

Review of swindontowncentre.co.uk

This review looks at the user interface and experience (UI - aesthetic elements, UX - experience and functionality of using the website). As the website is InSwindon's online 'shop window' the review touches on brand positioning, culture and relationships to improve wider communications.

It contains suggestions for improvements and ideas to consider as well as criticism of elements that undermine the UI / UX, to create a new website that will meet target audiences' expectations and portray Swindon town centre as a vibrant, bustling and useful destination.

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review

- The URL swindontowncentre.co.uk is positive, referring to the area not the BID, thus easier to find online. It also presents InSwindon as the organisation supporting Swindon town centre.
See section on searches on p8 for more detail.
- A review of approx 20 BID websites show that most are strongly members / business-biased, with URLs that don't directly refer to their area of business, making them hard to find online. Most BID websites have little or no content that promotes the area to the public and function as corporate or members-only sites. InSwindon's website positively recognises the needs of the public .
Glasgow's Sauchiehall Street BID's website is notable exception, with an excellent user-friendly interface – see p6
- The website feels like it has been added to, and amended, many times over its lifetime – the information is there but hard to find / in odd places. As a result, the content sometimes doesn't meet audiences needs – for example in the [Information](#) section there are details on parking (relevant to visitors) as well 'key contacts' for SBC graffiti removal (only relevant to members).
see comments on target audiences on p11

The publications section has member and visitor newsletters though the content is less defines. Reviewing each audiences' needs and making sure the information is relevant. The blog style works well (there are also some pdf downloads – make consistent). Place members' news within a business section and visitor news elsewhere (TBD)
- The current site loads very slowly: on multiple visits on both desktop and mobile minimum loading time 5 secs, up to 15 seconds. A new site and review of hosting should enable speeds visitors expect.
- Add a mission statement to explain InSwindon's aims and purpose and define visitor expectations of the site.

The business section requires an expanded statement with aims and benefits. Consider altering the logo with a positioning statement. Only business people know what a BID is – ensure every visitor knows who you are and what you do
see p10
- The website's map concept is user-friendly however the GoogleMap base competes with InSwindon pins and the reactive hover on map is distracting. Tailorable alternatives are available. *See p6*

- We have already decided to look into improving UX by grouping businesses into 'purpose groupings'. Currently some businesses sit awkwardly in a section, for example Artiste sits within 'leisure' though it is fundamentally a membership organisation. We will devise groupings to better meet visitors' needs. This will mean that the shopping, services and leisure sections that require users to guess, in some cases, where to find what they need can be replaced with intuitive categories. *See p4*
- A bespoke map with filterable layers of information will be able to display these categories of members' businesses. Practical information, such as where to find parking, toilet facilities, hotel accommodation etc can also be displayed on map layers. *See p9 and p11*
- Visual impact and interest (UI) can be improved with better photography. Currently photography used for members' listings is flat, unemotive, uninspiring – external shots of businesses depict a deserted town centre, and straight angles make many shops look run-down. Businesses such as Red House Records (within Holmes Music) have no presence.
- Many of the members' own websites and social media have great photography that could be used on swindontowncentre.co.uk listings with permission / without cost. Outlining standards for photography will enable staff to take better photographs. *See p4*
- Use of photography and/or video outside of listings will 'bring alive' the town centre experience. Currently the home page and others rely on graphics that are unemotive and do not evoke a vibrant economy or experience. People are very much absent from the website.
www.brixtonbid.co.uk is a good example of video evoking the experience

The typography, especially in graphics' headlines and titles is weak. Headlines are indistinct from content, or hashtags or links making the visitor 'work' to understand the message
see notes on p3
- The text is inconsistent in style and tone. Defining the style will establish the voice of InSwindon – knowledgeable, supportive, understanding visitor / business needs.

Defining templates for business listings and defining Swindon's voice will enable future staff to make additions and amendments with InSwindon's brand personality. *see p4*

- Consider employing someone to oversee website (and social media) to avoid additions upon additions that weaken the UX
- Navigation (UX) can be improved with menus visible on all pages. Currently the top menu is visible but sub-menus absent from pages. There are no back links. Using your browser's back arrow does not always return the visitor from whence they came, for example, you cannot return to previous page if search results in no results (and sometimes this results in a *brief web developer to include back links and sub-menus/breadcrumb trail visible on each page*)
- In-site links to external sites should be changed to open a new browser tab so that swindontowncentre.co.uk remains open for visitors to return to. Currently visitors are lost when clicking a link *see p9*
- The search functions (site-wide and in-section) are patchy or fail, narrow parameters mean misspellings yield no results, or results from a undesired category *see p8*
- Search engine optimisation (SEO) to be improved. swindontowncentre.co.uk does not appear in Google search result for 'Swindon shopping', also not included on Swindon Shopping list on VisitSwindon website.

Create reciprocal links with partners, such as VisitSwindon as well as the town centre malls – theparadeswindon.co.uk/swindon mentions InSwindon alongside Switch on to Swindon but without links; neither Regent Circus nor Brunel Centre acknowledge InSwindon online.

Encourage local independents to add InSwindon to their websites. Links help create traffic for both parties. This could be the basis for a culture change of greater mutual support between members and cross-marketing initiatives.

Consider co-branded initiatives (for example, InSwindon working in partnership with The Parade) to help promote initiatives, 'share glory' and promote co-operation as well as embedding InSwindon as the glue between the malls and independents.

suggested simplified structure

consider simplifying the website into 4 main sections (TBD):

A what's here:

information / navigation for general public, incl travel and parking

map based information with filterable layers

new grouping that meets visitors needs for example: take a break, be thrifty to replace shopping, leisure and service categories and sub-categories

include practical / facilities map layer: toilets, baby-changing, parking, cash machines;

include special needs and community initiatives: shopmobility, safe places, standardised listings with additional information and better photography

B be part of it (community involvement)

jobs

suspended coffees; busking and promotional sites; Ambassador's contact

green policies; charitable support

new businesses

featured campaigns or businesses / community newsletter

possible inclusion (TBD) of 'ready for change' – see homelessness on p9

C information for businesses / potential businesses

mission statement and introduction to InSwindon

list of member benefits

property search

useful reference information for businesses

updates (newsletters)

statistics: general footfall; increased footfall resulting from InSwindon initiatives

D what's on / what's happening

a news section to encourage visitors into the town centre and inform of any changes

campaigns and initiatives;

new shop openings;

event listings

regeneration projects; changes to infrastructure;

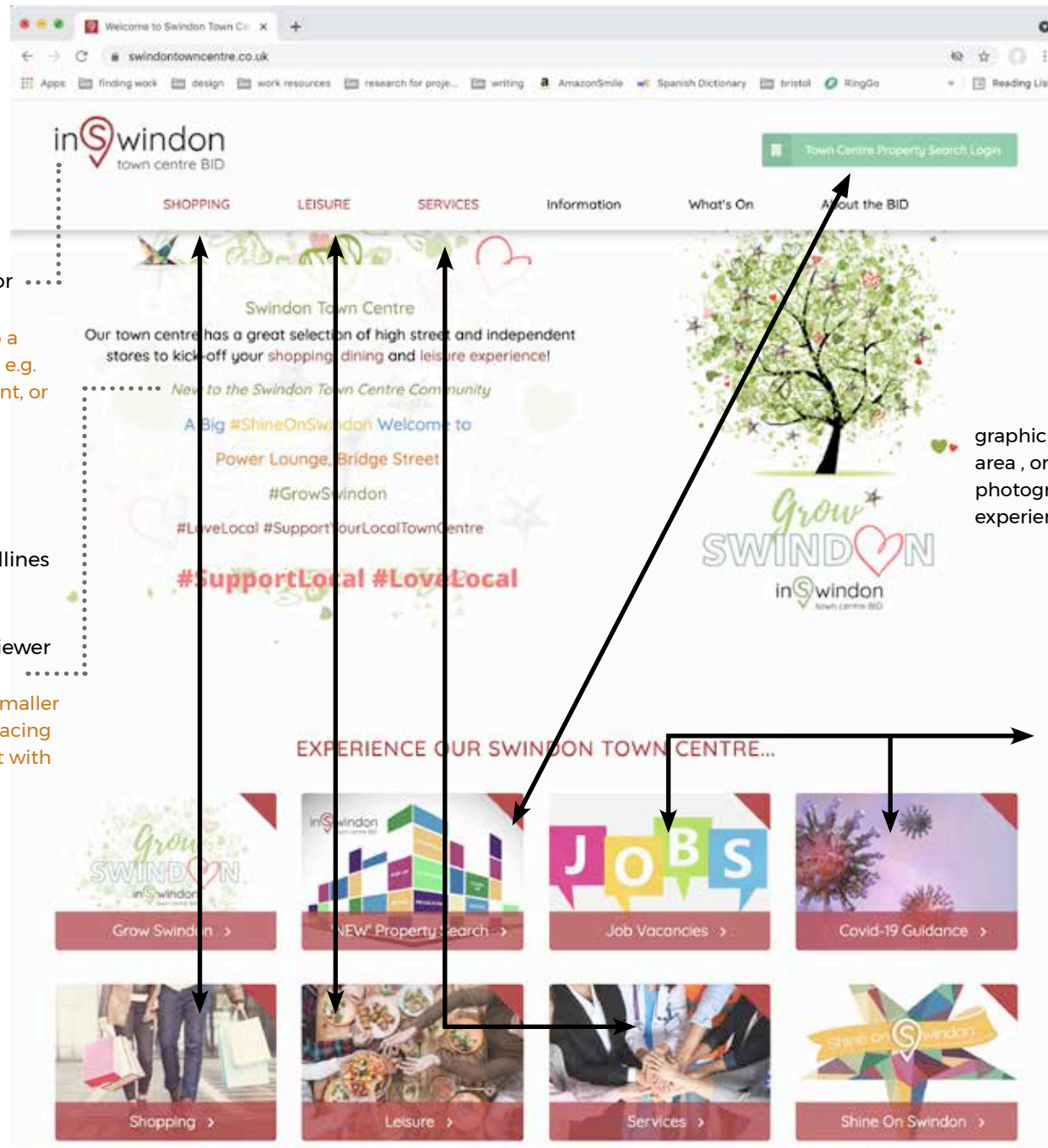
Home page

improvements to style and navigation can simplify the UI and UX and communicate a vibrant, bustling place to visit.

BID is not a well-known or ... understood acronym
consider modification to a more descriptive tagline e.g. town centre management, or the centre of town

improve typography – headlines and titles (in graphics) are indistinct from content, or hashtags or links making viewer work harder to understand
'new to town centre' title smaller than following text, line spacing puts Power Lounge in a list with #GrowSwindon

Include a positioning statement on what site provides for the user and who runs it
e.g. Discover the shops, restaurants, attractions and business at the heart of Swindon / easy to reach by public transport / InSwindon champions...



'log in' infers exclusivity, no invitation to search
this has odd prominence, better included in distinct business section

graphic doesn't reflect the shopping area, or the people who use it. Real photography / video better sells the experience

these 2 useful links not available on any other page
property, shopping etc links are unnecessary repetitions
campaigns can be moved to a new section

review: members' listings

Comments in this section focus on the members' listing found on swindontowncentre.co.uk/shopping/. Comments on the individual listings apply equally to the current leisure and service sections. NB: both the leisure and service sections contain a confusing mix of types of business:

- Leisure section includes diverse offers: betting shops, cafés and takeaways, hotels, gyms plus outliers such as Jungle Mania and Artsite (not a place the public can visit).
- Service section is a diverse mix of tattoo studios, insurance brokers, estate agents and private businesses such as PPS and Aecom.

As discussed, a further price of work will be to re-group members into 'purpose groups', and the usefulness of including private businesses for a) the visitor and b) InSwindon

navigation

- As discussed the search function is patchy and not truly fit-for-purpose. Maintaining this function as new businesses are added is tricky and can lead to inconsistent results. [see p7](#)
- no back button on landing page nor on individual listing (member) pages
task: decide workable search terms, change search function to categories drop-down menu within members' listing sections, or omit search function completely

photography

- Photo listing is uninspiring. The public is used, via Instagram, other social media and the capabilities of their own smart phones to crisp, colourful, 'creative' photography. Comparatively, InSwindon's photography looks old-fashioned and amateur. Images of each business' exterior does not tell the story of the customer offer, experience or the character of the business – they are devoid of people and products.

Utilise existing photography: liaise with members to use photos from their websites and social media (for example Darkroom Espresso, Emporium of Loveliness and Rudi's online have great photography that should be free to include.

task: to discover already existing photography from members to reduce photography needed

Commission photography and write instructions for future photographers (whether staff or commissioned) to ensure standard and consistency

define a photographic style/standard to help ensure future editions meet the new standard. For example: interesting (angles, perspective etc) ; interior photos to give 'feel' of shop; inclusion of staff and shoppers; outdoor shots to be taken when the centre is bustling – include shoppers to communicate 'buzz' of shopping centre

member information listing (text)

- Review and edit listings to meet audiences need
create a template for consistent information on each member's page
- Text currently has inconsistent voice, sometimes written in the voice of the business, other times in the third person. Change addresses customer – what the business offers 'you'. Consistent customer-focused text will give InSwindon 'ownership' – the organisation is talking to 'you'.
examples:
current (business voice): Bonmarché is the UK's largest womenswear value retailer catering for women over 50 years. We pride ourselves on offering quality clothing with appropriate styling,
customer focus: Bonmarché is the UK's largest womenswear value retailer catering for women over 50 years. Taking pride in offering (you) quality clothing with appropriate styling,
- ensure text is relevant
Review what businesses submit and/or provide template see p5
example: Swindon Sisters Alliance (charity shop) has no information on the shop, or merchandise. It is a mission statement of aims and objectives of the charity. It even says "we are trying to find a location for a shop"!
- ensure text really sells the benefits to the consumer
example: Cobblers Corner: "For all your shoe repairs, shoe polish, variety of key cutting. Contact business for services and current opening hours". Listing does not communicate owner's excellent skills and service, his place in the community or the convenience of his shop to bus travellers

suggestion: improved member listing

Creating a standard template for member's to complete will give visitors consistent information, make site maintenance/admin more straightforward and show new member's an organised procedure. Research possibility of adding badges (new: offers, job vacancy etc) to listing photos.

suggested template:

Business name

One line description: (top 2 categories appear in search / filter results)

Paragraph / sales pitch, customer offer

Status: National, local, independent, pop-up

InSwindon since: [date]

Categories (TBD): list of purpose groupings to help visitor find alternative businesses (links)

Schemes/affiliations membership of local national schemes e.g. suspended coffees

Events / offers

Delivery Service / online / click and collect:

Hours

Close to: short list of neighbouring businesses/destinations to help visitor plan 'journey'

website

social media

photography examples:



Taken from InSwindon listing



Darkroom Espresso's photography taken from its website and social media

examples of templated listings:

DARKROOM ESPRESSO

Speciality coffee shop

The best coffee possible, a relaxed creative space, making people feel welcome and well caffeinated. Founded in Swindon to bring extraordinary coffee to the town.

Local independent

InSwindon since 2014

café, coffee, take a break

Part of the suspended coffee initiative – pay it forward with a coffee for someone who is homeless

Regular events from flower arranging workshops to latte-art throwdowns: check our website

Hours

Close to: Historic Railway village, Bridal Boutique, Indian restaurant

social media

POUNDLAND

Discount general store: groceries, toiletries, cleaning products and more, all for £1.

groceries, toiletries, household items, stationery, gifts and more. Over 3,000 items: top brands, daily essential items, new product line and amazing money-saving deals

National favourite since 1990

InSwindon since: [date]

thrift, house and home, hobbies, beauty etc

Schemes:

Delivery Service / online / click and collect:

Hours:

Close to: Iceland supermarket, coffee shops, electronics exchange, Havelock Square

social media

map-based content

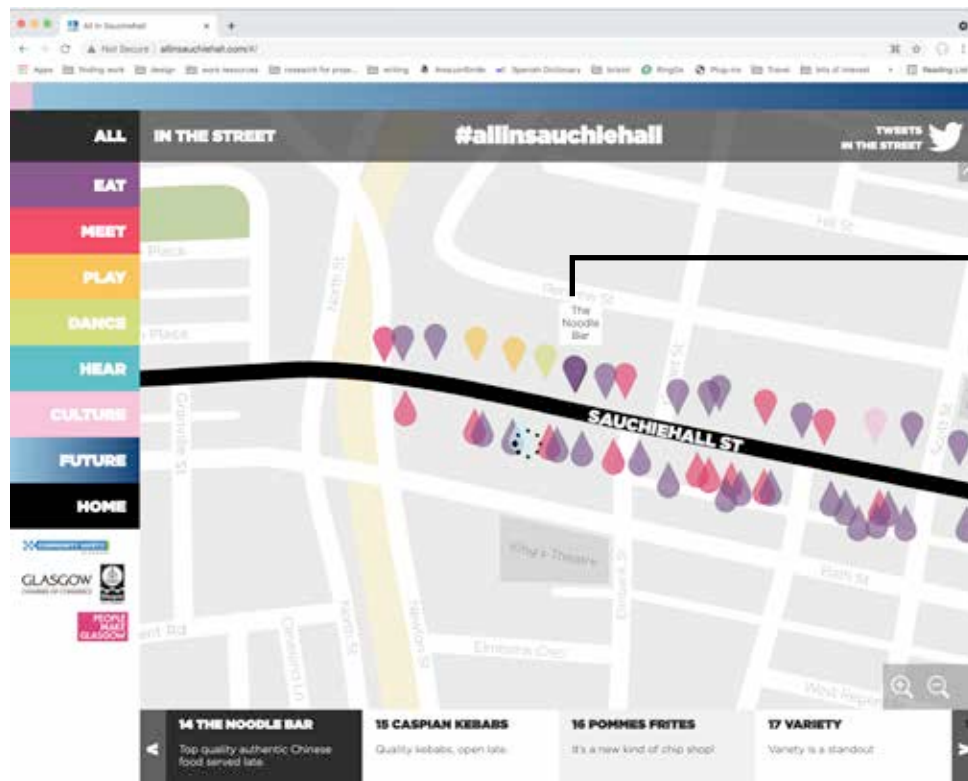
review:

The current clickable photo grid of businesses next to the GoogleMap is a good format but the map is messy: the Google map base and pins compete with InSwindon pins; the reactive hover on map is distracting. There are inconsistencies in the information shown on the maps which, in addition to, the myriad Google pins and labels

example inconsistency: Market Street Google pins are Abe's Cakes and T4 Cameras: the pin closest to Abe's Cakes links to Phone X Change (no Google pin). T4 Camera's InSwindon pin works. Inconsistent, and confusing information.

A map-based website is a good way of presenting useful information and navigation for the viewer. Bespoke programming is available and will allow in Swindon to show 'clean' information (without competing information from GoogleMaps) as well as information layer e.g. showing the layer, or layers chosen by the visitor. The maps can be styled to match InSwindon brand decisions.

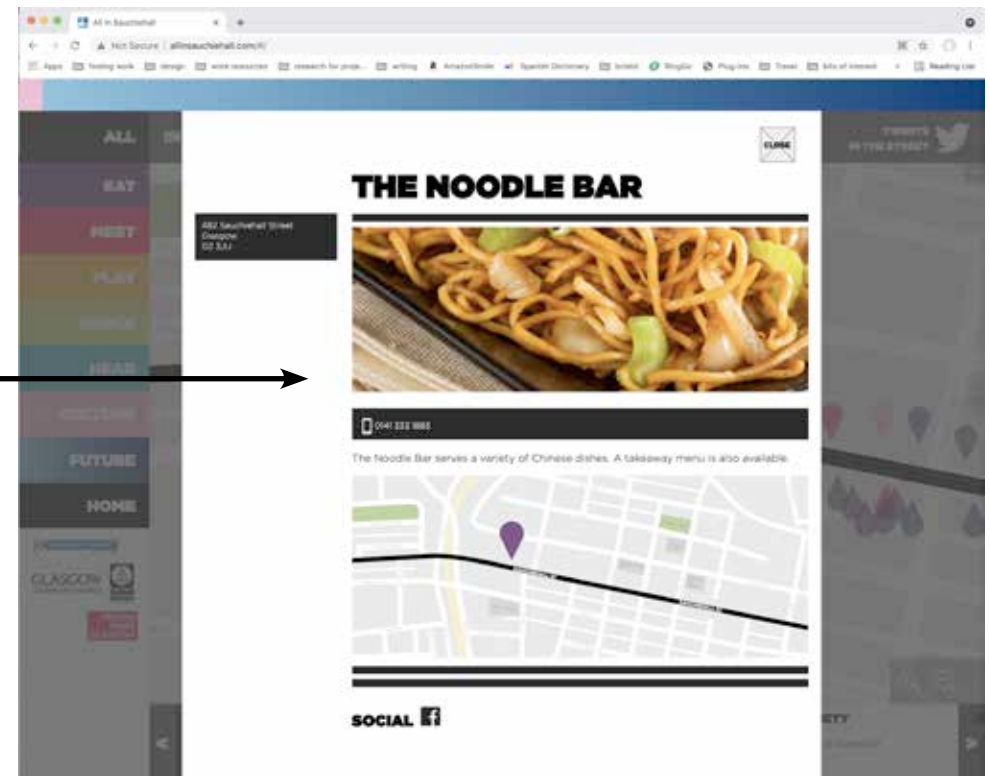
idea: badge business links (in grid) with 'new', 'opening soon', offers, sales, vacancies.



suggestion:

allinsauchiehall.com is a rare, excellent example of a BID website. (see left, and below. Also go to: allinsauchiehall.com)

Sauchiehall Street (Glasgow) BID has 7 colour-coded categories (left menu) reflected in coloured pins (this may/may not be possible with amount of business types in Swindon town centre). Horizontal scroll below map lists all businesses in that category. A click on a pin takes you to the member's listing. This exemplar can be tailored to InSwindon/member's needs. The Sauchiehall Street site has listings where the 'social' category is fed from social media, the area under photo contains web addresses and other contact details, text is a larger paragraph. Please take a look.



review: in-site search function

www.swindontowncentre.co.uk's in-site search function doesn't work reliably.

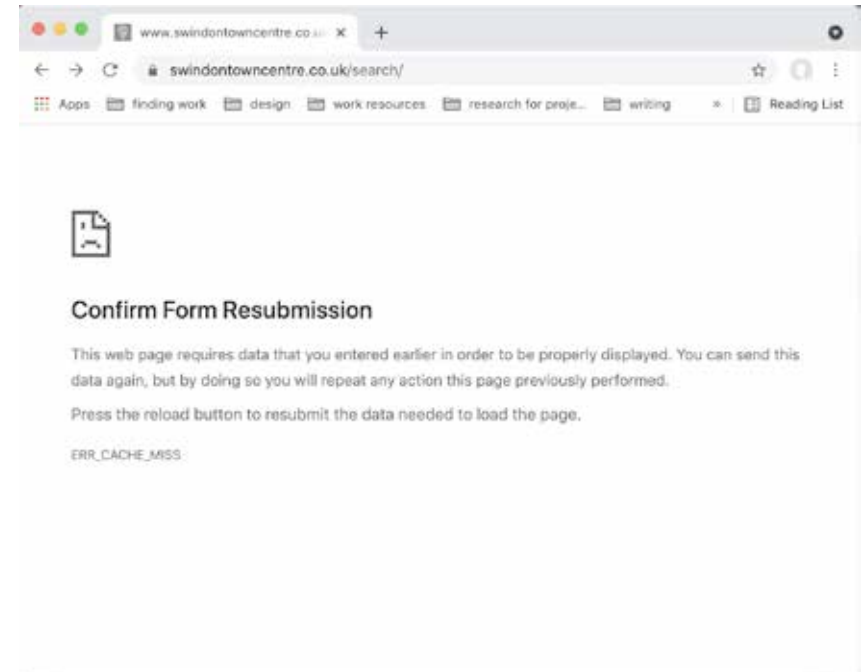
I randomly chose to search for categories, shop names and items to buy – just 20% success. As previously mentioned, maintaining a search function as new businesses are added is tricky and can lead to inconsistent results.

There is no back button for a viewer to return to their previous page, using the browser's back button results in an error message (see left).

Decide the usefulness of a search function for the customer: decide workable search terms, change search function to categories drop-down menu within members' listing sections, or omit search function completely. Seek advice from web developer.

results of trial in-site searches:

- searched 'charity shops' – no results; but 'charity shops' yields only the British Heart Foundation plus 2 articles
- searched 'mobile phone' - good
- searched 'coffee' – good
- searched for 'Clintons Cards' (adding an s on first word) – no result
- searched for Boots – good
- searched: 'haberdashery' – false result: 'Faringdon Road refurbishments nearing completion'
- searched 'underwear' – no result
- searched 'books' – good/incomplete NB: Cancer Research only charity listed as book seller Waterstones omitted
- searched 'beauty' – results include theatre events, generic 'services', Parade shopping, Superdrug but not Boots; salons, one tattoo studio
- searched 'gardening' – just Robert Dyas
- searched 'music' – mainly articles about past events, Wyvern, Beni's wine bar, Meca, HMV, Holmes Music
- searched 'musical instrument' – no results
- searched 'home furnishings' – results show Shaws the Draper and 'Home furnishings' category but not Gateway, Poundstretcher, Sew Elegant, Sewcraft, Furniture Direct, Wilko (which are listed within that category)
- searched for 'Rudis': finds a What's on event (titled Rudi's Bar and Kitchen but no listing)
- Search for 'Rudi' finds old events, Rudi's main listing appears second



Site visitors will be lost when they hit this dead-end.

It may be wise to remove the search function from the current site as an interim measure

review: Google searches and SEO

I searched for generic search terms 'Swindon town centre', 'Swindon shopping' and 'Swindon shopping centre' to test the visibility of the website. InSwindon's URL swindontowncentre.co.uk is excellent – site ranks high in any search containing those words, however results for generic searches are poorer.

Choose web developer with SEO knowledge to improve search results. Create list of terms to help SEO based on 'people also search for' and 'people also asked', and generic terms such as 'clothes shops' etc.

Claim ownership, and manage, of Google listing – InSwindon ad will appear with search results (add descriptor to name).

searches

- **searched: 'Swindon town centre':** swindontowncentre.co.uk top 3 results; visitswindon.org.uk is 4th result (this website does not feature town centre); featured website is Brunel Shopping centre.

People also searched for:

Swindon town centre shops

results: Google ad listing as above (InSwindon not listed), then InSwindon top 3 results

Swindon town centre postcode

top result swindontowncentre.co.uk/shopping

what is happening to swindon town centre

top result swindontowncentre.co.uk/information

swindon town centre (shops) opening times

results: Google ad listing as above (InSwindon not listed), then InSwindon top 1 result

Swindon town centre today

top 3 result swindontowncentre.co.uk

Swindon town centre jobs

results: Google ad listing for recruitment agencies, then InSwindon top result

is Swindon town centre busy today

top 3 result swindontowncentre.co.uk

results of Google searches:

- searched 'Swindon shopping centre' and 'Swindon shopping': swindontowncentre.co.uk not found. Top results:
 - The Brunel Shopping Centre
 - Designer Outlet Swindon
 - The Parade
 - District Centre West Swindon
 - Management Suites (Brunel Centre)
 - Greenbridge Retail and Leisure Park
 - Orbital Shopping Park
 - Mannington Retail Park
 - Wharf Green
 - House of Fraser

People searched for:

Swindon designer outlet opening times
results: none

town centre Swindon

results: Google ad lists InSwindon second, then InSwindon top 1 result

West Swindon shopping centre

results: none

what shops are open in Swindon (town centre)

results: Google ad listing as above (InSwindon not listed), then InSwindon top 1 result

Swindon town centre shops opening times

results: Google ad listing as above (InSwindon not listed), then InSwindon top 1 result

information section

This section contains a lot of useful information that could be better placed under other sections as well as information that feels out of place. I have listed the 'journey' through the submenus with review and suggestions.

- **lands on: Swindon Town Centre.** There is information and links to websites for The Parade, Brunel Shopping Centre and Regent Circus. None of these sites reciprocate links though InSwindon is mentioned on The Parade's website.
Cineworld and Wyvern are mentioned but without links.
There is no mention of independents, cafés, 'utilities' such as banks, post office etc
Links to external sites to open in separate browser tab.
Future activities and campaigns if co-branded i.e. InSwindon in partnership with The Parade could help encourage these management companies to promote InSwindon initiatives.
Important additions to the site would be information to help people, especially those with additional needs, to plan their visit. For example locations of toilets, baby changing, banks and cashpoints; places to stop for a break (cafés and outdoor seating); post office and bill-paying. Consider also non-business destinations such as Queen's Park, library, Museum of Computing and HAZ. The town centre is more than just shopping
- **news:** out of date (2019)
consider removing this section as interim measure
- **things to do:** listing contains specific venues and categories. Nightlife lost in this section. Swindon Dance and Artsite are not strictly 'things to do' – usually are organisations one needs to join – new structure to address this
include things to do in **what's happening:** section (blog) to include events, InSwindon events, shop openings, initiatives, each colour coded, filterable by date and category
Create category that fits learning and membership organisations such as Artsite
no back button or visible sub-menu

- **travel and getting here:**
reorganise with public transport first, then car parks. delete Wharf Green and InSwindon offices from this section
add in section/info on special needs e.g. shop mobility, 'safe haven' for autistic people
- **parking**
link to information layer on main map or, under advice from developer, separate 'utilities' map that include many of the sections listed here.
inclusion of postcodes useful for satnav
include bike parking
delete bus travel
- **where to stay:** each hotel company's information cites different advantages incl. McArthur Glen and Bath day trips!
move to information layer on map; include templated information (similar to business) with price range, facilities etc
- **Job vacancies:** excellent content (also features highly in Google searches
good section – to be relocated
- **key contacts:**
delete section: add Busking to new 'be part of it' section
- **useful information:** this is info for businesses rather than public
move to relevant section
- **homeless:** interesting idea, could be expanded to 'ready for change' section:
consider an honest approach to the 'bad side' of the town centre: homelessness, empty shops, litter and chewing gum, safety and lighting and how InSwindon are addressing such issues
add in 'help/special needs' (see shop mobility etc above), suspended coffee scheme etc
- **Swindon's Illimnia:**
old news – delete
- **Regeneration and planning news:**
move to different section

what's on section

review:

Rethink content. Currently the what's on section contains only Wyvern Theatre events – but without a link to Wyvern bookings site. There is no mention of recent InSwindon events. A blog-style page with events ordered by date, that keeps past events visible, will create a better impression of activity in the town centre. Again there is no back button or visible sub-menu (NB there is an in-page link to Swindon Loyalty card which I believe is defunct.)

suggestion:

Initial suggestion is to simplify the site into 2 public-focused categories: **what's here** and **what's happening**. **What's happening** ideally to include member's events such as theatre, cinema showings, offers and sales, InSwindon campaign activities, news of new businesses, town centre improvements etc. This would rely on the partnership of members supplying information. This may require a culture change: a new site could help herald change – members working with InSwindon (and vice versa) as well as other members for mutual benefit as discussed in person.

review: about the BID section

This section is the de facto business section for members and business members (as well as others). The section should start with an overview / mission statement of InSwindon's aims and area of business. The current statement details close partnerships without indication of the aims / purpose of those partnerships:

"InSwindon BID work in close partnership with various organisations including Swindon Borough Council, Wiltshire Police and Swindon & Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership to shape the Swindon town centre"

A review of texts to ensure the information is explicit, rather than implicit, will better establish InSwindon's raison d'être. The text on **About the BID** fails to explain what a BID is, and the language is officious ("... we represent 478 hereditaments"). Changes to a friendlier tone will reflect InSwindon's approachability.

This section should sell InSwindon to its members as a supportive, future-focused organisation.

The BID area map, currently can't be scaled to be readily readable, however a bespoke map will enable InSwindon to define its area of interest (that GoogleMaps cannot).

Amalgamating the **BID Team, Directors and Ambassadors** on one page will avoid repetition and show InSwindon as one united team / force working for the businesses, as well as town centre visitors. Information on Ambassadors to be visible for visitors, as part of the 'facilities' information.

For non-members especially the **Marketing Opportunities** (public space and leafleting and sponsorship opportunities) are difficult to find here. Consider moving to a new section, possibly under 'community involvement' or similar (TBD) that can include other opportunities and initiatives

Newsletters: rethink content. Visitor-facing news in blog style section within 'be part of it' section, member-facing content in business section.

Consider inclusion of a 'business' page that includes latest footfall figures, useful contact numbers, latest opportunities.

Review information currently given to new members, and information for potential members, to see what usefully can be included in this section

positioning and audiences

TBD: swindontowncentre.co.uk has 2 distinct target audiences

A. the general public

aim: to encourage local and regional shoppers back to high street shopping, highlighting the advantages of town centre shopping and community versus online and shopping malls

Although lockdown has encouraged more people to shop online, "Almost 3 in 5 shoppers have said they are more likely to shop at stores selling locally-produced goods once lockdown is fully lifted, compared to before the pandemic hit the UK."

B. businesses

B1: potential businesses / BID members

aim: to encourage new businesses into the town centre; to explain opportunities of town centre site and advantages of BID membership, plus useful information such as property search

B2: existing BID member

aim: to reassure members that InSwindon is usefully working on their behalf and with them to improve the attractiveness of the town centre / increase footfall. To include updates on initiatives and issues; up-to-date statistics and news

see p10

tasks for business content

- create distinct business section
see p10
- understand current B2B comms, e.g. what info-pack, benefits etc received with membership, thus what content required
- decide what information, if any should be, members (B2) only, Password protect area that contains B2only information
decide which group you are addressing, especially indistinct in newsletters
- strengthen culture of working with you, over working for you to encourage engagement in InSwindon campaigns and business cross-marketing to promote footfall in entire BID area

tasks for public content (overview)

- define the town centre offer
- strengthen the appeal of local, independent shopping supported by trusted national chains, and hospitality / activities
- embed the town centre and its businesses at the heart of real life in Swindon (amenities and culture)
The fundamental difference between a town centre and a shopping centre is the amenities. Town centres (High Streets) have post offices, banks, libraries, insurance brokers, solicitors, job centres, advice centres, art galleries, pubs, travel connections etc. Malls and outlet centres have cash machines.
Malls tend towards 'aspirational shopping' - nice to haves; High Streets toward 'functional retail' - day-to-day necessities, not necessarily important purchases. Traditional High Streets, such as Gorse Hill, have more independent shops whereas national chains long ago began to dominate town centres, creating a nation of 'carbon copy High Streets'.
With the departure of Top Shop, Debenhams, Starbucks, Argos, Sainsbury et al from Swindon Town Centre, there is more of a balance between trusted national favourites and characterful local independents. This happenstance can be positively leveraged to promote the new mix of independents with chains
- understand reasons people visit the town centre; understand the primary purpose for their visits and additional unplanned visit - their 'journey'
help to define categories and future campaigns
- create content to meet their needs, answer their questions
- create a picture of a vibrant, bustling high street shopping experience