

DON'T LET CANAL GET IN THE WAY

A SWINDON property expert has urged that plans to restore part of the town's industrial heritage by re-opening the disused Wilts & Berks Canal must not get in the way of town centre regeneration projects which are already underway.

Jeremy Sutton, a partner in the Swindon office of King Sturge, said that calls to bring the canal back to the town after almost 100 years and restore its historic link to the Kennet and Avon Canal at Devizes, should not be ruled out forever.

But he believes it could entail "biting off more than the town could chew" in the foreseeable future - particularly at a time when Swindon already has the £300m Exchange scheme in the pipeline, which includes the creation of a new town centre public square surrounded by shops, offices, homes and leisure outlets.

Earlier this year the New Swindon Company unveiled AMEC Developments as preferred developer for Swindon's new commercial core.

Mr Sutton said that the scheme was part of a steady revival in Swindon's

by Leigh Robinson

leighb@news.wilts.co.uk

office market which had seen several major organisations taking space in the town, but not in the centre.

"Recent speculation about the possibility of bringing the canal back into the town centre must not delay any decisions on major planning applications on the town centre sites which are now ready for redevelopment," said Mr Sutton.

"This proposal will no doubt require major alterations to local roads and infrastructure in and around the town centre and will inevitably have an impact on schemes which are currently being designed, presumably based on the existing infrastructure.

"Clearly everyone wants what is best for Swindon but I believe the plans for the canal will mean biting off more than the town can chew.

"We must start to deliver our existing projects rather than adding to the wish list and further delaying the much-needed improvements to our town centre office stock."



Mr Sutton, pictured above, said that office take-up so far this year stood at more than 120,000 sq ft, as opposed to 192,000 sq ft for the whole of last year, with the Lydiard Fields office scheme - which has recently attracted JP Morgan Chase Bank - and the Windmill Hill development, where building society Nationwide had taken

space, accounting for around 40 per cent of total take-up.

Legal & General has also announced it is leasing 30,000 sq ft at Kingsbridge Point in the town centre from Nationwide, while Loxton Developments is refurbishing and improving Western House after purchasing the 43,000 sq ft office building in April.

Meanwhile Modus Properties is committed to the development of Granville Street and Parkridge Holdings and Ashfield Land are progressing with the College site redevelopment.

"These two schemes will be dominated by leisure, retail and residential development and demonstrate the commitment there is in the town to regeneration and improvements to quality of life," said Jeremy Sutton.

"This, along with the lack of any quality town centre supply, has been the downfall of the town centre office market.

"Major occupiers who consider space in the town centre demand more from a location that purely space for desks and PCs."