

Westminster Hall debate 10.07.23: Use of swift bricks in new housing

Briefing note from Wildlife and Countryside Link

Link strongly supports the proposal for a new law to guarantee swift bricks in every new home.

Nature is in [long-term decline](#) in England, with bird species under particular threat. Four species of cavity nesting birds (common swift, house martin, common starling, and house sparrow) are on the red list of highest conservation concern. Swifts were [added to the UK Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in 2021](#), due to population declines of over 50% in the past 20 years.

One of the drivers of declining cavity nesting bird populations is the loss of nest sites, as older buildings are demolished and replaced by modern buildings which are less suitable for nesting.

Swift bricks, which can host swift but also other cavity nesting birds, can provide nest sites for birds in new buildings or in retrofitted buildings.

There are no mandatory rules concerning swift bricks, so they continue to be left out of developments. Non-mandatory recommendations for swift brick use in [Design Codes guidance](#) and a [BSI Standard](#) have failed to increase deployment rates.

The Government's [response](#) to date has been that, while they welcome action by individual developers, they will not legislate for the provision of swift bricks in new developments. They point to planning conditions imposed by local planning authorities and the introduction of new Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) as tools that could increase the uptake of swift bricks.

However, while many LPAs mention swift bricks in their guidelines for Local Plans, only a very few have made swift bricks a required condition for new housing. LNRSs may identify swift bricks as important, but without a legal link into the planning system, they are unlikely to impact development design decisions.

Mandatory swift bricks for all new development are essential to ensure that swift bricks are actually incorporated and used. This would help swift and other cavity nesting bird populations recover, contributing to the achievement of the [Environment Act target](#) to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030.

[Wildlife and Countryside Link](#) (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 75 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world.

For questions or further information please contact:

Emma Clarke, Nature & Planning Policy Officer, emma.clarke@wcl.org.uk

07.07.23