

Swindon Officials Clash Over Town Centre Revamp

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A debate over the future of Swindon's town centre has emerged, as local leaders propose higher building density and extended leisure offerings to revive the struggling area.

Borough Council Leader Jim Robbins is advocating for greater residential development and a boost in evening activity to attract more people and businesses. Robbins stated that the

town's low-rise layout and early evening shutdowns are limiting economic vitality, and that increasing housing density could bring more footfall into the centre during off-peak hours.

"The data suggests that footfall during the day is decent for a town our size," Robbins shared with the *BBC*. "But after five or six o'clock, shops close, and it quickly becomes an underused space. We need investment to change that."

Swindon's town centre has faced a significant decline in recent years. The once-prominent Regents Circus development now retains only one active business, despite being just a decade old. Robbins believes that by introducing new housing models and leisure options, the area could be revitalised and made attractive to residents and visitors alike.

"One of the key challenges is the town's low-rise design; many areas barely exceed two storeys," he explained. "If you look at other town centres that are thriving, you'll find a greater concentration of residents living in those areas. That density fuels a more vibrant local economy, especially in the evenings."

However, Conservative group leader Councillor Gary Sumner raised concerns about the practicality of the plan. He pointed to Swindon's low land values as a barrier to attracting the private investment needed for redevelopment.

"Despite the current administration's goals, many sites in the centre carry negative land value," Sumner said. "That makes development unattractive to investors. In some cases, substantial financial support would be needed to even make projects viable."

Sumner emphasised that while ambitions are commendable, economic realities must be considered. "Unless funding is provided, whether through government channels or otherwise, it's unlikely these sites will see meaningful development."

The exchange underscores the growing urgency among local leaders to reimagine Swindon's core. While there is consensus on the need for change, opinions differ sharply on how it can realistically be achieved.