The Swifts

The Swift Report:

Retention of the Existing Swift Colony nesting in the roof and walls of Carterton Church and Church Hall

The works being contemplated are being undertaken at the Church only, but care needs to be taken not to impinge in any way on the larger colony at the Church hall, e.g. by accidentally blocking access to the nest sites with scaffolding, boarding, tarpaulins etc.

Our information is that there is a colony of about 10 pairs of Swifts nesting in the Carterton Church building. Most of the nests are believed to be under tiles, resting against the tile battens, and the boarding on the underside of the roof, but some are believed to be in holes in the walls.

Swifts are faithful to their nest sites to an extreme; they will usually reject a nest site where the entrance aperture has been moved by as little as a few centimetres. because of this extreme care needs to be taken when replicating entrance holes in repaired roofs.

The tiles, battens and boarding at Carterton are all being replaced, and about 15% of the existing tiles are thought fit to be retained and re-used. New, similar tiles will be sourced to replace the defective ones.

Our recommendations for retaining the colony are as follows:

- During the nesting season of 2011 (May to August inclusive) try and locate all entrances in use by making observations and taking photographs. The hour before dusk on warm, clear days is best for this purpose. Use this information to formally brief the contractors.
- When stripping the roof, take photographs and measurements of every nest place and its entrance that is found. It is imperative that the entrances are replicated precisely in their old locations in the new roof, otherwise the Swifts may not nest there again. This information must be presented formally to the contractors for them to work to.
- When relaying the new roof, care should be taken that any membrane/roofing felt used is kept as flat on the boarding beneath as possible, so that the Swifts have as much space as possible to breed in above it and under the tiles.

- If possible, use deeper battens than the existing ones to provide the Swifts with more headroom in their nests.
- Where Swift nests are present, the membrane may be covered with a layer of 1/8th inch thick water resistant plywood to protect it from abrasion by the Swifts' claws; this depends on the strength of membrane being used and so may not be necessary. If used, the plywood should be fitted under the battens to preserve the headroom.
- To replicate the Swifts entrances (which should permit them an entrance gap under the tile of 3cm) particularly rough and "chunky" tiles should be selected to ensure this size of gap. Where such tiles are lacking, small wedges may be made from broken pieces of the old and rejected tiles taken from the roof, and secured in place with dabs of lime mortar, to create the 3cm gaps needed.
- Wherever possible, the opportunity should be taken to create extra new nest spaces for more Swifts to move into. Under more tiles seems the best option, as this is where they are nesting already, and Swifts look for nests where they see and hear other Swifts nesting.
- Where Swifts are nesting in holes in walls, these holes need to be identified, (e.g. by survey or borescope inspection) photographed, marked with a non-permanent marker (e.g. chalk) and the contractors instructed to leave them as they are. It may be easier just to leave all existing holes as they are unless there is firm evidence that Swifts are not using them and there is an essential structural need to fill them.
- Note for the Church management: Because the colony will be in a sensitive state when it returns to the new roof, no attempts are to be made at ringing the birds for research purposes for the next two nesting seasons or even more after completion of the works.