

Debate Pack

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By Felicia Rankl,
Elena Ares,
Georgina Sturge

Debate on e-petition 626737 relating to swift bricks

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Summary

A petition (e-petition 626737) calling on the government to [make swift bricks compulsory for new housing](#) will be debated in Westminster Hall on 10 July 2023. The petition received over 100,000 signatures and was supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

[Swifts are migratory species of bird](#) that usually arrives to breed in the UK in late April. They typically nest in the eaves of tall older buildings entering through gaps in timber and brickwork.

There is a continuing long-term decline in breeding swift numbers in the UK. Swifts were placed on the [UK Red List for birds](#) in 2021 by British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) “due to worsening declines in the breeding population”.

A ‘swift brick’ provides a nesting box for swifts that is fitted into the walls of a building. Brighton and Hove City Council has made [swift bricks a requirement in new buildings](#) above 5 metres in height.

In response to the petition calling for [swift bricks to be made compulsory for new housing](#), the government said it would not legislate to require developers or local authorities to use particular forms of building material, such as swift bricks, in every development. The government said particular forms of green infrastructure, such as swift bricks, were not suited to all developments.

1 Background: Swifts and swift bricks

A petition (e-petition 626737) calling on the government to [make swift bricks compulsory for new housing](#) will be debated in Westminster Hall on 10 July 2023. The petition received 109,894 signatures and was supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

1.1 Swifts

[Swifts are migratory species of bird](#) that usually arrive to breed in the UK in late April. Swifts are one of the fastest birds in level flight and have few natural predators. While away from nesting sites they do not touch down for around nine months, migrating to Africa and back, feeding off flying insects and sleeping on the wing.

Swifts usually breed from the age of four, mate for life and live on average 9 years.¹ Swift pairs return every year to the same nest, having wintered separately, and are present in the UK from late April to late July. They typically nest in the eaves of tall older buildings entering through gaps in timber and brickwork.

1.2 Swift population in the UK

The precise number of swifts in the UK is unknown so we rely on population estimates. The most comprehensive estimates come from the British Trust for Ornithology's [Breeding Bird Survey](#) (BBS), which is an annual exercise to record evidence of the presence of different types of bird across the UK.

The latest available estimate for swifts in the UK from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) was 57,000 breeding pairs in 2016.

The BBS has recorded a consistent decline in swift numbers across the UK since 1995, although to varying extent in different parts of the country. In total, the swift population is estimated to have declined by 62% between 1995 and 2021, with declines of close to 80% in the North East and North West.²

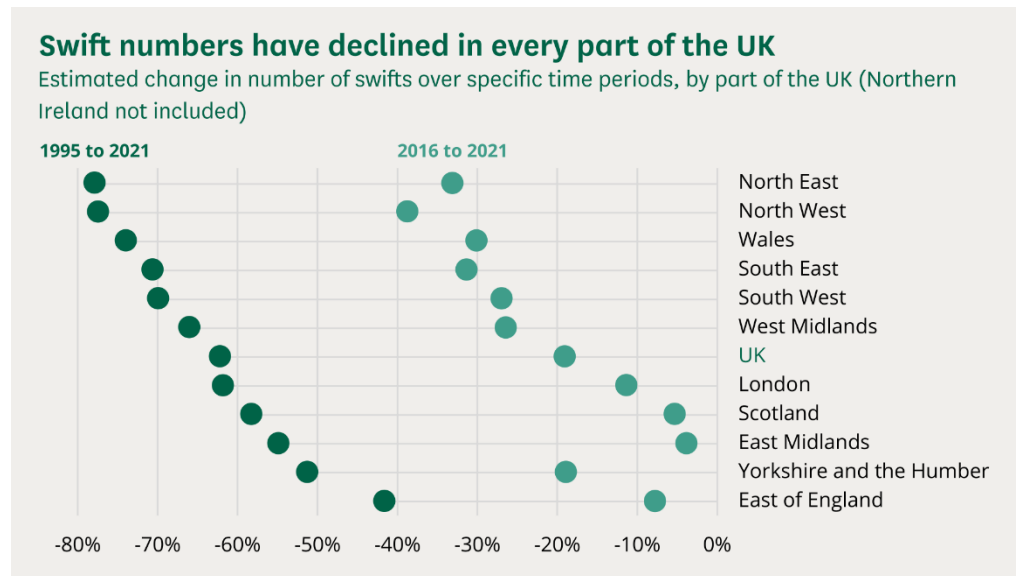
In the most recent five-year period for which estimates are produced – 2016 to 2021 – the data suggests that swift numbers declined by 19% across the UK as

¹ British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), [Understanding birds: Swifts](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]

² BTO, [Breeding Bird Survey 2022 – bird population trends](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]

a whole, and by 39% in the North West. The East of England saw much smaller declines of 42% since 1995 and 8% since 2016 (as of 2021).

The chart below shows the change in estimated swift numbers in each part of the UK over two time periods. Note that Northern Ireland is excluded.



Source: BTO, [Breeding Bird Survey 2022 – bird population trends](#)

1.3

Global swift populations

The swift population in mainland Europe as a whole is not considered to be at risk or in substantial decline. The PanEuropean Common Bird Monitoring Scheme classifies the swift population as ‘stable’ and the European Environment Agency judged it to be ‘secure’ as of 2020.³

The swift population size globally is estimated by Birdlife International as “extremely large” (at over 95 million individuals) of that large population 40% is present in Europe. As a species, it is listed as of least concern, except for in the UK and Ireland.⁴

The European Environment Agency’s monitoring of swift populations does suggest that there have been declines in some European countries other than the UK. Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Spain and Sweden all showed evidence of a decline in the swift population between 1980 and 2018 and, in

³ PanEuropean Common Bird Monitoring Scheme, [Species trend: apus apus](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]; European Environment Agency, [Status and trends of bird populations: datasets from Article 12. Birds Directive 2009/147/EC reporting: 2020 data](#).

⁴ BirdLife International (2023) [Species factsheet: Apus apus](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]

addition, Bulgaria, Netherlands, Ireland, Slovakia, and Slovenia showed declines between the mid-2000s and 2018.⁵

In Ireland, the swift population was estimated to have declined by around 38% between 2006 and 2016, similar to the estimated decline of around 41% in the UK's swift population between 2004 and 2016. Sweden was estimated to have seen a particularly notable long-term decline in its swift population, of around 74% between 1980 and 2018.

1.4 UK swift population status

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), together with a number of bird conservation charities, has been publishing a list of Birds of Conservation Concern (BOCC) since 1996. This is also [known as the UK Red List for birds](#). The first BOCC included 36 UK Bird species as being of serious concern (or red listed). The latest assessment, [BOCC5 published in 2021](#), listed 70 species as being of serious concern. The reasons for species being added to the list are as follows:

- They are threatened with global extinction
- They have undergone a severe historical population decline in UK since 1800
- Breeding numbers in the UK have fallen by at least half in the last 25 years or longer
- Their breeding range in the UK has had a severe contraction of at least 50% in the last 25 years or longer⁶

Swifts were listed as green in both 1996 and 2002, meaning they were not of concern. They were then deemed to be in decline and listed as amber, meaning they were of moderate concern, in 2009 and 2015.

However, as the data in the section above shows, there is a continuing long-term decline in breeding swift numbers in the UK, although the severity varies regionally. This decline is ongoing with numbers continuing to drop in the last 6 years. As result swifts was placed on the UK red list “due to worsening declines in the breeding population” in 2021, together with [house martins](#), another migratory bird species from Africa that breeds in the UK.⁷

⁵ European Environment Agency, [Status and trends of bird populations: datasets from Article 12, Birds Directive 2009/147/EC reporting](#): 2020 data.

⁶ RSPB, [What is the Red list for UK birds?](#) [website visited 6 July 2027]

⁷ Author(s): Stanbury, A.J., Eaton, M.A., Aebischer, N.J., Balmer, D., Brown, A.F., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D.G. & Win, I., [The status of our bird populations: the fifth Birds of](#)

1.5

Causes of swift population decline

Nesting site availability

The reasons for the UK swift breeding population decline are not fully understood but has been linked to a lack of available nest sites. As the RSPB, a bird conservation charity, notes:

Swifts are only here for around three months, two of which are spent raising chicks. So if an alternative site can't be found fast, a whole breeding season must be skipped.⁸

The lack of nesting sites in newer buildings has been highlighted by the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM):

Swifts rely on nest sites in buildings but unfortunately many traditional sites disappear each year through renovation, insulation and demolition, while new buildings exclude them from the spaces they normally use.⁹

The [Swift Conservation](#) website explains how changes in design have affected availability of nesting sites.

Swifts nest almost only in pre-1944 buildings. While 10% of homes built before 1919 can house Swifts, the figure for inter-war housing is 7%, and for post-1944 housing only 1.4%. Post-2000 it is probably nil. This is because the techniques and materials used in modern buildings deny Swifts access to breed, it's the same with refurbished or re-roofed older buildings.¹⁰

[Birdlife International](#) recommends the following conservation actions to support UK swift populations:

The species should be considered when repairing or replacing roofs, ensuring that holes and eaves that it uses for nesting are maintained and work does not take place during the breeding season (Mayer 2008). Nest boxes or nest bricks should be incorporated into new buildings or added to existing ones (RSPB 2012).¹¹

Insect populations

Swifts feed exclusively on flying insects and small spiders, which they catch mid-flight. There is evidence in the UK and world-wide that flying insect populations have declined significantly over recent decades.

[Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain](#), British Birds Volume: 114, December 2021

⁸ RSPB, [Save our Swifts](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]

⁹ CIEEM In Practice Magazine, [The Swift – a bird you need to help!](#), June 2019

¹⁰ Swift Conservation, [Swift facts](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]

¹¹ BirdLife International (2023) [Species factsheet: Apus apus](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]

The Science and Technology Select Committee launched an enquiry into [Insect decline and UK food Security](#) in March 2023. The [submission from Buglife](#), an insect conservation group, to the Committee explained that “there is now an increasing body of evidence that indicates population declines in insects at global scales” and set out some evidence of how large a change there has been in the UK:

The Bugs Matter Citizen Science Survey - led by conservation charities Kent Wildlife Trust and Buglife, is the only widespread flying insect abundance survey in the UK, found a 64% decline in insect numbers sampled on vehicle number plates between 2004 and 2022.¹²

1.6

Swift bricks

The petition (e-petition 626737) called on the government to [make swift bricks compulsory for new housing](#). A ‘swift brick’ provides a nesting box for swifts that is fitted into the walls of a building. A joint report by the RSPB and Barratt Homes, a housing developer, explains that that swift bricks are self-contained boxes, except for the entrance hole, and coloured to match the brickwork.¹³

According to Sheffield Swifts Network, a local group that advocates for swift protection, swift bricks “need to be installed as high as possible [...] and best under the eaves/verges to avoid driving rain”.¹⁴

A report on [how biodiversity can be incorporated in housing developments](#) by the National House Building Council (NHBC) Foundation and the RSPB from 2021 provides further detailed advice on the installation of swift bricks:

Provision of integral nest sites for swifts is through hollow chambers fitted into the fabric of a building while in construction. These are sealed units which prevent birds access to the roof space. Although targeting swifts they will also be used by house sparrows, tits and starlings so are considered a ‘universal brick’ [...].

Swifts prefer to nest in reasonably close proximity, as do sparrows, so nests should be clustered in suitable areas of a development, fitted adjacent to the roofline in the cold loft space of a gable or tight to the eaves of hipped roofs. Fitting at a ratio of 1 nest brick per house across the development will ensure sufficient nest sites for colonial species. 3-5 can be located in one house, so helping locate them in suitable locations for access to foraging habitat.¹⁵

¹² Science and Technology Select Committee, [Written Evidence submitted by Buglife \(INS0038\)](#), 17 May 2023

¹³ RSPB and Barratt Homes, [Swift nesting bricks](#) (PDF), undated [accessed 23 June 2023]

¹⁴ Sheffield Swift Network, [How to buy and retrofit a swift brick](#), undated [accessed 23 June 2023]

¹⁵ National Housing Building Council (NHBC), [Biodiversity in new housing developments](#), April 2021, page 42

Brighton and Hove City Council provides the [directions on how to position swift bricks](#), which have been made a requirement in new buildings above 5 metres in height. This sets out that:

- Bricks can be placed facing any direction but the ideal position for a swift brick is under shade-casting eaves.
- Swift bricks (or boxes, although bricks are the council's preferred option) should be placed in groups of at least three.
- They should be placed at a height above 5 metres, and where possible, with a 5-metre gap between them and other buildings.
- Sitting swift bricks and boxes above windows or doors should be avoided.¹⁶

The British Standards Institute (BSI), which provides standards for building work in the UK, has a [specification for in-built nesting boxes](#). It sets out how in-built nest boxes, including swift bricks, should be selected and installed.¹⁷

¹⁶ Brighton and Hove City Council, [Guidance Note for Provision of Swift Boxes in New Development](#), 2020 [accessed 5 July 2023]

¹⁷ British Standards Institute, [Integral nest boxes. Selection and installation for new developments. Specification \(BS 42021: 2022\)](#), May 2023

2

Government policy

In response to the petition calling for [swift bricks to be made compulsory for new housing](#), the government said it would not legislate to require developers or local authorities to use particular forms of building material, such as swift bricks, in every development. The government said particular forms of green infrastructure, such as swift bricks, were not suited to all developments:

We will not be legislating [...] to compel local authorities or developers to include particular forms of green infrastructure in every development. In some high density schemes the provision of “swift bricks”, for instance, might be inappropriate; in other places it could not achieve the desired connectivity for wildlife. For the natural environment to thrive we need both local authorities and developers to understand the natural characteristics of each site, and to take proportionate and reasonable action relevant to that location.¹⁸

Please note that because planning is a devolved matter the policies set out in this section of the briefing only cover the situation in England.

2.1

Current planning policy

The government’s planning policies for England are set out in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF). The NPPF states that the planning system should “provide biodiversity net gains where possible”.¹⁹

The NPPF notes that “improving biodiversity” is part of the “an environmental objective” of the planning system.²⁰ It states that policies set out in local plans and decisions on planning applications should contribute to, and enhance, the natural and local environment, including by:

- protecting and enhancing biodiversity sites.
- minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.²¹

The NPPF states that “opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.”²²

¹⁸ DLUHC, Government response to e-petition 626737: [Make swift bricks compulsory in new housing to help red-listed birds](#), December 2022

¹⁹ MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), last updated July 2021

²⁰ MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), last updated July 2021, para 8

²¹ MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), last updated July 2021, para 174

²² MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), last updated July 2021, para 180

1 What role does the NPPF play?

Most developments require planning permission from the local planning authority (LPA). The LPA is usually the district council. LPAs will decide planning applications for developments in line with their local plan, a document setting out their policies and priorities for the future development of an area, unless “material considerations” indicate otherwise.²³

One material consideration is the government’s [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF). The NPPF also provides a framework against which LPAs draw up their local plans.

The NPPF also sets out which principles local planning authorities (LPAs) should apply when determining planning applications for development. It states that significant harm to biodiversity should be:

- firstly, avoided, by locating the development on an alternative site with less harmful impacts.
- secondly, adequately mitigated.
- finally, as a last resort, compensated.²⁴

If none of these can be achieved, the NPPF advises that LPAs should refuse to grant planning permission to a development.

The government’s [planning practice guidance on the natural environment](#) provides further guidance on how biodiversity can and should be taken into account by LPAs in assessing planning applications for development.

Use of planning conditions and obligations

The government’s [guidance on the natural environment](#) notes that LPAs can use planning conditions and obligations to require developments to achieve biodiversity gains “in appropriate circumstances”.²⁵

- [Planning conditions](#) can be attached to planning permission by LPAs to mitigate the impacts of a development or make it acceptable from a planning perspective.

²³ [Section 70\(2\) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990; Section 38\(6\) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)

²⁴ MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), last updated July 2021, para 180; DLUHC and MHCLG, [Natural environment](#), last updated July 2019, para 19

²⁵ MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), last updated July 2021, para 23

- Planning conditions must be: necessary, enforceable, relevant to planning and to the development, and reasonable.²⁶
- [Planning obligations](#) are legally enforceable agreements negotiated between a local authority and a developer.²⁷ They can take either the form of financial payments to the LPA or in-kind infrastructure delivery.
 - Planning obligations must be: necessary to make a development acceptable in planning terms, directly related to a development, and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind of development.²⁸

The guidance highlights ‘swift bricks’ in developments as one option for LPAs to minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity:

The work involved may, for example, involve creating new habitats, enhancing existing habitats, providing green roofs, green walls, street trees or sustainable drainage systems. Relatively small features can often achieve important benefits for wildlife, such as incorporating ‘swift bricks’ and bat boxes in developments and providing safe routes for hedgehogs between different areas of habitat.

Benefits could be achieved entirely on-site or by using off-site gains where necessary. Off-site measures can sometimes be secured from ‘habitat banks’, which comprise areas of enhanced or created habitats which generate biodiversity unit ‘credits’.²⁹

Government guidance provides further inform on the [use of planning conditions](#) and [planning obligations](#).³⁰ The Commons Library briefing on [Planning Obligations \(Section 106 Agreements\)](#) provides further information on when planning obligations can be used.

Council initiatives

Some LPAs include policies for specific biodiversity measures, such as swift bricks or other nesting boxes, in their local plans or supplementary planning documents.

For example, as set out above, Brighton and Hove City Council attaches a planning condition to all permission for new builds that are over 5 metres in

²⁶ MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), last updated July 2021, para 55

²⁷ [Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#)

²⁸ [Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010](#); MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), last updated July 2021, para 57

²⁹ DLUHC and MHCLG, [Natural environment](#), last updated July 2019, para 23

³⁰ DLUHC and MHCLG, [Natural environment](#), last updated July 2019, para 18

height, requiring them to include swift bricks or boxes. The number of bricks will depend on the size of the development.³¹

2.2

Upcoming changes to planning policy

The petition calling for [swift bricks to be made compulsory for new housing](#) expressed concern that “the metric for calculating biodiversity net gain doesn't include existing nest sites in buildings, or swift bricks”.

This is in the context of an upcoming duty for developers to demonstrate 10% biodiversity net gain. The government's metric to measure biodiversity gains and losses does not account for individual wildlife species, such as swifts.

10% biodiversity net gain from November 2023

Under the [Environment Act 2021](#), most development sites that are granted planning permission will need to demonstrate at least 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) from November 2023.³² The government defined BNG as:

[...] an approach to development that leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. [...] Biodiversity net gain delivers measurable improvements for biodiversity by creating or enhancing habitats in association with development. Biodiversity net gain can be achieved on-site, off-site or through a combination of on-site and off-site measures.³³

Exemptions from the requirement will apply to householder applications and to development that will impact a habitat with an area of less than 25 square metres. The government said small sites, including residential developments which will provide less than 10 dwellings on an area of less than one hectare, would not have to deliver 10% BNG until April 2024.³⁴

The government [consulted on the implementation of BNG requirements and related regulations](#) between January and April 2022. In its response to the consultation in February 2023, the government confirmed that the 10% BNG requirement would take effect from November 2023.³⁵

³¹ Brighton and Hove City Council, [Guidance Note for Provision of Swift Boxes in New Development](#), 2020 [accessed 5 July 2023]

³² [Sections 98 to 101 of the Environment Act 2021](#)

³³ DLUHC and MHCLG, [Natural environment](#), last updated July 2019, paras 20-22

³⁴ Defra, [Consultation on Biodiversity Net Gain regulations and implementation](#), last updated February 2023, para 3.1; para 4.2

³⁵ Defra, [Consultation on Biodiversity Net Gain regulations and implementation](#), last updated February 2023

Measuring biodiversity gain: The biodiversity metric

The 10% BNG requirement will be implemented by attaching a new general condition to all planning permissions. The condition will require a biodiversity gain plan to be submitted and approved by LPA for development to start.

The biodiversity gain plan will have to include an assessment of the value of the habitat before and after development. The ‘biodiversity metric’ will be used to calculate biodiversity losses and gains for developments.³⁶

There is already a biodiversity metric that LPAs and developers can use to measure biodiversity net gain outcomes. In advance of the introduction of the 10% BNG requirement in November 2023, the government [consulted on updates to the metric](#) in August and September 2022.³⁷ Natural England published an [updated version](#) in March 2023.³⁸

The metric does not account for individual wildlife species. Instead, it uses habitat categories as a proxy measure for biodiversity and the species that those habitats support. In its [response to its 2022 consultation on the metric](#) (PDF), the government said that it would “keep species features, like bat and bird boxes, outside the scope of the biodiversity metric”.

The government has said it would consider how habitat criteria could be updated in future to take account of protected and other important species.³⁹

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)

The [Environment Act 2021](#) also introduces local nature recovery strategies (LNRSs). Their main purpose is “to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment”.⁴⁰ In exercising their planning functions, LPAs will be required to have regard to LNRSs.⁴¹

However, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) notes that due to their wide foraging habits, very localised actions to increase biodiversity are unlikely to have major benefits for swifts:

Swifts can forage over an extremely wide area during the breeding season, so other conservation actions such as habitat management in the vicinity of nest

³⁶ DLUHC and MHCLG, [Natural environment](#), last updated July 2019, para 25

³⁷ Defra, [Biodiversity Metric Milestone: Consultation on the biodiversity metric](#), last updated May 2023

³⁸ Natural England, [The Biodiversity Metric 4.0](#), last updated July 2023

³⁹ Defra, [Consultation on the Biodiversity Metric: Government response and summary of responses](#) (PDF), March 2023, pages 27-28

⁴⁰ [Sections 104 to 108 of the Environment Act 2021](#); Defra, [Local nature recovery strategy: what to include](#), March 2023, para 4

⁴¹ DLUHC, [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy](#), December 2022, chapter 7, para 8

sites (to attempt to increase the availability of prey) are unlikely to be successful, unless they can be undertaken on a wider landscape scale.⁴²

⁴² BTO, [Birdfacts: Swifts](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]

3

Stakeholder views

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has highlighted that main drivers of swift decline are uncertain because the species “is difficult to monitor”.

However, given the population decline it advocates a precautionary approach while research is ongoing. It recommends the installation of swift bricks and swift boxes as a “straightforward and inexpensive” measure:

Provision of additional nesting space to counter any reductions in availability of nest sites as a result of modern building designs and refurbishment of older buildings, either in the form of Swift nest boxes and Swift bricks which can be integrated into new buildings and renovations, as supported by Action for Swifts, Swift Conservation and similar organisations, are a relatively straightforward and inexpensive conservation action which can be taken by local groups and individuals, and can also be incorporated into wider development planning. Swifts are known to use these artificial nests (e.g. Schaub et al. 2015). The availability of nest sites could also be increased on a wider scale by implementing policies or regulations which encourage or legislate the provision of nest boxes or Swift bricks on new buildings.⁴³

Some developers work with conservation charities to include swift bricks in their developments. For example, Barratt Developments partnered with the RSPB to install swift bricks in its developments and “to boost the number of swifts in the country”.⁴⁴ In August 2022, Barratt Developments announced that it had installed 4,000 swift nesting bricks into its homes since 2016. It said it aimed to install 7,000 swift bricks in its homes in total by the end of 2025.⁴⁵

Hopkins Homes, another property company, said it worked with the Action for Swifts, a group dedicated to reversing the decline of swifts, to install swift bricks in its developments in Norfolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk.⁴⁶

A number of local councils such as [Woking Borough Council](#) and [Oxford City Council](#) and are working to map swifts in their area to encourage developers to include swift bricks in their design and householder to install swift boxes.⁴⁷

⁴³ BTO, [Birdfacts: Swifts](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]

⁴⁴ Barratt Homes, [Campaigns: Giving nature a Barratt Homes](#), undated [accessed 5 July 2023]

⁴⁵ [Barratt Developments supports birds with 4,000 'nesting bricks'](#), The York Press, 31 August 2022 [accessed 5 July 2023]

⁴⁶ Hopkins Homes, [Hopkins Homes installs even more swift bricks in Cambridge](#), undated [accessed 5 July 2023]

⁴⁷ Working Borough Council, [Swifts in Woking](#), undated; Oxford City Council, [Need to tackle ecological emergency underlined as swift nests decline in city](#), undated [accessed 6 July 2023]

4 Selected further reading

4.1 Reports

- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM), [Swift Bricks: The 'Universal' Nest Brick](#), July 2021
- National House Building Council (NHBC), [Biodiversity in new housing developments](#), April 2021
- Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), [Biodiversity in Planning: Obligations and opportunities to promote biodiversity through the UK planning systems](#), November 2019
- RSPB, [New homes for swifts – the Manthorpe swift brick](#), September 2019

4.2 News

- [Tory MPs back mandatory swift bricks in all new homes to help declining birds](#), The Guardian, 6 July 2023
- [Brick by brick: the British manufacturers building a better future for birds](#), The Guardian, 30 June 2023
- [How can we counter biodiversity loss?](#), Building, 16 November 2022
- [Government fleshes out biodiversity net gain requirements](#), Construction Index, 22 February 2023

4.3 Parliamentary questions

[Birds: Conservation](#)

Asked by: Whittome, Nadia

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if her Department will make an assessment of the impact of swift bricks on the swift population in areas where such bricks have been included in new build developments.

Answering member: Trudy Harrison | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Through the Environment Act 2021 we have introduced a mandatory duty for developers to deliver a 'biodiversity net gain', which will mean that habitats for wildlife must be left in a measurably better state than they were before any development. Specific biodiversity features, such as swift bricks, would normally be required of developments through either the relevant local plan or through the local authority's development control team. There is currently little research into how swift bricks are used by swifts and what designs work best. As their use becomes more widespread, Defra and its agencies will continue to monitor swift populations and look for indications of positive effects.

HC Deb 15 June 2023 | PQ 189107

[Housing: Construction](#)

Asked by: West, Catherine

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring swift nesting bricks to be installed in newly built homes.

Answering member: Rachel Maclean | Department: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

We have always been clear that planning is a local matter and it is for each local planning authority to assess how it will deliver the Government's environmental goals, alongside our ambition to deliver the identified housing needs of their communities.

As we have set out previously, we of course welcome action by individual developers who wish to provide swift bricks and the benefits are set out in our Planning Practice Guidance on the Natural Environment. Local authorities can prioritise specific species such as swifts.

HC Deb 23 February 2023 | PQ 142794

[Birds: Conservation](#)

Asked by: Lord Robathan

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Benyon on 9 January (HL4498), what consideration they have given to including swift bricks as a biodiversity net gain in the schedule of the Environment Act 2021.

Answering member: Lord Benyon | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Government has consulted on the detail of implementation and secondary legislation for mandatory biodiversity net gain in the Environment Act, and the response will be published in due course. The mandatory approach will be based on a biodiversity metric which assesses biodiversity using habitats. Species-based features such as bird and bat boxes are not included within the metric; instead it focuses on the habitats such species need to forage and complete their life cycles. Planning Practice Guidance published to help implement planning policy makes clear that relatively small features can often achieve important benefits for wildlife, with incorporating 'swift bricks' in developments in particular highlighted as an option. Specific biodiversity features, such as swift bricks, would normally be required for developments through either the relevant local plan or through the local authority's development control team.

HL Deb 13 February 2023 | PQ HL5369

Birds: Conservation

Asked by: Huq, Dr Rupa

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of making it a requirement to include swift bricks in new-build housing in the context of declining swift populations in the UK.

Answering member: Trudy Harrison | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

All local authorities have a duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making. As well as this duty, national planning policy states that the planning system should minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible. Planning Practice Guidance published to help implement planning policy makes clear that relatively small features can often achieve important benefits for wildlife, with incorporating 'swift bricks' in developments in particular highlighted as an option. Specific biodiversity features, such as swift bricks, would normally be required for developments through either the relevant local plan or through the local authority's development control team.

Through the Environment Act 2021, we have introduced a mandatory duty for developers to deliver a 'biodiversity net gain', which will mean that habitats for wildlife must be left in a measurably better state than they were before any development.

HC Deb 23 January 2023 | PQ 122186

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