

Swindon's Health Hydro Vision Statement

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The Vision

The Health Hydro will inspire a more thoughtful and holistic approach to the health and wellbeing of Swindon.

This was its vision and the reason it was built by the Great Western Railway Medical Fund in 1891. Set up as a cooperative, workers contributed to its upkeep and, in return, received free treatment when they needed it. The first sustained experiment in socialised health care was so revolutionary for the time that it was visited and adopted by Nye Bevan and William Beveridge, architects of the National Health Service. After visiting, Bevan said “There it was, a complete health service. All we had to do was to expand it to embrace the whole country.”

By combining swimming pools, baths, dispensaries, treatment rooms and surgeries, the Health Hydro was also among the first to recognise that ‘good health’ is more than just the absence of disease. Where contemporary medicine was overwhelmingly concerned with understanding ‘why do people get sick’, the Health Hydro set out to answer a more nuanced question: ‘how do people stay healthy’?

It was thus among the first places to recognise health as a process to be cultivated, especially by acknowledging the relationships between health and hygiene, diet, environment, physical activity, community support, and affordable access to preventative care.

The Health Hydro was a pioneer. And it was, back then, emblematic of Swindon's motto: *Salubritas Et Industria* (Health and Industry).

It will be again.

This project is about more than the Grade II* built heritage. In addition to restoring the Victorian splendour of the building, we aim to restore the purpose of the place. We will give a contemporary expression to its original

ethos and intent. We will make the Health Hydro the focal point of a healthier Swindon. A place that will inspire and empower all residents to make more informed and healthier choices for themselves and their families for ever – choices about physical activity, diet, medical care, environment, lifestyle and mental health.

Just as the Health Hydro once inspired the creation of the NHS, it will be a model for the current preoccupation with making healthier places and communities. Policy makers and practitioners today appreciate the complexity involved in this. It is not just about physical design, planning, community engagement, delivery, management or maintenance. It is about all of these things working in concert to create an environment in which people are incentivised to take more responsibility for their personal health, as well as the health of their community, and the planet.

The measure of its success is not just longer life expectancy, but longer healthy life expectancy – the length of time that people spend in good health. The Health Hydro will add life to years, as well as years to life.

