, flexible space in easy reach of the station, London and Bristol.

Finally, plans for phase 4 are being finalised for the upgrading of the GWR Bristol Street Tunnel, the main north-south pedestrian link between the town centre and the Outlook retail centre and Steam in order to provide sustainable accessibility for the local population and workforce.

1.0 Planning Content and Skills

1.1 High quality of professional planning work in devising solutions to key issues, barriers and problems

Project Conception

The Planning Team worked alongside the Council's regeneration arm "Forward Swindon Ltd", to prepare a "Delivery Plan" to set out how priority schemes in the Masterplan, including the carriage Works regeneration, would be delivered.

The Masterplan Delivery Plan noted that "*Assets such as the Carriage Works are incredibly significant for Swindon, and a major opportunity to redefine the Railway Heritage Quarter as a destination for culture, learning, working and living. The overriding objective is to 'get the heritage working'.*"

The Delivery Plan went on to explain that "*Restoring the Mechanics' Institute to a viable and suitable use should be a priority for this area, alongside the conversion of the Carriage Works to workspace and an 'Arts and Innovation Factory' of national significance. Such projects can powerfully promote Swindon's*

enterprising talents and celebrate its rich heritage whilst strengthening the critical mass and connectivity of this area. Expectations of Swindon will only be fulfilled when the town's internationally significant heritage quarter is perceived to be fully restored and making a dynamic contribution."

The Delivery Plan identified the restoration of this iconic engineering building to provide high quality enterprise space as a priority project. The Delivery Plan also set out a roadmap for delivery on the ground. The Town Centre Delivery Plan can be viewed at <http://forwardswindon.co.uk/delivery-plan/>

The Scheme

The first challenge to be met was the need for a land swap with Network Rail. The land swap means that the entire the carriage works site is now under the Council's ownership. This was fundamental in paving the way for present and future regeneration works.

A development team approach was employed at the pre-application stage to ensure the Council's Planning, Design, Highways, Conservation, Contaminated Land and Building Control Officers worked together to provide comprehensive and timely advice at every stage.

A range of external stakeholders, including Historic England, Network Rail and the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society were also actively engaged. In turn, the project architects, Metropolitan Workshop were able to grasp every detail of this complex scheme and meticulously worked through the design stage, to produce a high quality scheme.

The design team compiled a detailed Conservation Plan stemming from access to a well-documented site history. This provided a detailed chronology and an analysis of the significance of the assets.

This preliminary work enabled agreement to be reached by all parties on the historic assets in the building that needed to be retained. This work informed the content of the Heritage Statement, which provided a comprehensive record of the heritage features present. The Heritage Statement also noted the significance of the openness of the space and provided detailed analysis of how this openness can be retained whilst inserting mezzanines and partitions required by the new building use.

The design team – through working in partnership with the Planning Officer and Conservation Officer - has developed a scheme where the original building features of importance have been retained, whilst new installations, such as the lightweight mezzanine structure help reinvent the space for modern use.

1.2 The clear impact that planners have made to the success of the project

The Council's Planning Team has been co-ordinating the regeneration of the Railway Works area for over 20 years. Over this period the Council has been systematic in bringing forward the successful regeneration of this large expanse (21 hectares) of former Railway Works land.

The guiding principles have been to ensure that new development preserves and enhances the historic character of the former Railway Works, whilst delivering a mix of development that brings vibrancy and vitality to the area.

The regeneration of the Railway Works area is an exemplar in the benefits of taking a strategic perspective in co-ordinating regeneration.

The Central Area Action Plan (2009) is the adopted statutory development plan used to determine planning applications in Central Swindon (within which the former railway works area lies).

The Central Area Action Plan was amplified by the Town Centre Masterplan (2013), prepared by Forward Swindon in partnership with the Council's Planning Team, which identified several regeneration schemes to deliver the Central Area Action Plan.

The projects in the Town Centre Masterplan were prioritized in the Town Centre Delivery Plan (2016), which identified the Carriage Works restoration as a priority scheme.

1.3 Evidence of quality in design and place making

Regeneration of the Carriage Works is an integral part of ambitious plans to regenerate Swindon's town

centre as set out in the Central Area Action Plan (2009) and amplified in the Swindon Town Centre Masterplan (2013).

Policy CAAP18 of the Central Area Action Plan (The Railway Heritage Area) requires that *“Development proposals for the vacant plots within the Railway Works Area must be of the highest design quality. Contemporary building designs that will complement the special interest, character and appearance of the Railway Works Area will be supported. Redevelopment in the area should also seek to address features for improvement identified in the Swindon Railway Works Conservation Area Appraisal.”*

Policy CAAP18 of the Central Area Action Plan have provided the primary planning policy steer for ensuring that the development scheme was of the highest design quality.

The renovation of Units 3 and 5 of the Carriage Works helps maintain the significance of the listed buildings and the Swindon Railway Village Conservation Area. The design approach sought to restore the buildings to their spacious and cathedral-like atmosphere, with open trusses and cast-iron columns and beams.

The architects, Metropolitan Workshop, produced a detailed report of the history, construction and use of the Carriage Works which has led to a sympathetic design which is reversible and not fixed to the original fabric. The existing roof finishes were removed, and insulation installed above the original sarking and purlins, before it was then replaced. All existing cast ironwork and timber were cleaned back, fireproofed where necessary and redecorated with traditional materials. In addition, all new joinery was produced on site and in some cases using salvaged materials to create new building elements.

1.4 Strong or effective leadership from a planner or planners

The planning policy framework that set the vision and objectives for the area is documented above.

The Council's Planning Team worked closely with Forward Swindon Ltd to secure £100,000 in grant funding from One Public Estates to fund the evidence base studies that informed the development of the site.

The planning and listed building applications were managed as priority schemes by the Planning Team, with the case officer facilitating a design-team approach involving key technical disciplines at an early stage.

2.0 Sustainable Development

2.1 Positive short, medium and long term benefits arising from the project

Taking advantage of its close proximity to Swindon Town Centre, the scheme has delivered a new hub of economic activity that will benefit Swindon's economy in the long term.

Future development phases will enable the Carriage Works the buildings to host a variety of education, arts and business tenants.

2.2 A balance of economic, social and environmental objectives

The economic benefits of the scheme are clear. However, there are also a number of social and environmental benefits.

The GWR works area forms an important part of Swindon's social history. Restoration of the Carriage Works forms part of wider plans to regenerate the GWR area. A regenerated GWR area, will raise awareness of Swindon's rich heritage, and in so doing will engender much needed civic pride in the town.

The scheme makes effective use of under-used, inner-urban buildings. This is in contrast to most post-war developments at Swindon which have been located on greenfield sites on the town's periphery.

Taking advantage of its close proximity to Swindon's town centre, the scheme makes efficient use of land (the workspace business model is much more efficient in land use terms than the traditional office space model. In so doing, the scheme makes effective use of brownfield (and in parts heavily contaminated), inner-urban land.

At a micro level, the Planning Team has ensured the extensive provision of bike racks at the site, enabling and encouraging cycling as an alternative form of transport to the carriage works.

The application was accompanied by a series of reports to address biodiversity and ecology, specifically the presence or absence of bats in the building. These reports detail a series of investigations carried out, including a bat survey. These reports notes firstly that the site has a low potential to provide a bat roost and a subsequent field survey found no evidence of bat activity.

2.3 Indication of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals the project supports

The carriage works project was devised largely around the economic benefits that providing a workspace for creative and innovative industry would bring to Swindon. Goal 8 and Goal 9 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals require decision makers to consider 'decent work and economic growth', and 'industry, innovation and infrastructure' respectively. The carriage works has provided a hub for start-up creatives, which drive for innovation in line with the growing regional and national knowledge economy.

With respect to Goal 11 'Sustainable Cities and Communities', against the context of a scheme that comprises restoration of older buildings, the development does an impressive job in meeting modern standards sought in terms of insulation, thermal performance and reducing energy demand. Additionally, the project fosters sustainable forms of journey to the development. The site is located in close proximity to key transport nodes, such as the rail station and bus station, and adjoins the town centre.

For the Carriage Works to be successful, the Council had to work in close cooperation with multiple stakeholders in both the public and private spheres, but also in civil society. Public consultations played a key role in informing the final project. Goal 17 'Partnerships for the Goals' was therefore present throughout the process.

3.0 Community Engagement

3.1 Positive and constructive engagement with local residents and businesses in the design and delivery of the project

Regeneration of the Carriage Works has been well received by the local community. There was detailed interaction with the local business to inform the business model for the development. Business community feedback outlined the demand for more enclosed office spaces in inner Swindon.

Throughout the process, there has been engagement with local stakeholders, such as the local University Technical College (UTC).

3.2 Consideration of, discussion on and communication with local residents and businesses about their views

To raise the profile of the Carriage Works building, the Council hosted a performance in the then vacant premises by the Royal School of Speech and Drama.

Recent open events saw many local companies join an information session and tour, followed by a discussion with the operator to sign up terms and formalities.

Local companies Bravedog, the Carto Group, Tom Davenport, Minnoch Design are among the first tenants in WorkShed.

4.0 Inclusive Planning

4.1 The needs of all potential users of a development or place have been taken into account to ensure everyone is able to participate equally, confidently and independently in everyday activities

The scheme has been developed in compliance with the Council's Inclusive Design Supplementary Planning Document.

The scheme is also fully compliant with the criteria of Part M of Building Regulations (Access to & Use of Buildings), which set out the requirements for adequate accessibility within and around the buildings, including, stairway design and external surfaces treatment.

The scheme has been designed to enable the public, without access to a car, to gain easy access to the works through alternative means. The scheme makes provision for access for all through a new pedestrian entrance to the building from London Street and also from the building's northern end.

The future phases of the redevelopment, in particular the GWR Bristol Street Tunnel improvements, will encourage more footfall between the Steam Museum, the Designer Outlet and the town centre.

4.2 Approaches to promote equality and diversity issues

The scheme has been developed in compliance with the Council's Inclusive Design Supplementary Planning Document.

The scheme has been designed around people, not cars. This represents a big shift for Swindon, where developments have tended to be designed around the needs of the car. The scheme is readily accessible from the rail and bus stations.

The scheme is sited in central Swindon, which forms the cultural and civic heart of the town, and which is an area that is accessible and welcoming to all.

5.0 Outcomes

5.1 Benefits of the project for the local community

The scheme preserves the historical fabric of the Carriage Works building, whilst providing a publicly accessible form of development. In so doing the scheme helps conserve and showcase Swindon's rich heritage to the town's residents.

5.2 Positive impacts the project has had for the community

The scheme will make a significant contribution to the community's appreciation of the area's history, to the benefit of the residents and to the long term conservation of the area.

5.3 Positive impacts the project has had for the environment

It is a challenge to ensure that conversions of historic buildings deliver high sustainable construction standards. However, sensitively designed and sited M&E installations have been deployed that employ sustainable techniques for environmental control. If certificated, the M&E installations would reach be categorized as "B"

The scheme is inherently sustainable, by providing an intensified use in an accessible location in inner Swindon.

6.0 Good Practice

6.1 Creative and innovation techniques and processes that have been undertaken

This project is inspired by heritage-led regeneration, the concept of taking something old and turning it into something new, both in terms of design and function. This project is unique in the sense of contrasting old and industrial exterior design with new and technologically creative interior and use.

Regeneration of the Carriage Works into a centre for education, business and the arts maintains the original character of the building. Future use will strengthen Swindon's reputation of invention, modernisation and ingenuity. Breathing life back into the Carriage Works creates a hub for creatives in a building originally built for industry and the design and construction of railway carriages. New modern facilities in a traditional envelope is an established model, provided that the integration of a new use and its design works well and respects the original building's heritage and form.

6.2 The transferability of the approaches taken in the project

The development is an example of a provincial town providing modern, flexible workspaces for creative industries and start-up businesses, and proving that this can be a success outside of the UK's large cities. In proving the concept, this model has the scope to be implemented in provincial towns and cities across the UK.

6.3 The lessons learnt from delivering the project

There were time delays in delivering the project on the ground, in large part arising from the dearth of specialist heritage contractors in the south-west. The UK, and the south west, needs to build capacity in the heritage building sector.

7.0 Social Benefit

7.1 How this project has helped provide a better quality of life for disadvantaged communities this could include anti-poverty initiatives, approaches that ensure community benefits arise from the project, the provision of facilities, job creation schemes

The local University Technical College has been actively involved the scheme. In so doing, students have developed greater understanding of heritage buildings and heritage-led regeneration.

Further works include converting Unit 11 of the Carriage Works into a space for education and research. The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) will move into this unit to teach post-graduate cultural heritage courses and carry out local research. Securing this institutional anchor tenant will bring an influx of high skilled human capital into the Swindon area, ensuring potential benefits to the area in the long term (Swindon is the largest town in the UK without a university).

The Carriage Works provide low-cost space for smaller and start-up businesses. In so doing the Carriage Works development will help these businesses to flourish.