# UK government plans new building regulations including bat tunnels and fish discos



Plans currently under consideration by the UK government may see the introduction of new building regulations that include the establishment of "bat tunnels" and "fish discos" as part of environmental commitments. The situation has drawn scrutiny from political figures, including Conservative shadow housing secretary Kevin Hollinrake, who has raised concerns over the implications of the proposals outlined in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

These new regulations aim to empower Natural England to develop environmental delivery plans (EDPs) designed to address natural features that could suffer as a result of construction activities. Such plans would evaluate the potential negative impact of development and propose conservation measures to mitigate these effects. An element of the proposed framework includes a "nature restoration levy," which would necessitate payments from developers to fund these environmental initiatives.

The conversation was sparked by the high-profile example of a bat tunnel at Sheephouse Wood in Buckinghamshire. This 900 metre-long structure, constructed to prevent bats from colliding with trains on the HS2 high-speed railway between London and Birmingham, has reportedly cost over £100 million. This figure has been branded as excessive, with Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner describing the situation as "an outrage" during the bill's introduction. Rayner acknowledged a shared goal of improving outcomes for nature but criticised the inefficiency of the existing system, stating, "Any set of rules that results in a £100 million bat tunnel is an outrage."

In addition to the bat tunnel, the proposal includes a similar initiative in the Bristol Channel, where an "acoustic fish deterrent," colloquially referred to as a "fish disco," would be implemented to safeguard fish from the cooling systems of the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset. This element has sparked further debate regarding the practicality of environmental safeguards versus the necessity of infrastructure.

In a session in the House of Commons, Hollinrake questioned the capabilities and resources of Natural England to execute these plans effectively, expressing concerns about potential delays caused by judicial reviews of the EDPs. He posited that if the conservation measures do not pass the proposed "overall improvement test," which assesses whether the benefits of the initiatives outweigh the detrimental impacts of development, the system would falter, leaving developers still responsible for facilitating these specific environmental structures.

Labour MP Chris Curtis, who represents Milton Keynes North, also weighed in on the debate, referring to existing nature legislation as "indefensible." He argued that the current setup not only hampers construction and economic development but also fails in its environmental objectives, with Britain being one of the most nature-depleted countries globally. Curtis expressed strong concerns over the economic impact of current requirements, pointing out the substantial financial resources allocated towards individual projects like the bat tunnel that could instead support broader environmental initiatives.

Former environment secretary Steve Barclay responded to the discussion by highlighting a contradiction in Curtis's argument. He noted the paradox of criticising the expensive bat tunnel while simultaneously championing the expansion of Natural England's authority to manage similar environmental projects in the future.

The ongoing discussions surrounding the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and its implications for developers and environmental conservation remain at the forefront of parliamentary debate, highlighting the complex intersection of development, ecology, and economic policy in the UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.samdumitriu.com/p/how-to-solve-the-100m-bat-tunnel> - This article supports the notion that bat tunnels are expensive and controversial solutions. It highlights the £100 million cost of a bat tunnel for HS2 and questions the effectiveness and cost of such projects.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/angela-rayner-natural-england-buckinghamshire-bristol-channel-birmingham-b1218568.html> - This article corroborates concerns by political figures, such as Angela Rayner, regarding the cost and viability of bat tunnels and other environmental measures like fish discos.
* <https://substack.com/home/post/p-159758479> - This post touches on the example of a £121 million bat tunnel related to HS2, underscoring the high costs associated with environmental conservation measures in infrastructure projects.
* <https://www.samdumitriu.com/p/back-to-what-we-re-good-at> - Though not directly mentioned in the search results, this link could support discussions about reforming environmental legislation to make conservation more efficient.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/planning-reforms-could-see-bat-tunnels-and-fish-discos> - Unfortunately, no exact match for this URL was found in the search results. However, it could provide insight into the UK government's stance on environmental regulations.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This URL is not explicitly linked to any specific argument about bat tunnels or fish discos in the search results but could be relevant as the source of original information.