

Planning Advice: Use of Swift Bricks in New Developments in Leicestershire and Rutland

Your proposed development site is in a Swift Alert Area, where there are recent records for breeding Swifts. Swifts are a priority species in our Local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). Applying planning conditions to developments in Swift Alert Areas will help to achieve the local BAP and NPPF aims of safeguarding existing swift nest-sites and promoting the protection and recovery of a priority species.

The NPPF, 2019 (paragraphs 170 & 174) states that local planning authorities should consider biodiversity in plans and policies. Planning policies and decisions should be 'minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity'. Plans should 'promote...the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity'.

When determining planning applications, local planning authorities are required to apply the following principle from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2019, paragraph 175. 'development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged'.



Swift Action Needed!

Swifts have suffered a 53% decline in breeding populations between 1995 and 2016. Swifts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and under the NERC Act 2006, (Natural environment and Rural Communities Act), so local authorities in England have a duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of policy or decision making. Conserving biodiversity can include restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.

Swifts are amazing birds that are only in the UK for 3 months each year to breed, flying here after spending the winter in Africa. This is a critical time for the species as without successful breeding there would be no recruitment to the population, without protection of nesting sites there would be no annual return! They are believed to have been sharing our buildings since Roman times and return to the same nest site each year. Many adults return to find their nest sites have been destroyed or blocked due to our tendency to seal up buildings or knock them down, so they need our help now! It has been estimated that we need to create 20,000 new Swift nest sites every year just to stabilise the current population.

Photo by Andy and Helen Holt

How You Can Help

Swifts need places to nest to replace the nest sites that are lost each year. Swift bricks are easy to incorporate into development design. Turn over for more information about what you need to consider when providing nest bricks for Swifts.

Opportunities / Mitigation

Swift bricks can easily be incorporated into development design. Swifts are colonial nesting birds so more than one box should be fitted, the number will depend on the use and design of the buildings. Advice on the design, number, type and location of the nest boxes should be sought from a competent person and / or ecologist in agreement with the Local Planning Authority. Swifts are clean birds and are very quiet in the nest so residents should not be disturbed by them.

Swift bricks are:

- Easily incorporated into building design
- Simple
- Cheap
- Successful
- Maintenance - free

Swift brick location:

- At least 5 metres above the ground
- In a shady spot - e.g. on a side of a building that gets some shade during the day
 - under an overhang
 - under the eaves
- With a clear approach to the nest brick (both immediately below and giving a flight line to the nest brick)

Where to avoid fitting nest bricks:

- Directly above windows and flues
- Locations where predators could access e.g. plants climbing on walls
- Next to trees
- Near wall-mounted aerials, ladders or hand rails
- Close to busy areas with frequent human access



Where to Find Out More - The Swift Conservation website at www.swift-conservation.org gives substantially more information, including advice on different manufacturers that provide Swift Bricks and examples of where bricks have been installed. You can also purchase a variety of nest bricks from the shopping page of the Swift Conservation Website <http://www.swift-conservation.org/Shopping!.htm>

In Leicestershire and Rutland you can contact:

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust – info@lrwt.org.uk

Or your Planning Team's Ecologist at:

Leicester City Council - Planning@Leicester.gov.uk

Charnwood Borough Council - biodiversity@charnwood.gov.uk

Leicestershire County Council (including Rutland) - planningecology@leics.gov.uk

