

NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS LOCAL WILDLIFE

A new housing development in Derbyshire is helping to conserve an endangered species of bird.

Rykneld Homes and North East Derbyshire District Council (NEDDC) have teamed up with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) to build special bird boxes into the walls of new homes in North Wingfield.

Rykneld Homes met with the DWT whilst planning their most recent development of 50 brand new homes at Wingfield Court. As a result, some of the homes were fitted with 'swift bricks', which have small slots to enable the birds to nest inside, creating a new home for the birds and helping to support local swift colonies for generations to come.

Since 1995 the swift population has reduced by 51% and experts believe some home improvement programmes could be part of the problem when the small access holes the birds require are accidentally blocked up. The DWLT is encouraging social landlords, who managed large scale improvement schemes, to work with them to try and halt the decline, and putting in 'swift bricks' is one of the options.

Rykneld Homes invited the DWLT to give a presentation about the bricks and was so impressed it agreed to install them at the Wingfield Court development.

Rykneld Homes also teamed up with the DWT to deliver classes and educational sessions to the local North Wingfield Primary School. They were helped by the building firm Westleigh, who built swift boxes for the children which will be installed at the school, adding yet more nesting spots for the swifts and bringing the children closer to wildlife. Rykneld Homes will continue to work hard to ensure it builds and maintains high quality housing that supports wildlife and the local environment.

Nigel Barker, Chair of Rykneld Homes, said: "We are delighted to be supporting the work of Derbyshire Wildlife Trust to help protect these beautiful birds that are so much a part of our British summers. The building of swift boxes into walls has been shown to work in other areas and we will keep our fingers-crossed that Wingfield Court will prove to be a big success.

"We are also very proud of the fantastic new development at Wingfield Court which provides 50 brand new homes for local people. Rykneld Homes, working in partnership with North East Derbyshire District Council, have made great strides towards replacing or regenerating outdated council properties in our district. In addition to Wingfield Court the partnership has also developed new homes for rent, for open market sale and for shared ownership in other parts of the district including Wingerworth, Calow, Stonebroom, Eckington, Grassmoor and Killamarsh."

North East Derbyshire District Council's Cabinet Member for Housing Strategy, Councillor Bette Hill said, "The wildlife we see and hear where we live is important, so it is vital that we look at how construction can be sympathetic to nature and how future communities can

welcome wildlife into their gardens. So, we are delighted to be able to support the DWT by installing these swift bricks and boxes as not only will we be providing excellent new homes for our local communities but new homes for this declining bird as well.”

Nick Brown, who manages the Trust’s Derbyshire Swift Conservation Project, said “It is really heartening to see the way Rykneld Homes has responded to our suggestions to make provision for swifts in their new housing. We will need many more such initiatives if we are to prevent this spectacular bird from drifting towards extinction in the county.

“The swift is a remarkable bird that spends almost all its life on the wing. Each spring the bird completes an epic 6000-mile migration from Africa, returning to the UK to nest. Sadly, swift populations in Britain are declining dramatically, down by half since 1995, and improvements to existing properties are contributing to this. This is thanks to the fact that swifts nest in gaps and crevices in old brickwork or roofs. When social landlords make improvements to properties through cladding or re-roofing, these holes are often covered up, with no knowledge that the birds used them as nests, not helped by the fact the birds are very tidy occupants, leaving no tell-tale signs of their presence. We hope to continue to work with housing organisations to foster all types of urban wildlife.”

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