



BirdWatchIreland
birdwatchireland.ie
protecting birds and biodiversity

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BirdWatch Ireland submission to Wicklow County Council – County Development Plan Consultation,

BirdWatch Ireland together with other conservation groups and individuals is working to help halt declines in breeding Swift populations in Ireland. The latest long term trends for the Irish Swift population, recently published from the Countryside Bird Survey (CBS - <https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/IWM115.pdf>), shows a decline of almost 58% in the breeding population between 1998-2016, and one of the largest declines in distribution of any species.

One of the major issues driving their decline is the loss of nest sites in building throughout the country. Swifts nest in man-made structures where they can find access to narrow cavities where they will construct a small nest cup and lay their eggs. Due to the nature of these nest locations they are most often found within old and historic buildings. As a result of renovation, redevelopment and demolition of these sites, many Swift nest colonies have been lost in Ireland.

Swifts can however be helped by protecting the nest sites where they are already nesting through good planning and construction practices as well as by supplying new, safe and permanent nesting opportunities in existing buildings or through incorporating nest sites in new build designs.

BirdWatch Ireland has together with experts compiled a booklet to help stakeholders follow best practice in conserving Swift nest sites whilst also delivering building repairs, renovations and new building stock, the Saving Swift Guide can be found here: <https://birdwatchireland.ie/publications/saving-swifts-guide/>

In preparing the new draft **County Development Plan** it is important for the local authority to consider the following:

It is illegal under The Wildlife Act 1976 (+ amendments) to intentionally kill or cause harm to nesting bird species. Therefore, to comply with Irish legislation and to follow best practice the following actions should be carried out within the respective situations outlined below.

BirdWatch Ireland are happy to supply further steer and recommendations if needed at any point and can be reached at swifts@birdwatchireland.ie or on (0)5791 51676.

The following best practice should be adopted by the local authority during their own operations and made standard procedures as part of any relevant work carried out by contractors on the council's behalf:

When working on buildings where Swifts are nesting (during nesting season):

- Always carry out a nesting Swift survey in advance of works taking place on any building potentially suitable to nesting Swifts.
- Limit working on these building to outside the Swift nesting season (end April – end August inclusive), if work must take place it must be limited to areas where Swifts will not be affected (internal work) or disturbed.



Directors: JE Fitzharris (Chair), L. Lysaght, J Nolan, C O'Keeffe, D O'Reilly, J Taylor, D Toohey.
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Wholesale removal of roof structures and masonry is to be avoided always within the nesting season. - Do not block nest access with scaffold and do not net or wrap areas of scaffold close to elevations or roof-plates where Swift nest entrances are active.

When working on buildings where Swifts are nesting (outside of nesting season):

- Preserve the Swifts nest access holes or make new ones to match the old exactly. - If existing nest entrances can't be retained, mitigation by erection of externally fixed specialised Swift nest boxes should be made.

When working on new builds or renovations to buildings that do not have Swifts nesting:

- At the planning stages for all new public buildings (over 5 metres), built-in Swift bricks (preferable) or externally fixed Swift nest boxes should be incorporated.

- At the planning stages of all new private buildings (over 5 metres) built in Swift bricks or externally fixed Swift nest boxes should be stipulated by county planners.

The wording quoted below is what Kildare County Council have included in their current County Development Plan. The provision has led to the stipulations for Swift nest boxes and bricks in several new developments from Schools to retail outlets (Lidl Stores etc) all resulting in very positive results for locally nesting Swifts. BirdWatch Ireland encourages Cork County Council to adopt a similar policy in their planning procedures and CDP to see similar results realised in one of the most important counties for our native flora and fauna.

Kildare County Council County Development Plan example wording to ensure provision for Swifts in all new suitable building developments in the county:

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- Requires all new developments to identify, protect and enhance ecological features by making provision for local biodiversity (e.g. through provision of Swift nest boxes or towers, bat boxes, green roofs, etc) and providing links to wider Green Infrastructure network as an essential part of the design process.

(Chapter 13.10.3 of the Kildare County Development Plan)

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