

Guidance for Lewes Town Councillors
Consideration of Swift Accommodation when considering a planning application
Revised October 2025
Produced by Lewes Swift Supporters on behalf of Lewes Town Council

Swifts are on the **red list** of birds of conservation concern. In England, the Swift population has declined by an estimated 60% since 1995. Retaining and increasing the number of nesting Swifts in Lewes can form part of the biodiversity net gain that is required by legislation.

In September 2024, Lewes Town Council formally approved the proposal of Lewes Swift Supporters to designate Lewes as a “Swift-friendly Town”.

Planning Context

Environment Bill 2020

The 25 year Environment Bill makes it mandatory for new developments to demonstrate a net gain in biodiversity of at least 10% in order for planning to be permitted. Very minor changes, such as extensions to houses and national infrastructure projects are to be excluded. Biodiversity net gain is “an approach to development that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than beforehand. This means protecting existing habitat and ensuring that lost or degraded environmental features are compensated for by restoring or creating environmental features that are of greater value to wildlife and people.

National Planning Policy Framework, (MHCLG 2019)

Para. 174b “...promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

South Downs Local Plan – adopted 2nd July 2019, (2014-33, SDNPA 2019)

Strategic Policy SD9 Biodiversity and Geodiversity, (p. 59): “Development proposals will be permitted where they conserve and enhance biodiversity and geo diversity, giving particular regard to ecological networks and areas with high potential for priority habitat restoration or creation....”

Lewes Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2033, (LTC 2019)

Policy LE2 Biodiversity, (p.36), “Development proposals will be expected to demonstrate how they will provide a net gain in biodiversity, habitats and species on the site, over and above the existing biodiversity situation....”

Why LTC planning is essential to Swift recovery

In England, Swifts only nest in buildings, and an ever-increasing shortage of nest sites is one significant factor driving their population decline. Swifts nest at over 4.5 metres, (15 feet), above the ground and usually in small colonies where other Swifts are already established.

LTC are in the best position to implement the planning policies, detailed above, and to thereby increase biodiversity in their consideration of planning applications – including the supporting of Swifts.

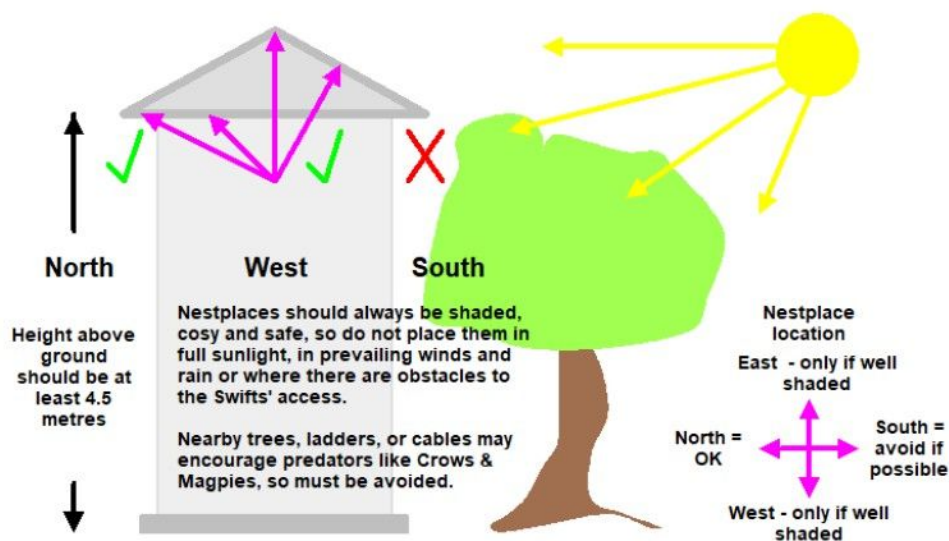
Objective

To aid the recovery of this declining species by ensuring that Swift accommodation or “nest places”, (i.e., Swift bricks, boxes or cabinets), are incorporated into any suitable new development or significant redevelopment or extension, within the parts of Lewes shown on the map below.

This is to be achieved through the planning process by attaching a condition of approval to any suitable application reviewed by LTC, (for implementation by Lewes District Council and the South Downs National Park Authority). LTC will state whether the bespoke conditions they are putting forward have been agreed as a result of either (a) specific discussion with Lewes Swift Supporters on the affected planning application, or (b) just following the guidelines without consultation.

Questions for LTC to consider when reviewing a planning application

1. Is the proposed development located within the Red Zone of the town on Map 1, (see Appendix 1)?
2. Is the proposed development to be over 4.5 metres high, (15 feet), i.e., two storeys or above?
3. Can Swift accommodation, (i.e. Swift brick, box or cabinet), be located so that the nest entrance would face preferably north, north-east or north-west, or west or east if well-shaded? A south-facing aspect should be avoided unless Swift bricks are to be used. Lewes Swift Supporters can advise – see Figure 1.
4. Can Swift accommodation be located so that the Swifts have an unobstructed flight path into the nest space from 10 metres away, avoiding trees, cables, etc? See Figure 1.



Types of Swift Accommodation

Swift nest spaces come in different shapes and sizes. They can be externally mounted nest boxes fitted under the eaves, (e.g., 36 x 20 x 21 cm), externally mounted triangular cabinets on a gable end, typically with three nest spaces, (e.g., 75 x 40 x 45 cm apex boxes), or Swift bricks that can be incorporated in a new wall of a building. If externally mounted boxes are made of Woodcrete rather than wood they will last much longer.

Swift bricks are typically a hollowed-out set of six “bricks” with a small nest entrance that allows the Swifts to nest without entering the cavity wall.

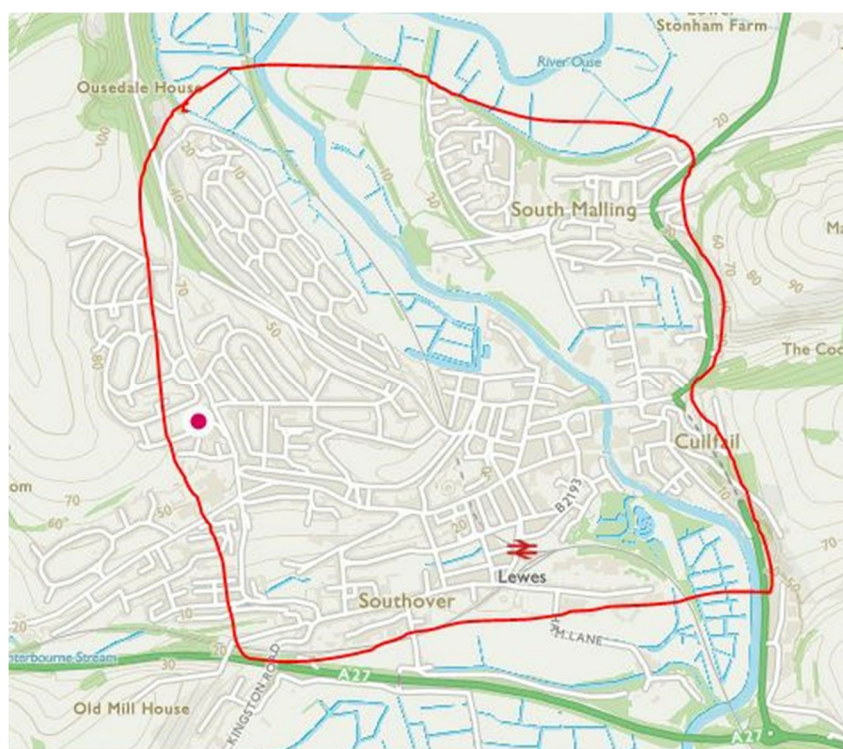
Further Support

If in doubt during the review process, please consult Lewes Swift Supporters, (lewesswifts@gmail.com). The group will visit the proposed development site, if necessary, to confirm the suitability of the site and to recommend the type of Swift accommodation and its preferred location. If required, LSS can also provide more information on the importance of Swifts in Lewes.

Website: <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftsupporters>

This guidance will be reviewed periodically as more information becomes available, in order to better support a thriving Swift population in Lewes.

Appendix 1



Map 1 The Red Zone of Lewes within which consideration of Swift accommodation is required.