

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS  
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros  
Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig  
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate  
Change and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1489  
Ein cyf/Our ref HIDCC/00599/25

Carolyn Thomas MS  
Chair – Petitions Committee

01 May 2025

Dear Carolyn,

Thank you for your further letter of 24 March regarding Petition P-06-1489 Legislate to ensure swift bricks are installed in all new buildings in Wales.

The Welsh Government is aware that nesting sites for swifts have been depleted. The reasons include building renovation as well as the limited opportunities provided in the design and construction of new buildings. While providing additional nesting sites in tall buildings and new developments would help, this is only part of the problem. Habitat loss, land management practices and climate change also contribute. We are committed to helping address many of these wider issues through initiatives like the Nature Networks programme, tackling climate change and the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

With my lead responsibility for biodiversity, I thank Jenny Rathbone for her lead as the Senedd Species Champion for the Swift. I responded to the Petitions Committee in January concerning the petition calling on the Welsh Government to legislate.

The use of levers to promote or mandate swift bricks in new buildings, which largely lie outside of my portfolio like planning and building regulations, is not without problems. Focusing on using planning conditions to mandate a single issue outcome will cut across existing policy relating to securing a net benefit for biodiversity. It would most likely have adverse and unintended consequences. We are already aware of discussion across development sectors suggesting that this proposal will be a way of circumventing the implementation of a net benefit for biodiversity which reflects ecological context and delivers the right measures in the right place. The potential for inclusion of swift bricks as part of the building work we fund or procure in other parts of government may attract similar concerns. Action across Wales needs to be set in the context of securing wider biodiversity benefits. It requires a cross-Cabinet approach which we support and are keen to explore. Like many issues relating to the nature and climate change emergencies, the solutions require an integrated and cross Government approach.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Existing legislation, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, already protects all wild birds and swifts. It is illegal to kill or harm them, to damage their nests or take their eggs. Under the Environment (Wales) Act public authorities have their section 6 duty. Planning Authorities for example must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems across their functions, including decisions for planning and development control. This is articulated in Planning Policy Wales where developers are required to achieve a Net Benefit for Biodiversity (NBB).

Swifts are not currently included on the Interim Section 7 list of species and habitats of principle importance for Wales. We are currently working with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to finalise an updated Section 7 list. It is proposed that the swift will be included in the revised list. This requires Welsh Ministers to take all reasonable steps to maintain and enhance this species alongside the other species and habitats on the list. They must also encourage others to take such steps.

While it is likely that the loss of nesting opportunities will have contributed to the decline in swift numbers, the whole picture is more complicated. A combination of factors from the 'insect apocalypse' (driven by habitat loss, agricultural pesticides and climatic factors) to the wider consequences of climate change in Wales and in their wintering grounds in Africa have impacted on health and breeding success. Evidence suggests that increasingly colder and wetter summers are playing a key role. Breeding success is positively associated with warmer temperatures in June and July.

Mandating the use of swift bricks in all new buildings will require legislation. There is little space within the current legislative programme to introduce new legislation this Senedd term. The forthcoming Environmental Governance, Principles and Biodiversity Targets Bill will include a power and duty for Welsh Ministers to set statutory domestic biodiversity targets. While the details of the targets are to be developed, the proposed priority areas of safeguarding and recovering species and ecosystem resilience offer the potential for further action to support swift populations.

Equally the actions we are currently taking to meet the United Nations Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) will over time also deliver benefits for bird populations such as swifts. For example, action to deliver GBF targets to restore 30% of our degraded ecosystems and 30 by 30 will improve the condition and resilience of habitats and ecosystems across Wales. This will improve the availability of the flying insect food vital to swifts in their summer breeding grounds.

The Nature Networks Programme is Welsh Government's key biodiversity delivery programme. It aims to address the nature emergency in Wales. Increasing biodiversity, improving the condition of protected sites and enhancing the resilience and connectivity of our terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats and species. The Programme is delivered through the Nature Networks Fund by Heritage Lottery, with direct delivery by NRW. Officials can explore scope for targeted action to benefit swifts. The Sustainable Farming Scheme will support a sustainable, productive agricultural industry. It recognises the key role farmers play in protecting and restoring nature and tackling the climate emergency.

Working within the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning's portfolio, the Property Infrastructure Division has a set of Biodiversity Guidelines. These guide the integration of biodiversity management and enhancement into the development process. They are currently being updated. These will include guidance on best practice approaches for applying the wider policy of NBB and Planning Policy Wales. This will encompass delivery of S6 duties under Environment (Wales) Act. For site development and land management activities work would deliver bigger benefits for biodiversity and underpin the ecosystems resilience approach.

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government has stated her recognition of the seriousness of this issue. She supports new social housing developments incorporating biodiversity innovations into their design and build. In 2021 swift bricks were included in the Innovative Housing Programme and swift bricks were included until that programme came to an end. Our social housing new build standard, the Welsh Development Quality Requirement, requires developments to consider biodiversity. This has meant swift bricks are being used by many social landlords in their new developments. The Welsh Development Quality Requirement is due for review this year. We will consider the mandated use of swift bricks as part of this review.

I am grateful to the Committee for raising this important issue with the Welsh Government. I hope my response is useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Huw Irranca-Davies', written in a cursive style.

**Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS**

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