



Urban Wildlife Strategy



Cala Homes (Chiltern) recognises the importance of the climate emergency and the vital role that maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and habitats plays as part of an integrated response. We also recognise that the UK desperately needs new housing and we are proud to be one of the UK's highest quality homebuilders.





A proactive response

Whilst in the past the ecological credentials of our developments have been driven solely by the requirements of the planning system, we now recognise that we need to respond in a much more proactive manner.

This is particularly the case where we have developments that were granted planning permission historically and at a time when the extent of the climate emergency and biodiversity degradation was not as fully understood or accepted as it is today.

Finding a balance

We acknowledge that there will be people who fundamentally object to the loss of green fields for new housing.

However, the reality is that just as we are in the middle of a climate and biodiversity emergency, we are also in the middle of a chronic housing shortage which, if left unaddressed, will disadvantage future generations for years to come. Leaving a generation whose home ownership aspirations remain unfulfilled





Our approach

Cala passionately believe that housing delivery and biodiversity enhancements are not mutually exclusive and as an overarching approach, all developments moving forward will achieve net biodiversity gain. This includes looking at the sustainability of a development, including energy efficiency, renewable energy generation, electric vehicle charging, sustainable urban drainage, tree planting and habitat creation including wildflower meadows.



Talk to the experts

However, following engagement with local campaigns including Make Tring a Bee Town, we have asked our Ecologists, RPS Group, to look specifically at the opportunities for integrating urban wildlife opportunities into each home and garden that we build.

This recognises that new developments, rather than being wildlife deserts, can in fact boost habitat opportunities, especially for those species that thrive in more of an urban environment.





The plan of action

We have created a strategy that will allow us to optimise opportunities for urban wildlife throughout all of our developments including those that already benefit from planning permission.

It does not represent the extent of our aspirations from a biodiversity and habitat creation perspective but instead looks to establish a baseline of urban wildlife opportunities to be included on each of our housing plots moving forward, regardless of where in our region the development falls or what the planning permission asks for.

The strategy

Moving forward Cala (Chiltern) will work towards the following:



Swift nesting feature*



Bird nesting feature*



Bat roosting feature*



Boundary walls to have at least one invertebrate brick



Where the rear garden of the property adjoins other gardens or any other form of green space to include hedgehog friendly fencing*



Provide a minimum of one tree per dwelling within the development

Information and maintenance tips on how to look after each of the implemented urban wildlife features included on dwellings will be provided to new homeowners in their welcome packs. This will provide valuable education on the vital role that maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and habitats plays in the delivery of new housing.

*To selected homes



A photograph of a swift bird in flight, showing its wings spread wide against a clear blue sky. The bird is dark brown with a lighter patch on its forehead.

Changes in the UK's bird habitats

Many bird species have suffered significant decline over recent decades. For example, swift numbers have declined by 58% in 23 years between 1995 and 2018¹ while house sparrow populations have decreased by 60% since the 1970s².

Part of these decreases have been ascribed to the loss of nest sites caused by modern buildings and the renovation of older buildings that may have historically provided nesting opportunities.

1. BTO/JNCC Bird Trends Report

2. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/house-sparrow/population-trends>

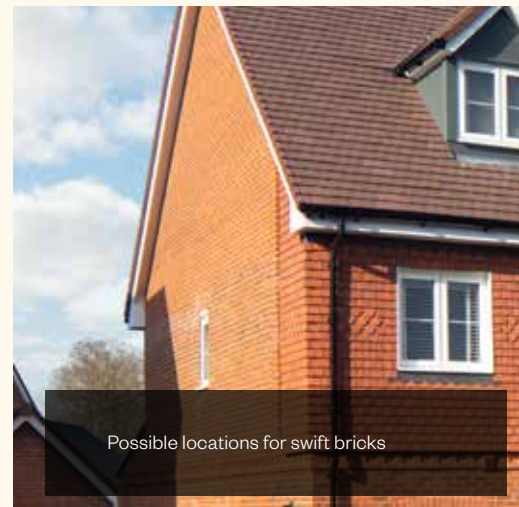
Bird nesting

To help address this, all new Cala (Chiltern) developments will incorporate nesting opportunities for a range of bird species. Given their use by other species as well as swifts, this will be an integrated swift brick, considered a universal bird nesting feature.

On brick elevations features will be fitted into gables, as high as possible, and near to the roof overhang to ensure they are sheltered.

On some streets, swift bricks will be clustered in groups of 3-5 on a single house, in particular adjacent to suitable foraging habitat. Where clustering is proposed, the locations shown on the adjacent photographs will be used.

If cladding or render is used on the facade of a house, a suitable integrated or external nesting feature will be provided.



Possible locations for swift bricks



Possible locations for swift brick under soffit with cladding or render



Looking out for the bats

UK bat populations have declined over recent decades due to a variety of factors, including loss of foraging habitat and roosting sites as well as severance of habitats by roads.

However, although some bat species are very photophobic and will avoid all sources of light, some species (such as the common pipistrelle) will actively forage around street lights, which attract insects, and can therefore thrive in urban settings, if they have roosting locations on modern buildings.



Bat roosting

Therefore, to help support bat species, selected homes will incorporate a bat roosting feature. This could be in the form of a bat box such as that adjacent, or a less obvious feature such as shown in the image on the far right, which is incorporated into the fabric of the wall with only the entrance showing.

Bat roosting features such as these shown will be incorporated into similar parts of the houses to the swift bricks, spread high on gable ends or under soffits on front/rear elevations.

In addition, where hanging tiles are used on new buildings, bat access tiles will be incorporated into the hanging tiles. Although they will be blocked off behind to prevent access into the wall/loft space, they will provide opportunistic roosting for crevice dwelling bats, imitating the roost choices of these species on damaged/old roofs where tiles have slipped.



Invertebrate bricks in boundary walls

Invertebrates are critical to the majority of food chains with large numbers of species relying on them for both food and pollination. Significant numbers of species have also declined in their own right due to habitat loss.

To encourage invertebrate populations, boundary walls to selected properties that feature masonry will include bee bricks to encourage solitary bees and other invertebrates. They will be set low in walls and near to areas of planting to help facilitate pollination.

Prickly garden visitors

Hedgehog numbers have declined significantly in recent years, estimated to have fallen by up to 30% since 2000 in urban settings. Although the exact cause of the decline has not been determined, it is thought that gardens with impermeable fencing prevents hedgehogs moving between foraging habitats, restricting their range.





Hedgehog friendly fencing

Hedgehog-friendly fencing will be used to ensure permeability for this species through the site, adjacent to areas of open space and where there are interconnecting gardens.

This will be created by cutting small holes at the base of the fence panels and installing a small sign to highlight what the gap is for, as shown in the image opposite.



Building with a conscience

Find out more about how Cala Homes (Chiltern)
is putting their urban wildlife strategy into practice:

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