

Cllr David Renard
Leader, Swindon Borough Council

drenard@swindon.gov.uk

xxx BY EMAIL xxx

21st July 2021

Dear Cllr Renard,

Re: Closure of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery

We have been made aware of the current proposals to close Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, dispose of the listed building that houses it and put all the collections including the archaeology collection into storage until a new venue is available as part of a proposed cultural quarter. As we understand it there is no detailed plan in place for the new facilities or agreed budget and timescale for delivery of the cultural quarter.

As well as the archaeology collection the museum is also a place of deposit for archaeological archives and material that arises out of developments within the Borough, which brings in considerable material and local knowledge. Furthermore, the museum also works with the Portable Antiquities Scheme, sharing Finds Liaison Officers with other museums in Wiltshire and has accepted valuable material that has come via this scheme. Material which has been recovered by local people and relating directly to the local heritage of people.

The role and importance of museums to the local community in terms of economic activity, tourism, local pride and identity cannot be underestimated. It is with great concern that the Council for British Archaeology has heard of your proposal. We write seeking clarification on the current situation and assurance that the important archaeological collections held by the Borough at the museum, its role as an archaeological depository, and the support of the Portable Antiquities Scheme are all retained and that these collections and material remain publicly accessible.

Council for British Archaeology

The Museum is highly regarded in the local community for its contribution to the identity and pride of Swindon. Museums and archaeological archives make a substantial contribution to the local economy and towards the health and wellbeing of the people of Swindon. We are writing to express our concerns about these proposals on behalf of the wider archaeology community in the UK and to seek assurances that any decision will be based on a sound business plan and the needs of the local community who value this community asset. There is clear reputational risk to the Borough at stake.

The Council for British Archaeology (CBA) is a charity committed to making archaeology accessible to anyone interested in exploring the stories of people and place. As the voice of archaeology in the UK we bring together community groups, commercial units, academics, and heritage organisations to create and share opportunities to participate, discover and be inspired by archaeology.

Archaeology and museums help underpin the heritage industry in the UK, which through tourism and development generates £31 billion a year to our economy. We are currently running our annual Festival of Archaeology which despite the pandemic and being forced online in 2020 saw 580,000 participants and a digital reach of over 24 million. This year we have over 400 events, activities, and resources available across the UK promoting archaeology and helping people participate and get active. Our theme this year is around Exploring Local Places, and it is therefore with added disappointment that we hear of the news to close Swindon Museum and Art Gallery. Our Festival of Archaeology shows the appetite of the public for local heritage and archaeology, and how this can be harnessed with a little commitment and imagination.

We fully appreciate the difficult financial environment in which you operate as a Council and the difficult decision we are all faced with as a consequence of the COVID pandemic. However, we would urge you to consider the wider implications of the loss of the Museum and Art Gallery and look to retain this as a viable option moving forward. Indeed we would highlight the work being done in Northamptonshire at Chester House Estate (www.chesterhouseestate.org), which is being developed by the local authorities, not only into a major visitor attraction but integrating a function and role as the area's archaeological archive and depository. All of which will be publicly accessible as part of the wider attraction.

We would welcome your assurance that any decision will be robustly tested against an open business plan and a clear understanding of the wider impacts of this highly regarded local museum.

Council for British Archaeology

Yours Sincerely,



Neil Redfern BA (Hons) MPhil ACIfA FSA
Executive Director

cc. Robert Jandy - RJandy@swindon.gov.uk

Robert Buckland MP - robert.buckland.mp@parliament.uk

Justin Tomlinson MP - justin.tomlinson.mp@parliament.uk

Linda Kasmaty - lindakasmaty@hotmail.com, Chair Friends of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery

*As a dyslexic person, occasional English errors may pass me unnoticed.
Please accept my apology if any appear in this letter.*

Please donate to support the CBA's activities donate.archaeologyuk.org



The 2021 Festival of Archaeology is live. Find out how you can get involved here:
[Welcome | Festival of Archaeology \(archaeologyuk.org\)](https://www.archaeologyuk.org)



Watch a video on our work in 2020 on our YouTube channel at: [The CBA in 2020 - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Council for British Archaeology
92 Micklegate, York
YO1 6JX
Tel: 01904 671417

Archaeology for all

www.archaeologyuk.org
info@archaeologyuk.org

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