

Guidance Note for Accommodating Swifts in New Developments and Existing Buildings



Introduction

Over the centuries swifts have chosen to make use of buildings rather than naturally occurring features for nesting. As a result of this behaviour, swift populations are declining as they find it difficult to gain access to modern and refurbished buildings. Modern materials and building methods are reducing opportunities for swifts to access buildings through incidental holes, cracks and gaps. This situation is now particularly serious as a national survey in 2004 reported a 62% decline in swift numbers in Scotland since 1994. This leaflet wishes to help address this population decline by providing guidance to developers on how they can accommodate swifts in new developments and building refurbishments.

The City of Edinburgh was recognised as an important area for swifts in EBAP 2000 and a species action plan written in 1999 (and revised in 2004) to focus attention on the declining numbers of the species, survey the existing swift

population, and identify actions to halt the decline in nesting sites lost through re-development of the older areas of the City.

A survey completed in 1999 and 2000 has been used to assess suitable areas in the City with potential for more swifts. As expected there was a strong positive correlation between tenement areas and reported nesting sites. However in 2004 swifts were reported in new developments and in peripheral part of the City eg Portobello, Longstone and Colinton which demonstrates that swifts do extend their range should suitable nesting sites be available.

A systematic survey is being done in 2005-06 to update the previous survey and record changes in the last five years in the core swift areas. Additionally sites with nesting bricks or cavities provided by developers will be monitored for swift occupation.

Swifts

Swifts are the country's fastest bird which visit in the in summer months. They are migrants arriving in Scotland from Central Africa in May and departing for the winter months in August. Their aerial acrobatics and screaming is an evocative summer occurrence which adds to the richness and diversity of city living. They are clean, exciting to watch and bring wildlife interest into the heart of Edinburgh.

Furthermore, swifts are extremely hygienic birds and don't create a mess around the nest or on building frontages. The birds empty their nests by carrying waste away from the building and dropping it a significant distance away at high altitude.

What Type of Buildings are Suitable for Nesting Swifts?

Old Buildings

Swifts are traditionally found in older buildings such as tenements and churches. They nest inside the fabric of a building. Nesting places include spaces under tiled roofs, just inside the roof space under eaves where they gain access via gaps or cracks in stonework and in holes in walls throughout the city. Prior to any refurbishment work during the breeding season (May to

August), it is essential to check buildings for nesting sites, as it is illegal to disturb any wild bird or its nest while in use. It is important to note that the nest cannot be seen from outside the building. For older buildings, nest sites should be retained or recreated wherever possible. Suitable nesting accommodation can be installed easily when repair work is taking place to roofs, render, brick and stonework. Contractors should take care not to obstruct access to existing swift nesting sites when undertaking external repairs.

New Buildings

Although nests are mainly found in older buildings, swifts can also be found in new buildings when there are suitable spaces for them to nest. Nests can be found inside the roof space and in small holes in the fabric of walls or within soffits. The ideal site for new nests are under the eaves, on the gable end or other high location on building elevations.

As new buildings are generally well sealed, the use of swift bricks or purpose built internal cavities or nest boxes can provide ideal nest accommodation.

What Options are Available?

Swift bricks

Swift Bricks are made of concrete and are designed to be built into the walls of buildings, they are similar in construction to a breeze block. They must be positioned at least 4m from the ground and the flight path to the access hole should not be directly obscured by trees or other buildings. The bricks should preferably be installed on the north or east facing walls of a building, though, anything but south facing is appropriate.

Each brick measures 260mm x 220mm x 180mm high and weight 8.8kg. The outer face of the brick can be rendered or faced with brick or stone so that they appear inconspicuous on a façade (see Figure 2 and 3).

It is recommended that groups of bricks be installed as swifts nest together in colonies. Depending on the number of appropriate elevations, the number of bricks appropriate to a building should be decided on a case by case basis.

Supplier of Swift bricks: Jacobi Jayne & Company, Wealden Forest Park, Herne Common, Canterbury, Kent CT6 7LQ Tel. 01227 714314 Fax: 01227 719235. They cost £21.99 each.

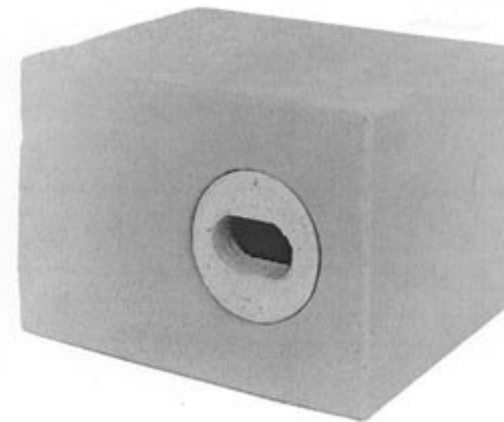


Figure 1 - Swift Brick



Figure 2 - Swift bricks behind brick work on a new development



Figure 3 - Swift bricks under eaves

Open Access Eaves

Nests can be created by a simple conversion and adaptation of eaves and lofts spaces to house swifts cleanly. This method is only suitable for unheated buildings. Nest place dimensions are 30cm wide by 50cm long by 20cm high. A sloping roof of lesser height is acceptable as long as there is adequate space further back for the swifts to be able to stretch their wings. The entrance hole should ideally be 30mm high x 65mm long, round or oval, in either the base or side wall of the nest space (See Figure 4).

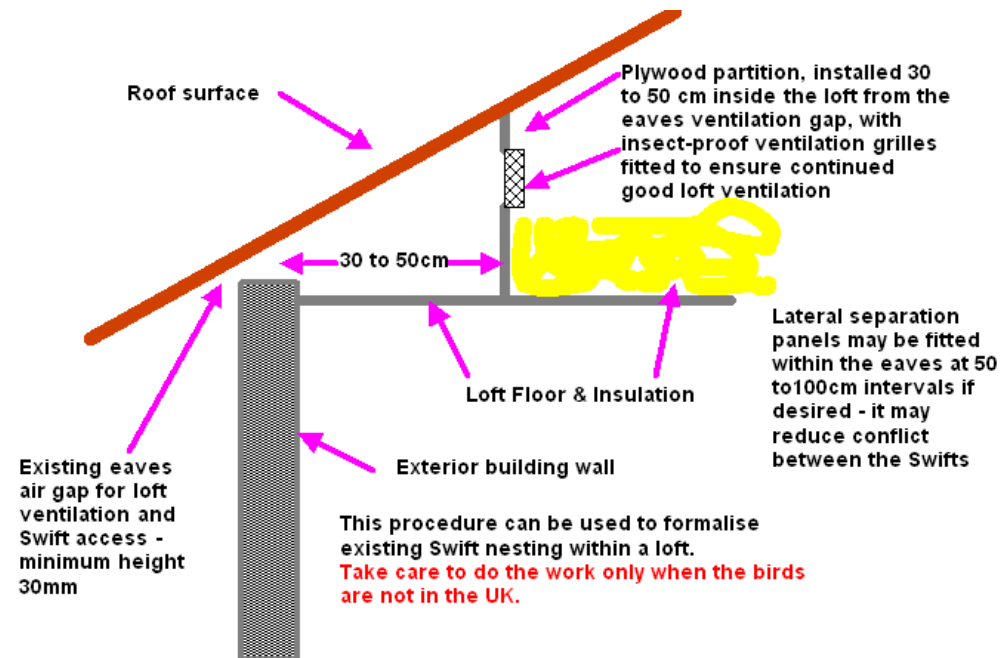


Figure 4 - Open access diagram eaves

Soffit Access - hollow eaves

Another method is to design and build hollow eaves with suitable access holes (See Figure 5). They can be constructed from 8mm plywood and there will normally be two fitted in each property of normal residential size. They are made on site as each roof is exposed or constructed. Each nest can be made up to exactly fit the space available which varies from property to property.

Locating Nests in Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas.

External alterations to listed buildings, buildings in conservation areas and other historic buildings need to be sympathetic to the existing special architectural character. The following text outlines methods that can be used to install swift nesting accommodation in such buildings. It should be noted that for some historic buildings it may not be possible to locate swift nesting accommodation in a sensitive manner. Advice should be sought from the CEC Natural Heritage Section. It is important to consider the retention of existing nesting spaces during work.

Although the standard swift bricks are not specifically designed for use in historic buildings, it may be possible to incorporate them during refurbishment by concealing them within a facade. This can be done through the use of render or real / reconstituted stone facing in front of the installed nesting brick. There are also external boxes available (Figure 6). It would have to be demonstrated that these can be used without detriment to the historic or architectural character of the building. More innovative individual design solutions to accommodate swift nesting accommodation within historic buildings will also be encouraged.

Alternatively, the eaves or soffit access method may be achievable in conservation areas or on historic buildings. Obviously this will only be possible on buildings that have soffits or open eaves as an existing feature.

Where it is not possible to accommodate swift nesting accommodation internally, there are external swift boxes that are designed for historic buildings See Figure 6. These swift boxes can be supplied by Jacobi Jayne & Company, Wealden Forest Park, Herne Common, Canterbury, Kent CT6 7LQ Tel. 01227 714314 Fax: 01227 719235. They cost £32.95 each.

Most importantly, contractors should take care not to obstruct access to existing swift nesting sites when undertaking external repairs.

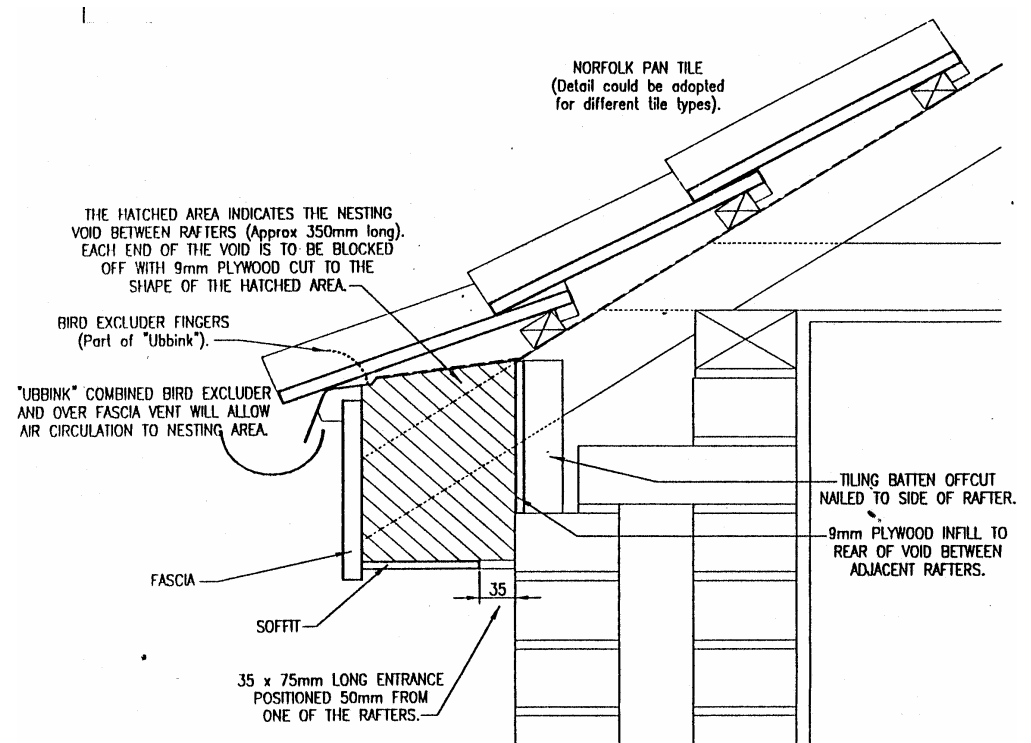


Figure 5 - Soffit / hollow eaves with access hole - designed for Norwich City Council, 1997



Figure 6 - Swift boxes installed on Culzean Castle, A Listed Building, Ayrshire

Where should swift nests be located on a building?

Nests should be positioned at least 4m above ground level and the flight path to the nest should not be obscured by trees or other buildings. All new nests should be provided out of direct sun, ideally on a north or east-facing aspect.

How many nesting devices should be installed?

Swifts nest in colonies, therefore groups of bricks or access points should be installed. This should be determined on a case by case basis depending on the development size and any constraints on site.

When should a swift nesting brick or box be installed?

Swifts arrive in Scotland in May for breeding and leave in August, therefore, the best time to install nest boxes and bricks is during winter months (September to April), although they can be incorporated at any time.

Building Warrant

Most construction works require a Building Warrant to demonstrate that the proposals comply with the current Building Standards under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Building (Scotland) Regulations 2004. Please contact the CEC Building Control Section, 329 High Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1PN if you require any advice.

Further help and advice

Please contact CEC Natural Heritage Section 0131 469 3920