

Application reference: 6/2021/3422/MAJ – Salisbury Square Hatfield AL9 5AD

Erection of 1 x building containing 3 x flats, 11 x offices and 1 x retail unit (Use Class E), erection of 5 x terrace houses with parking and associated works, involving demolition of existing shopping parade with 7 x maisonettes above, alterations to existing parking area and erection of a parking area

As a local resident and volunteer for the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust I wish to comment on the above-named planning application and request that Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council takes measures to ensure that swift nest bricks are incorporated into this major development as a biodiversity enhancement.

If Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council intends to grant permission for the above planning application, I urge you to make installation of at least 30 swift bricks within the new development a planning condition.

Section 40 of the **Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006**, states: *“Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.”*¹

This is supported in Section 170(d) of the revised **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, which states: *“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: ...minimising impacts on and providing net gains in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures...”*

The **Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (2005)** - Urban Habitats – Objective 2, Action UR/A/2.7: further supports national policy, stating that *“increasing the biodiversity of urban greenspaces and promoting biodiversity gain in all appropriate developments’ should be ‘achieved through the planning process, seeking to integrate biodiversity or green gain (e.g. through green roofs, green walls, appropriate landscaping, nest boxes and roost boxes) within proposals..”*

Lastly, the **Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (2017)** in policy SADM16 – Ecology and Landscape states that *“proposals will be expected to maintain, protect and wherever possible enhance biodiversity, the structure and function of ecological networks...”*

Installing integral swift bricks would contribute to these objectives and demonstrate the commitment of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council to protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

Designing for and installing swift bricks into the fabric of the new building during the construction phase is easy, inexpensive, and will last the lifetime of the building.

This area of Hatfield already supports breeding swifts. The RSPB’s Swift Mapper nest recording scheme has records of two swift nest sites present nearby in Woods Avenue in recent years. There are also many records of swifts foraging for insects in the wider area of central and west Hatfield including over the railway line adjacent to the proposed development site, suggesting that, given the right nesting opportunities, many more swifts could be encouraged to breed in this area. This is a hugely valuable opportunity to encourage more swifts to make the town their home and to help reverse the huge recent decline in their numbers throughout the UK, due largely to lack of nesting opportunities in modern buildings. Using swift bricks can change this.

Why are swifts important?

Swifts are a quintessential sign of British summertime and an intrinsic part of Hertfordshire. They are often seen soaring over rooftops on late summer evenings, with their dark sickle-shaped wings and distinctive 'screaming' calls. These charismatic birds spend nearly their whole lives in flight and are migrant birds, arriving all the way from central/southern Africa in early May just to breed in the UK, before leaving again in August.

However, swifts are in trouble, having declined by 51% between 1995-2015. Swifts are now an 'Amber-listed' species on the list of Birds of Conservation Concern³ and a Priority species for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Without our help, swifts will be lost as a breeding species in the UK.

Swifts are entirely reliant on buildings to nest. Nest sites are being lost when buildings are demolished or refurbished - and because swifts are faithful to their nest site, breeding success of swifts is being severely affected. The RSPB and the British Trust of Ornithology believes this loss of nest sites is a key driver behind the dramatic decline of swifts.

All is not lost, however. There are lots of simple and inexpensive solutions, easily deployed in all manner of developments which addresses the issue - swift bricks being one such example.

I enclose an annex which lists a range of possible solutions, products and resources.

If we do not take action now to save swifts, no more will future generations hear the exhilarating sound of screaming parties of swifts soaring over rooftops on a summer evening. With their loss, a part of our British heritage will be lost with them too.

Yours sincerely,

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