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Swindon Council Plans 200 Homes on 13 Undisclosed Public Sites

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Swindon Borough Council has unveiled a bold initiative to construct over 200 homes across 13 publicly owned sites, aiming to breathe new life into its beleaguered Swindon Housing Company. The council-owned firm, established to develop small housing projects and generate profits for local services, has faced significant challenges, posting a

combined loss of £1.7 million over the past two financial years and failing to build a single home in over a year.

In a recent cabinet meeting, Councillor Kevin Small, the council's cabinet member for finance, outlined a critical "pathway to profitability" for the struggling company, describing the plan as a "last chance saloon." He warned, "If it doesn't achieve that in the next four years up to 2029, then I think time will be called on the company." Despite the firm's rocky track record, Cllr Small emphasised the value of a council-owned housing company, stating, "There are good reasons to have a housing development company building small developments and providing extra money we can use for services."

The council has identified 13 sites across the borough capable of accommodating 200 new homes, with profits intended to bolster council coffers. However, the locations of these sites and the specifics of the proposed developments remain under wraps, shared only with cabinet members and withheld from the public and press. This lack of transparency has raised eyebrows, as residents are left in the dark about where these homes will be built.

The business plan, approved by the cabinet, hinges on two core strategies. The first, "design, build, and sell," involves the company directly constructing homes and recouping costs through sales. The second, "disposal of land," sees the company securing planning permission for council-owned sites before selling them to developers at a premium, capitalising on the added value of pre-approved plans.

To kickstart the initiative, the cabinet has greenlit a £1 million loan to the housing company, intended to fund the first three years of the four-year plan. This financial lifeline comes as the council grapples with the Labour government's broader economic policies, which some critics argue place undue strain on local authorities already stretched thin.

The road ahead for Swindon Housing Company is fraught with uncertainty. With a clear ultimatum set for 2029, the council's gamble on these 13 sites will be closely scrutinised. If successful, the project could provide much-needed housing and revenue for Swindon. If it falters, the council may be forced to shutter the company, leaving questions about the future of local housing development.