

SWIFTS AND DEVELOPMENT

INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPERS

NATIONAL POLICY/ CONTEXT

- The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004
- The UK Biodiversity Action Plan
- The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy

LOCAL POLICY/ CONTEXT

- Edinburgh City Local Plan Policy Des 3 – Development Design
- Supplementary Planning Guidance – Biodiversity
- Edinburgh Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-2015 – Species Action Plan for Swifts

BACKGROUND

Swifts are a priority species in the Edinburgh Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) 2010-2015. They are amber-listed in 'Birds of Conservation Concern 2009' due to a steep decline in breeding population numbers, caused by an ongoing loss of nest sites. Swifts are uniquely dependent on the built environment for nest sites.

The Edinburgh Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-2015 contains a priority action for swifts: that suitable new development includes artificial swift nest sites ('swift bricks') to counteract the ongoing loss of nest sites.

The Council are keen to promote within development sites the inclusion of swift bricks. Developers are encouraged to consider the inclusion of swift bricks within their developments and should be considered integral to the design.

Should applicants or architects require further information on swifts please contact the Biodiversity Officer: biodiversity@edinburgh.gov.uk or 0131 469 3920.

The Biodiversity Officer holds records of swift sightings, indicating which areas in and around Edinburgh are known to be important for swifts. They are frequently found in areas with lots of tenements, such as Leith, Canonmills, Stockbridge, Newington or Southside. They are also found in other parts of the city such as Portobello, Currie, Juniper Green and Gracemount. It is safe to assume that anywhere with a dense built environment is capable of supporting swifts.

Many building types are ideal for including swift bricks, particularly blockwork or brickwork walls. They can be faced with render or other facings as long as the entrance hole is left open. The bricks can easily be incorporated into larger buildings such as supermarkets.

GUIDANCE

Guidance¹ from the Royal Institute of British Architects states that swift bricks should be:

- Located out of direct sunlight, ideally on north-east or north-west elevations
- Located 5 m above ground, ideally near the top of the elevation underneath eaves or roofing
- Located where swifts have clear airspace to approach and exit their nests, i.e. clear of trees/utilities etc.
- Incorporated in groups appropriate for building size and mass:

¹ Reference: Williams, C. (2010) Biodiversity for Low and Zero Carbon Buildings: A Technical Guide for New Build, RIBA Publishing

- 1 to 4 nest provisions on a house
- 4 to 10 on a small block of flats
- 10 to 20 on a larger building, e.g. offices or industrial site

SUPPLIERS

Some commonly used swift bricks are:

Swift brick	Dimensions	Further information
lbstock Swift Box	140 mm (h) x 326 mm (w) x 102 mm (d)	lbstock
Schwegler Swift Box 25	180 mm (h) x 265 mm (w) x 220 mm (d)	Schwegler shop
Schwegler Swift Box 16 S	240 mm (h) x 430 mm (w) x 220 mm (d)	Schwegler shop

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

Cleanliness

- Swifts are very hygienic and their nest sites do not suffer from staining as the birds either eat or carry their waste away from the nest before dropping it.
- See the fourth bullet point on this page for confirmation:
- <http://www.swift-conservation.org/Swift%20Facts.htm>

Excluding other bird species

- Most swift box designs are careful to exclude other species from entering the nests. This is possible because swifts have very short legs so the entrance hole can be extremely narrow.
- For example the Swift Box No 16 S from Schwegler is designed to exclude starlings by the inclusion of a short tunnel behind the entrance hole.

Using swift bricks as a design feature

- The swift bricks can be incorporated as a row or in other configurations such as triangles or diamonds – they can form a design feature e.g. a diamond design on the gable end of a building.
- Swift bricks can be covered in render or other facing materials as long as the entrance holes remain uncovered.
- The following webpage shows a range of buildings where swift nest boxes have been incorporated, including some which have been rendered:
- <http://www.swift-conservation.org/OurProjects.htm>

Attaching to rooftop plant rooms

- Buildings with rooftop plant rooms are ideal for incorporating swift bricks – internal or external nest boxes can be attached and will be out of sight of passers-by on the ground. The following webpage shows some examples:
- <http://www.swift-conservation.org/OurProjects.htm>