

P-06-1489: Legislate to ensure swift bricks are installed in all new buildings in Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 10 Mawrth 2025
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Petition Number: P-06-1489

Petition title: Legislate to ensure swift bricks are installed in all new buildings in Wales

Text of petition:

Swifts are the fastest birds in level flight and can sleep, eat, drink and mate on the wing. Their cries define Welsh summers. Sadly, they are rapidly declining – down 72% in the last 30 yrs. Swifts nest in holes in buildings. Renovation makes them homeless, and new-builds currently offer no cavities. Without more nesting options, swifts will disappear. Incorporating swift bricks into all new developments would help swifts (and other struggling birds like house martins and sparrows) to recover.

British Trust for Ornithology data show Welsh swifts declined by 72% from 1995 - 2018. They are Red Listed as Birds of Conservation Concern. Swifts face many challenges, but nest site loss is a major factor. Due to the scale of Welsh decline and ongoing destruction of their unprotected nest sites, only a mandatory approach will provide enough new nest spaces to allow swifts to recover to anything like former levels. Regulatory or legislative change is needed for this.

Swift bricks are nest-boxes that can be built into a wall. They are BSI standardised, affordable, sustainable, easy to install, don't need maintaining / replacing, and help other declining hole-nesting birds.



Swifts' lives have been linked to ours for centuries. Their connection with buildings is captured in an old Welsh name – gwrach yr eglwys ('church sprite'). Swifts are a charismatic species and enliven built up areas, inspiring people and communities. They depend on us - their disappearance would be a real loss.

1. Background

The Swift (*Apus apus*) is an ariel bird that feeds on small invertebrates and often nests in buildings at roof level when raising chicks. Swifts are summer migrants to the UK, spending their winters in Africa.

As the petitioner notes, Swift numbers have declined dramatically in recent years - 62% between 1995 and 2021. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) placed Swifts on the UK Red List for birds in 2021 "due to worsening declines in the breeding population".

The RSPB says swift bricks are:

... an easy and cheap way to provide nest sites for Swifts that can be simply included in new housing developments or fitted into existing buildings. When they are, research shows they are help not only for Swifts, but other wildlife, including Red Listed species such as House Sparrows, Starlings and House Martins.

A petition to the UK Parliament - Make swift bricks compulsory in new housing to help red-listed birds – received 109,896 signatures and was debated in Westminster Hall on 10 July 2023.

The then UK Government responded saying it would not legislate to require developers or local authorities to use swift bricks in every development. It said:

We welcome actions by developers to provide "swift bricks", however Government considers this a matter for local authorities depending upon the specific circumstances of each site.

2. Welsh Government action

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies MS, has written to the Committee in relation to this petition.

The Cabinet Secretary states he understands that swift bricks work and provide opportunities for other species. He says they're affordable, don't require maintenance and "it does make sense to incorporate them into new buildings as part of their structure when they are designed and built".

However, he points out that the main mechanisms to promote or mandate the use of swift bricks in new buildings are through Building Regulations and the planning system. These lie within the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning, Rebecca Evans MS. He also identifies building work funded or procured by the Welsh Government as another important mechanism. He concludes:

Action to secure the incorporation of swift bricks into new building across Wales therefore will require a cross-cabinet approach which I support and am keen to explore with my cabinet colleagues.

In his letter, the Cabinet Secretary, identifies Welsh Government work he believes will support swifts and other species, including that:

- The forthcoming Environmental Governance, Principles and Biodiversity Bill will include a power and duty for Welsh Ministers to set statutory domestic biodiversity targets. He says the proposed priority areas of safeguarding and recovering species, and ecosystem resilience offer the potential for action to support swift populations.
- Welsh Government officials are developing additional guidance on the Net Benefit for Biodiversity (NBB) approach set out in Planning Policy Wales which requires bespoke, place-based solutions for biodiversity, including measures such as swift bricks where appropriate. He says the guidance should be completed by spring 2025.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The issue of mandating swift boxes was raised in Plenary on 30 June 2021 by Jenny Rathbone MS. The then Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, responded by saying the Welsh Government was incorporating them into its

Innovative Housing Programme, with swift bricks “going up across a number of social houses across Wales”. She also said the then Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS, was “looking at biodiversity along road routes and rail routes, including incorporating swift boxes and other nesting boxes as appropriate along those routes.”

In response to a question from Jenny Rathbone MS in **Plenary on 4 December 2024**, the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government, Jayne Bryant MS, confirmed that swift bricks were included in the developments funded under the Innovative Housing Programme, from the date the previous Minister agreed to do so until that programme came to an end. She also committed to considering mandating swift bricks in social housing in the future:

Our social housing new-build standard, the Welsh Development Quality Requirement, requires developments to consider biodiversity, which has meant swift bricks are being used by many social landlords in their new developments. The Welsh development quality requirement is due for review in 2025, and we will consider the mandated use of swift bricks as part of this review.

Jenny Rathbone MS is the Wales Environment Link species champion for the Swift.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.