

## **P-06-1489 Legislate to ensure swift bricks are installed in all new buildings in Wales - Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 09 June 2025**

Dear Petitions Committee members

### **SWIFT BRICK PETITION**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity again to respond to the Deputy First Minister's latest letter. The following are my comments -

Swifts are Wales' fastest declining birds - the latest Breeding Bird Survey figures for Wales (just published), show the decline is now at more than 76% since 1995, and 56% in just the last 10 years. It is clear that the existing (limited and inadequate) protections for swift nests are not fit for purpose.

Any potential recovery of swift populations due to e.g. improved environmental factors and recovery of insect numbers, would still be severely limited by the declining stock of available nest sites: more swifts would have to nest somewhere. Increasing the availability of nest sites is therefore **essential** for the recovery of swifts. It will also help other birds of conservation concern, such as house sparrows and house martins.

The Deputy First Minister mentions some concerns about mandating swift bricks, but it isn't clear exactly what these concerns are, nor what the 'adverse and unintended consequences' might be. There is no mandatory percentage requirement for Net Biodiversity Benefit, so Local Planning Authorities could take a pragmatic approach as to whether swift bricks would alone demonstrate NBB in a given case (it could be sufficient for a simple house extension for example, but not for a large, complex scheme). There seems no reason why mandating swift bricks via planning condition and delivery of NBB could not be complementary. It would be helpful to know whether the Deputy First Minister has consulted with swift experts and organisations on these points. It would also be helpful if he could provide some examples of the perceived problems. Having been involved with swift conservation for the past 14 years (during which the loss of swift nest sites in Cardiff and the decline in swift numbers has been all too apparent), I am not clear what these problems are. Mandating swift bricks as part of the Welsh Development Quality Requirement would be a positive step, but if swift brick provision in social housing is desirable why not in other developments?

To reiterate, swift bricks are cheap, long-lasting (at least 30 years) easily and quickly installed and need no maintenance. There is already British Standards Institution guidance on the selection and siting of swift bricks in new builds – '*BS42021: 2022 Integral nest boxes. Selection and installation for new developments – Specification*', so additional ecological expertise re. their installation is not required.

I welcome the review of the s.7 species list and the likely inclusion of swifts. I note that Welsh Ministers will need to take all reasonable steps to maintain and enhance swift numbers, if they are included. Mandating swift boxes would be an entirely reasonable step to take in the case of Wales' fastest declining bird.

In my view, it would be helpful if Welsh Government were to produce a Regulatory Impact Assessment on the mandating of swift bricks. By doing this, concerns would be identified and any

misconceptions could be clarified. I'd be grateful if the Petitions Committee would ask for this to be done.

Yours faithfully

Julia Barrell (Petitioner)