

Guidance note for provision of swift boxes (including swift bricks) in new development



Produced by Planning Policy and Development
Management Teams

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Introduction

The aim of this guidance note is to provide householders and developers with advice on:

- The policy context within which the council is requiring new developments to specifically address the provision of suitable habitats for migrating swifts
- Solutions currently available (June 2020); although new suitable products and installations may become available in the future
- When and how many will need to be incorporated into developments
- Advice on how they should be sited

This follows the Council's Tourism, Environment, Culture & Communities committee resolution in March 2020 that:

"Agreed to the introduction from 1st April 2020 of a model planning condition and informative requiring the provision of swift boxes (including swift bricks) in planning permission granted for new development ..."

Policy Context

In general terms, every local planning authority has a statutory duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of the planning process. Planning policy at both a national and local level strongly supports the need to protect and conserve biodiversity and to seek enhancements, including measures to extend existing and support new or isolated habitats.

Following consultation in 2019, the government announced its intention to make biodiversity net gain compulsory within planning policy. The government proposes to introduce a national approach using a 'Defra metric' to determine ecological value at any site and an improvement of least 10% is proposed. It is anticipated that the government will need to produce guidelines on the mechanisms to be followed.

Local Policy

Adopted City Plan Part One Policy CP10 Biodiversity already seeks a net gain in biodiversity from all development, wherever possible.

In addition to local plan policies, there is also the Supplementary Planning Document SPD11 Nature Conservation and Development. The SPD recognises that many development proposals will have the potential to benefit local biodiversity. It addresses proposals with no current nature conservation value and those likely to affect existing areas of value. The SPD clarifies those types of development that the guidance will not apply to (for example advertisement applications, changes of use, conversions, alterations to windows and doors.)

Facilities

Swift boxes and bricks provide nesting accommodation for swifts either within brickwork (swift brick) or externally (swift box). They are available from a range of suppliers and can be embedded into walls below the eaves. Reference to 'swift boxes' in this guidance includes both integrated swift bricks as well as external swift boxes.

The Requirement

Swift boxes should be provided in all new developments (residential and commercial) across the city of 5m or greater in height to the eaves. Built-in swift bricks are preferred to external swift boxes as they are integrated into the building, cannot be removed, provide better

temperature control and require less maintenance. Unless circumstances make the swift brick impractical, this system should be chosen over external swift boxes.

For **minor developments** (less than nine new residential units, or under 1,000sqm commercial floorspace), the minimum number of swift boxes required on residential development is three, or two per residential unit, whichever is the greater. (NB it is not necessary that each dwelling has two boxes placed upon it, but that the equivalent number be applied across the development). The requirement does not apply to extensions or alterations of existing buildings. The minimum number of swift boxes required on commercial development is three, or one per 50sqm of floorspace, whichever is the greater.

For **major developments** (10+ residential units/1,000sqm+ commercial floorspace) specific requirements will be recommended by the ecology advisor.

This requirement will be secured by attaching the model condition set out in this guidance, along with the informative, to planning consents.

Model Planning Condition & Informative

Condition: XX (number) swift brick(s)/boxes shall be incorporated within the external walls of the development hereby approved and shall be retained thereafter. Reason: To enhance the biodiversity of the site and to comply with Policy CP10 of the Brighton & Hove City Plan Part One and Supplementary Planning Document SPD11 Nature Conservation and Development.

Informative: Swift bricks/boxes can be placed on any elevation, but ideally under shade-casting eaves. They should be installed in groups of at least three, at a height above 5m height, and preferably with a 5m clearance between the host building and other buildings or obstructions. Where possible avoid siting them above windows or doors. Swift bricks should be used unless these are not practical due to the nature of construction, in which case alternative designs of suitable swift boxes should be provided in their place.

If it is not possible to provide swift bricks due to the type of construction or other design constraints, the condition will be modified to require swift boxes.

Siting of Swift bricks and boxes

- Swift boxes can be placed on any elevation, but ideally under shade-casting eaves
- Swift boxes should be installed in groups of at least three, at a height above 5m, and preferably with a 5m clearance between the host building and other buildings or obstructions.
- Where possible avoid siting swift boxes above windows or doors.
- Where built-in swift bricks are not practical due to the nature of construction, for example buildings finished with external panels rather than brick or render, alternative designs of suitable external swift boxes should be provided as an alternative.
- If it is not possible to provide swift bricks, due to the nature of the construction, the condition will be modified to require swift boxes.

