

DEFENCE SECTOR PROSPECTUS



A national defence innovation hub
2026–2031





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FORWARD THINKING DEFENCE

Swindon's emergence as the epicentre of the UK's sovereign autonomous manufacturing isn't just a modern economic pivot—it is the next logical chapter in an extraordinary 180-year history of industrial transformation.

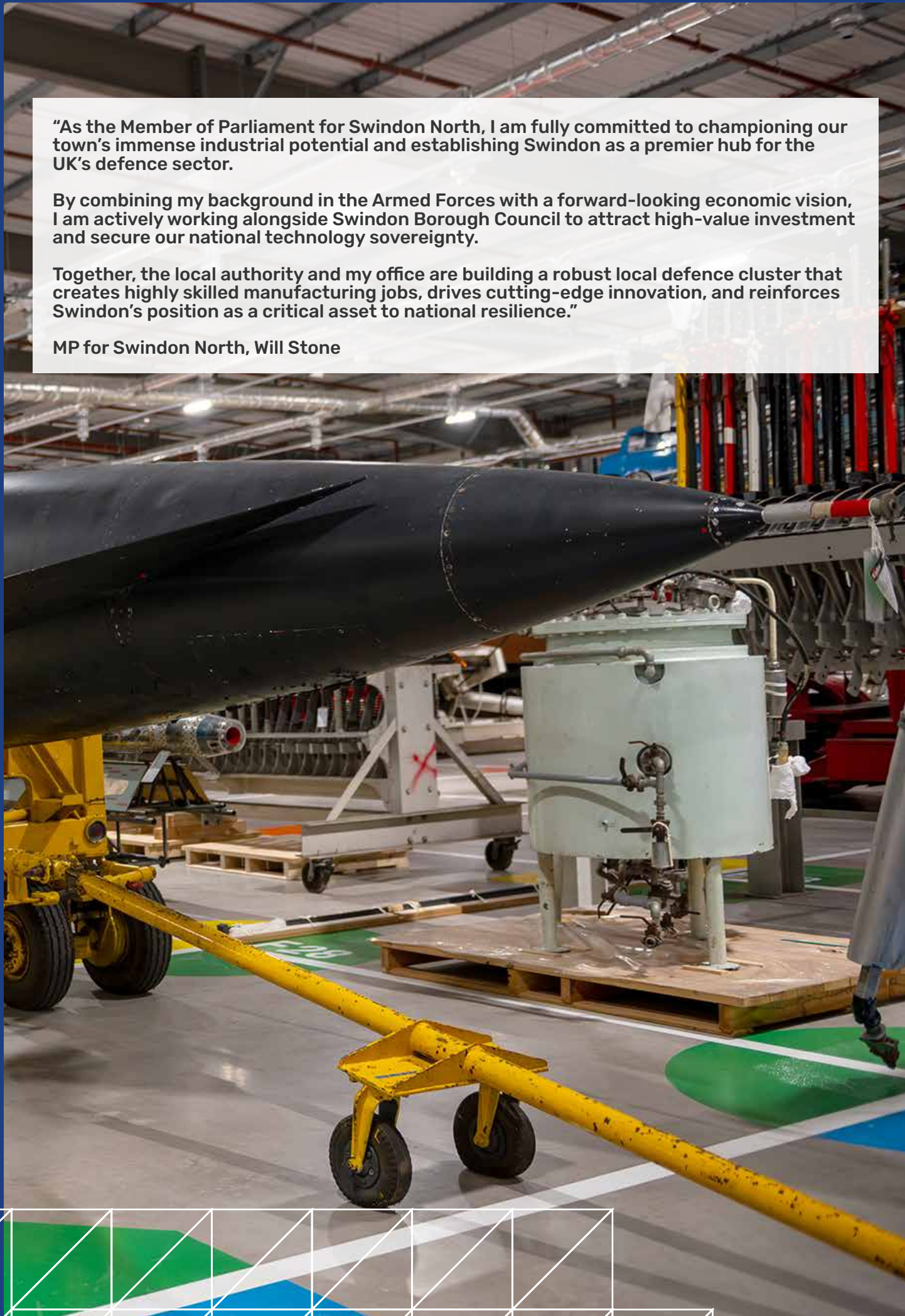
The town has always excelled at taking a highly skilled workforce and pivoting it toward the cutting edge of global engineering. Swindon's DNA was written by Isambard

Kingdom Brunel in the 1840s, when the Great Western Railway (GWR) locomotive works turned a small market town into a global titan of steam. When the world changed, Swindon adapted.

The precise engineering and heavy manufacturing skills honed on locomotives naturally transitioned into premium automotive manufacturing and advanced electronics in the late 20th century.

Today, that same industrial lineage is driving the UK's modern Defence Industrial Strategy. The newly opened DroneTEX facility—housing the Ministry of Defence's Uncrewed Systems Centre (USC)—spans a staggering 545,000 square feet on the sprawling former Honda manufacturing site.

It represents Europe's largest dedicated drone testing and development hub.



"As the Member of Parliament for Swindon North, I am fully committed to championing our town's immense industrial potential and establishing Swindon as a premier hub for the UK's defence sector.

By combining my background in the Armed Forces with a forward-looking economic vision, I am actively working alongside Swindon Borough Council to attract high-value investment and secure our national technology sovereignty.

Together, the local authority and my office are building a robust local defence cluster that creates highly skilled manufacturing jobs, drives cutting-edge innovation, and reinforces Swindon's position as a critical asset to national resilience."

MP for Swindon North, Will Stone

FULL-CIRCLE AVIATION HERITAGE

The link to flight runs deep. During the Second World War, Swindon's skilled railway carriage workers were rapidly repurposed to manufacture Supermarine Spitfires on the very same South Marston complex that now anchors DroneTEX.

Eighty years after the last Spitfire rolled off the production lines, Swindon is once again answering the national call—shifting from iconic fighter planes to the sovereign autonomous systems and software-defined platforms of modern warfare.

"Swindon's rich industrial heritage has always been defined by our ability to build the future, and our new Swindon Economic Growth Plan firmly establishes the town as a powerhouse for modern innovation.

By focusing heavily on the defence sector and advanced component manufacturing, we are unlocking massive commercial opportunities and creating high-skilled jobs across the borough. This prospectus highlights how our world-class infrastructure, strategic location, and pioneering facilities like DroneTEX make Swindon the premier destination for sovereign capability.

We are fully committed to supporting global defence primes and local supply chains as they manufacture the next generation of technology right here in Swindon."

Councillor Gary Sumner, Leader of Swindon Borough Council



SWINDON'S ECONOMIC PROFILE

- **Highly Productive:** Ranked 3rd nationally for productivity, boasting a Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked of £62 and a total GVA exceeding £12.7 billion.
- **Defence Specialisation:** Swindon and the surrounding region hold a Defence Location Quotient (LQ) of 2.0—double the national average.
- **Dynamic Labour Pool:** A rapidly expanding population (up 10.4% over the last decade) with 65% representing a highly skilled working-age demographic.
- **Private Sector led economy:** At 3.6 to 1 Swindon has one of the highest ratios of private to public jobs in the UK.
- **Population:** At 243,875 Swindon has seen a population growth of 11.4% from 2014-24 making it one of the fastest growing areas of the UK.
- **Modern or Refurbished Industrial Units:** Typically command £10 to £13 per sq. Ft.
- **Older, Secondary Industrial Units:** Usually the most affordable, ranging from £7 to £9 per sq. ft.

"Swindon offers a compelling base for Defence companies, and as a Swindon-based business, SDO Associates is actively supporting new entrants with practical supply chain engagement and local integration, alongside our work promoting the Uncrewed Systems Network and working with the MoD's newly opened Uncrewed Systems Centre in the town. Our focus is simple: help companies land, connect, and grow quickly and effectively within the UK Defence & Aerospace ecosystem from a strong Swindon footing."

Stu Olden, CEO SDO Associates

CONNECTIVITY & STRATEGIC LOCATION

Swindon stands at the nexus of the M4 technology corridor, acting as a crucial bridge between London, the major aerospace clusters of Bristol and South Wales, and the scientific hubs of the Thames Valley.

THE 'GOLDEN HOUR' PROXIMITY

Our strategic transport links ensure that defence companies, researchers, and supply-chain partners can move people and components seamlessly across the UK:

Swindon Borough Council is deeply committed to a proactive, pro-business growth agenda that turns strategic ambition into rapid commercial reality. This approach is vividly reflected in the unparalleled levels of recent investment and the surge of speculative industrial builds across the town.



Digital & Energy Infrastructure Resilience

Next-Generation Digital Infrastructure: Over 98% of urban premises feature superfast broadband access, with full-fibre rollout aggressively mandated for all new commercial zones to guarantee secure, high-speed military-grade data transfers.

Proactive Power Planning: Swindon Borough Council is actively collaborating with Distribution Network Operators to secure priority grid connections and energy reinforcements, making the region highly resilient for energy-intensive advanced manufacturing and testing activities.

Global Primes Investing in Swindon

Our innovation cluster is underpinned by major capital commitments from pioneering global technology and defence leaders:

TEKEVER: Deploying cutting-edge, long-endurance maritime and land surveillance unmanned systems, anchoring high-skilled aerospace roles right here in Swindon.

“For TEKEVER, Swindon is an increasingly important part of our UK growth story. Locating our new manufacturing facility in the town reflects our confidence in the region’s defence industrial base, the strength of the UK’s engineering and manufacturing capability, and the opportunity to support the UK and its allies with operationally proven autonomous systems.”

Stark: Investing in autonomous systems manufacturing and electronic assembly, capitalising on Swindon’s rich engineering DNA.

“Swindon was a natural choice for STARK and we’re proud to have made it our UK HQ. The town combines engineering and manufacturing heritage, a skilled local workforce, strong transport links and a growing defence technology cluster, with the added advantage of being close to key military stakeholders, trials and testing areas. As we scale in the UK, Swindon gives us the right platform to build the next generation of defence technology.”



CRADLE OF INNOVATION

Dronetex & Anchor Investments

Europe’s Largest Drone Testing Centre: DroneTEX

Swindon proudly hosts DroneTEX, Europe’s premier operational facility dedicated to testing, validating, and accelerating drone technology and unmanned aerial systems. This revolutionary hub serves as a catalyst for advanced research and development, anchoring national initiatives to deploy rapidly scalable autonomous assets for security and defence - backed by £310m of committed MoD investment in the Uncrewed Systems Centre through the Defence Investment Plan 2026 (2026–2030).

“The character of warfare is changing, and it is changing fast. From Ukraine to the Middle East, we are seeing right now how uncrewed systems are rapidly evolving and reshaping conflicts - on land, in the air and at sea.

Our new DroneTEX facility at the heart of our Uncrewed Systems Centre is Europe’s largest drone test and development facility and will help us ensure the UK embraces technologies that are redefining warfare.

Where once new technology could take years from inception to reaching our Armed Forces, we will now be able to develop and field new tech in a matter of weeks - because in this new era, those who innovate fastest will win.

This state-of-the-art centre will work with British companies, supporting SMEs, unlocking exports and creating high-skilled jobs.”

Defence Secretary Dan Jarvis MP



The Defence Investment Plan 2026

Over £5bn into autonomous systems over the next four years. We will build a Hybrid Navy with new autonomous vessels and uncrewed sub-surface vessels, an Army transformed by AI, armed autonomous vehicles and drones, and a Next Generation Royal Air Force with new autonomous fighter jets capable of operating from land bases or aircraft carriers. We have established a new Defence Uncrewed Systems Centre in Swindon, and an Uncrewed Systems Taskforce to embed these capabilities across our Armed Forces.

“This location was chosen for all the right reasons: access to a technically proficient workforce, strong physical and digital infrastructure, and proximity to all facets of defence.”

Brigadier Stu Nasse, head of the UK Drone Coalition

STRUCTURAL & STRATEGIC SUPPORT

Advanced Manufacturing Skills Support in Swindon

For businesses relocating to the Swindon region, a robust local skills ecosystem provides a comprehensive pipeline of technical talent, centred around the Swindon and Wiltshire Institute of Technology (SAWIOT) at the North Star campus of New College Swindon.

Foundational Talent: Level 3 Apprenticeships

The region offers foundational, hands-on technical training to build and maintain high-precision engineering capabilities:

Machining Technician Apprenticeship: A 42-month program at New College Swindon covering manual and CNC machine tools, complex engineering drawings, and strict industry compliance. It utilizes the nationally recognized EAL L3 Extended Diploma.

Business Benefits: Companies receive dedicated recruitment support to find, vet, and mold “home-grown” talent tailored to their specific machinery and workflows.

Complementary Programs: SAWIOT also provides related apprenticeships, including Level 3 Mechatronics Maintenance.

Leadership & Industry 4.0: Online MSc

To upskill existing engineering leads and management without disrupting operations, Brunel University London delivers a flexible, two-year part-time online MSc in Advanced Manufacturing Systems & Technologies.

Curriculum Focus: Features specialized training in automation, robotics, global supply chains, and systems modelling via MATLAB, Simulink, and CATIA.

Strategic Advantage: Transforms technical workers into strategic manufacturing managers capable of leading smart-factory environments.

Regional Infrastructure & Support

The multi-million-pound SAWIOT facility acts as a centralised training hub:

Cross-Disciplinary Training: Offers higher-level technical qualifications (HNC/HND), Level 4 Engineering Manufacturing, and partnerships with institutions like the University of Gloucestershire.

Employer Collaboration: Features an “Employer Charter” and dedicated business development teams to customise corporate training packages and optimise government funding/levies.

“As a fast-growing Swindon startup operating from our advanced facility at South Marston Park, Billet Precision is proud to support the defence sector with high-precision, UK-based engineering that meets the industry’s most rigorous standards. With over thirty years of combined experience and an intensive investment in multi-axis CNC milling, mill-turn technology, and further investment and expansion in the very near future, we have built a manufacturing environment where there are minimal margins for error.

We specialise in machining complex, mission-critical components from demanding aerospace-grade materials, offering defence contractors a highly agile, reliable supply chain partner capable of handling everything from rapid, full-traceability prototyping to high-tolerance batch production.”

Will Casey, Director & co-founder, Billet Precision Ltd

Strategic Business Growth Support in Swindon

Swindon offers a comprehensive support ecosystem for businesses looking to relocate, expand, or develop within the region, structured around six key growth pillars:

Property, Innovation & Site Development

Precision Site & Property Solutions: Targeted searches to secure ideal office, industrial footprints, or high-potential development sites tailored to specific investment criteria.

Planning & Regulatory Navigation: Expert guidance on planning from beginning to end, with prioritisation of key investments to ensure hurdles are navigated as smoothly as possible.

R&D Integration: Seamless entry into local research, development, and academic networks (HE/FE) to drive collaborative growth.

Workforce, Talent & Local Integration

Talent Pipelines: Support for expert strategic recruitment to attract top-tier talent and scale teams effectively.

Customised Training: Direct links to local training providers and apprenticeship pathways to future-proof the workforce.

Community Integration: Practical assistance covering vital local services, including transport logistics, parking, healthcare, and schooling.

High-Value Connectivity & Investment Support

Ecosystem & B2B Networking: Instant access to a thriving community of industry leaders with facilitated introductions to local suppliers and partners.

Investment Concierge: Tailored visit itineraries and logistical support for eligible investors, alongside ongoing account management for long-term expansion.

National & Global Reach: Direct bridges to national powerhouses (Innovate UK, UKRI, Department for Business & Trade) and strategic partnerships with UK Universities and Catapult centres.



Pro-Growth Intelligence & Partnerships

Market Intelligence: Exclusive access to demographics, economic forecasting, and local trend data to validate and de-risk investments.

Public Sector Collaboration: Strong, established relationships with Swindon Borough Council and key local stakeholders to drive sustainable development.

Funding Optimisation: Expert guidance on navigating grants, tax incentives, and capital funding opportunities to maximize project viability.

COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL REAL ESTATE

Swindon's upcoming Local Plan framework prioritises the active expansion of advanced manufacturing, logistics, and engineering space, allocating a massive 640,000 square metres of brand-new industrial floorspace across highly competitive, cost-effective locations.

"Panattoni Park Swindon marks a historic new chapter for a site that once anchored Britain's wartime industrial efforts; today, we are proud to see it shape the future of modern sovereign capability.

Securing the landmark DroneTEX facility for the Ministry of Defence's Uncrewed Systems Centre underscores the world-class scale, power, and strategic connectivity our development offers. We are fully committed to working alongside Swindon Borough Council to build on this momentum, and we look forward to welcoming further pioneering defence and aerospace occupiers looking for ready-to-go, next-generation facilities to scale their operations."

James Watson, Director Panattoni



KEY STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT HUBS

Strategic Business Growth Support in Swindon

Swindon offers a comprehensive support ecosystem for businesses looking to relocate, expand, or develop within the region, structured around six key growth pillars:

Panattoni Park (The Core Manufacturing Site)

- **Overview:** A massive £918 million redevelopment spanning 360 acres at the former Honda manufacturing site. It represents one of the single largest industrial re-industrialisation schemes in Europe.
- **Capability:** Delivering 7.2 million sq. ft. of Grade A, ultra-modern employment space targeted specifically toward advanced component manufacturing, logistics and defence primes and supply chains.
- **Credentials:** Targeting BREEAM 'Outstanding' and EPC A ratings, complete with substantial solar PV array infrastructure and rapid heavy-vehicle electric charging options.

Knowledge Central & The Carriage Works

- **Overview:** A 100-acre future-focused innovation district situated directly adjacent to Swindon's mainline railway station.
- **Capability:** Incorporating the historic Carriage Works and flexible incubation facilities at the Workshed. Ideal for high-value research, artificial intelligence engineering, cybersecurity operations, and digital dual-use technology testing.
- **Synergy:** Anchored alongside the national headquarters of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), providing immediate proximity to major scientific grant ecosystems.

Science and Innovation Park

- **Overview:** A 545-acre innovation powerhouse just minutes from the M4—where cutting-edge research meets industrial scale.
- **Capability:** Providing specialised, massive-scale facilities for large-object storage, conservation research, and commercial prototyping. It features adaptable hangar spaces designed for advanced material testing, autonomous vehicle trials, and low-carbon energy technology deployment.
- **Credentials:** Managed by the Science Museum Group, this site offers unparalleled security and operational scale, seamlessly bridging the gap between national heritage preservation and forward-looking scientific enterprise.



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