

Glantawe Riverside Park Swift Tower

Planning Statement for the erection of a Swift Tower in Glantawe Riverside Park, Pontardawe

Summary

This Planning Statement has been prepared by Neath Port Talbot Council Countryside and Wildlife Team. It accompanies and supports a planning application for the erection of a “Swift Tower” on land at Glantawe Riverside Park in Pontardawe.

The purposes of the Swift Tower are to:

- 1) Provide a prominent piece of art to inform residents and visitors to Glantawe Riverside Park of this iconic, declining urban bird, and to inspire individuals to take action to help swifts and other urban nature.
- 2) Provide additional nesting spaces for swifts and other urban nature, to help address the long-term loss of traditional nest sites in buildings.

Based on a review of local plan policy and other material considerations, there are no significant constraints to the development of the Swift Tower at the chosen location.

Background

Swifts are a bird which have recently been put on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in recognition of the fact that populations across the UK have declined by 58% since 1995, 75% in Wales. Swifts nest almost exclusively in buildings, making use of holes to raise their young. However, with lots of old buildings being renovated to improve insulation or simply demolished, our swifts are losing their nesting sites. To help these birds, nesting sites can be provided artificially in the form of swift boxes or in the form of a ‘Swift Tower’.

Neath Port Talbot Council Countryside and Wildlife Team have been awarded ‘COVID Recovery’ funding for the installation of one of these ‘Swift Towers’ at Glantawe Riverside Park, Pontardawe. Recording by members of NPT Local Nature Partnership have revealed that Pontardawe is a hot spot for sightings of Swift in the county. Providing additional nest sites in this location could provide a vital opportunity to boost the population.

Proposed location and its surroundings

The proposed location is at Grid Reference SN 73071 04782 / <https://w3w.co/circus.searches.mimes>

Glantawe Riverside Park is a publically accessible nature reserve on the outskirts of Pontardawe (Figure 1), owned by NPTC but leased and managed by the registered charity Arena Pontardawe. Permissions from both the Estates department of NPTC and Arena Pontardawe as the leasee of the site have been granted.

The proposed location for the swift tower is in the meadow adjacent to the visitor centre at Glantawe Riverside Park (Figure 2). This site has been selected as the best option for Pontardawe as it will be noticeable to Swifts passing as they feed along the river. It is not adjacent to residential properties so is unlikely to cause any inconvenience to members of the public and should in fact enhance the experience for visitors to the park.



COUNTRYSIDE AND WILDLIFE

Environment
THE QUAYS, BRUNEL WAY,
BAGLAN ENERGY PARK, NEATH
SA11 2GG

www.npt.gov.uk

The proposed location is at Grid
Reference SN 73071 04782
w3w.co/circus.searches.mimes

Scale: 1:8283



**Plan No. 05
Location Map**

Figure 1



COUNTRYSIDE AND WILDLIFE

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The proposed location is at Grid
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w3w.co/circus.searches.mimes

Scale: 1:1250



**Plan No. 03
Location Map Aerial**

Figure 2

Photos of the application site

Figure 3 provides a key to show where photos have been taken from of the application site to give context of the proposed location:

Plan 6; Key to photo locations. Photos taken looking towards the development site.



Figure 3. Key to photo locations

A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I



J





Swift Towers

A 'Swift Tower' is a collection of nest boxes placed on a pole or structure at least 7m in height, which is the appropriate height for swifts to use. Some examples of swift towers similar to the proposed swift tower are shown in Figure 3.

The likelihood of swifts using nest boxes is significantly increased through the utilisation of a 'swift caller', which plays the call of the swift at key times in order to attract the swifts to investigate the box. The proposed swift tower will have a caller built in, which will be set on a timer to play calls at certain hours of the day (just after dawn and dusk). It will be possible to adjust the volume on this caller and manually turn it off when required.

Description of the development

The proposed structure will be 7 meters high. It consists of a galvanised steel column and a wood and GRP birdbox containing 12 swift apartments on two floors. More details of construction materials are given below.

The tower will be fitted with a solar powered swift call audio system, with speakers mounted into the larch cladding and cabinets housing the batteries mounted on the pole. This is a standalone system which can be de-activated and removed once swifts begin using the tower. It can also be switched on and off when required.

Figure 3 below show photos of a swift tower of similar design in Norwich (produced by the same designer as is producing the swift tower for Glantawe Riverside Park).



Figure 4

Details of the construction

Materials:

Column - Galvanised Steel

Birdbox Exterior - Larch cladding, GRP roof

Birbox Interior - Plywood

RAL Colours:

The RAL number for the GRP roof and for the powder coated column is RAL 9018.

Land Take:

Foundation 1.2 x 1.2 meters

Height from ground:

7 meters

Trees/Vegetation removed:

None

[How the height relates to adjacent landscape / trees](#)

The nearest trees are 6.25m from the development site. The tower will be visible above the trees in close vicinity, and from the east across the meadow it will be clearly visible, but it will be screened by trees further afield. It will not be visible from any residential properties.

[How long it is anticipated that it will be in place](#)

It is anticipated that the Swift Tower will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

[Maintenance](#)

Once installed, the swift tower is designed so that it can be left to its own devices and can be exposed to the elements with no maintenance or damage issues for 10-20 years. The only elements of the swift tower which may require small repairs are the wooden boxes and the solar panel/ caller system.

The Swift Tower is 7m high consisting of a steel column with a wood and GRP birdbox mounted at the top, it contains 12 swift apartments on two floors.

The Swift Tower is designed to be maintenance free:

The Larch cladding is a natural weathering material and should last for between 10 and 20 years depending on weather conditions. The GRP Roof is waterproof. All the exterior fixings are stainless steel.

If repairs are required the Birdbox can be removed from the top of the column, to do this a suitable crane or Hiab and a MEWP (Mobile elevating work platform) with operators will be required. Once removed the Birdbox can be assessed and repaired at ground level.

Solar Powered Swift Call Audio System:

- Two Visaton FR 8 WP 25w speakers surface mounted into the Larch Cladding
- Two IP65 weatherproof cabinets mounted on the pole
- Speaker wire, runs from the speakers to the cabinets
- A Lepy LP-269s Hi-Fi Digital Multimedia player
- A Memory card with MP3 playing Swift Calls plugged into the Lepy
- Heschen Programmable Timer Relay Switch, CN101A, DC12V 16Amp
- Victron Energy SmartSolar Bluetooth charge controller
- 12v Battery
- Pole Mounted 30watt Solar Panel

The Swift Call audio is designed as a stand-alone system, it will be programmed to play swift calls for a few hours in the morning and evening during the period when Swifts are in the UK (between end of April and mid-September) Once Swifts are observed nesting in the Swift Tower the audio system can be de-activated and removed.

The Swift Call system will need to be activated in spring once the Swifts have arrived and switched off in autumn when they leave. It is recommended that the battery is removed, charged and stored during the winter. Other than that there is no need to do anything to operate the Swift Tower, however if the calls stop working, the volume or

on/off times need changing, the timer, battery, solar controller and MP3 player are accessible inside the pole mounted cabinets. Troubleshooting instructions will be provided.

Site Specific Constraints:

A number of site specific constraints have been flagged for the proposed location of the swift tower and appropriate internal NPTC officers or external organisations have been consulted to determine whether there are any issues that would prevent the erection of the swift tower. These have been addressed individually below:

- *NRW Flood Zone Rivers: Risk Zone: Flood Zone 2 / NRW DAM Zone B: Zone B: B / NRW DAM Zone C2: Zone C2: C2*

Natural Resources Wales was consulted on the likelihood that this development would cause an issue and a response from the Development and Flood Risk Advisor has confirmed that for a development of this nature it is highly unlikely that there would be any flood risk and a FCA is not required.

- *Consult Contaminated Land: Consult: 5*

Although the site has a contaminated land use constraint for development, consultation with NPTC Pollution Control Officer determines that 'due to the type of construction, there would be no objection from a contaminated land perspective.'

- *Consult INM 800m:*

This constraint is in regards to Active Travel and ensuring the development does not adversely affect cycle routes etc. The NPTC Policy Implementation and Research Officer with responsibility for Active Travel routes was consulted on this matter. As the development is not going to affect the nearby cycle route, no objection was raised.

- *High Risk Coal Area: Class: DEVELOPMENT_HIGH_RISK_AREA*

A representative of The Coal Authority has confirmed that 'owing to the nature of the development, the Coal Authority would not expect the planning application to be supported by a Coal Mining Risk Assessment, or equivalent, to assess the risk to the development from coal mining legacy.'

- *Natural Environment*

The swift tower will be situated in the meadow which is in its infancy and is not yet of significant species diversity. The footprint of the tower will be very small (2m²) and the small loss of grassland to the tower will not be significant in ecological terms.

There are trees within the park which must be considered, and the tower is located away from trees to avoid harm and also to perform its function as a swift nesting site (swifts require clear flight-lines to and from their nest sites). The tower location is proposed in an open field and there is no trees in close proximity. Therefore, it has been advised that a tree survey is not required.

Careful selection of any locations to store materials during construction, along with routes to be followed by any vehicles used, will also be employed to avoid impacts on tree root zones.

Given the negligible impact on any habitat of importance, the Swift Tower will result in a net gain in biodiversity through provision of nest sites for swifts and other urban nature.