# Conservation groups warn against Planning and Infrastructure Bill reforms



Conservation groups in the UK are sounding alarms over proposed reforms in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, warning that these changes could lead to significant threats against wildlife and natural habitats, including ancient woodlands. A coalition of leading nature organisations, including the Wildlife Trusts, the Woodland Trust, the RSPB, the National Trust, WWT, the Rivers Trust, and the Marine Conservation Society, has expressed serious concerns regarding the potential ramifications of the Bill.

In a letter directed to Environment Secretary Steve Reed and Housing Minister Matthew Pennycook, the organisations pointed out that the proposed legislation may allow developers to override existing environmental regulations and ignore community apprehensions regarding local ecosystems. This, they argue, could lead to increased risks of sewage contamination in rivers, flooding, and the loss of valued natural areas.

The UK Government contends that the current planning system is inefficient both for economic growth and the protection of environmental standards, suggesting that housing and infrastructure projects have been hindered by overly complex processes. The proposed reforms include the introduction of environmental development plans, which would allow development schemes that might impact protected wildlife or areas to instead pay a “nature restoration levy.” This levy would ostensibly fund improvements in habitat or species at a wider scale.

However, conservation groups argue that this "strategic approach" may not effectively safeguard species that inhabit specific or irreplaceable habitats, such as ancient woodlands. They highlight that many protected sites, including heathlands, wetlands, and woodlands, could lose crucial protections, becoming vulnerable to development pressures that could harm these environments.

In their letter, the conservationists warned that the environmental delivery plans could permit developments to bypass vital environmental requirements without adequate scientific justification or genuine commitment to preventing harm. They have called for amendments to the Bill that would ensure developers focus on avoiding environmental damage, allow harm to protected sites only in over-riding public interest, use scientific evidence for decision making, and secure upfront benefits for nature before any development proceeds.

Richard Benwell, chief executive of the Wildlife and Countryside Link coalition, remarked on the potential implications of the Bill, stating, “The Government is right that a win-win is possible for nature and development, but the Planning Bill is completely one-sided. It throws environmental protection to the wind, with little to offer future generations or communities fearful for the future of nature.”

Beccy Speight, RSPB chief executive, echoed these concerns, stating that should the Bill remain unchanged, it would “supercharge the decline of our most precious habitats and wildlife.” She also stressed the economic rationale behind investing in natural preservation, highlighting that damaging such environments ultimately undermines the economic foundations reliant on them.

Harry Bowell, director of land and nature at the National Trust, cautioned that the current form of the Bill would represent a regression in environmental protections. He remarked, “With steep declines in wildlife continuing, none of us can afford for new laws to make this problem worse,” indicating that comprehensive safeguards are essential for ensuring that nature can coexist harmoniously with development efforts.

The letter, co-signed by the chief executives of 32 nature organisations, serves as a firm call for the Government to reevaluate and amend the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to better align with both developmental needs and ecological preservation. The ongoing discussions surrounding this legislation continue to highlight the delicate balance between growth and environmental sustainability in the UK.

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

## References

* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2025/march/planning-and-infrastructure-bill-call-for-evidence/> - This URL provides information about the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, including its goals to streamline planning processes and deliver infrastructure projects, which is relevant to the government's stance on the balance between development and environmental protection.
* <https://www.tlt.com/insights-and-events/insight/draft-planning-and-infrastructure-bill-published/> - This source discusses the proposed changes to the nationally significant infrastructure project regime and the challenges in achieving the government's ambitious targets, highlighting concerns over the efficiency of current processes.
* <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/resource/the-government-publishes-the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill.html> - This resource explains how the Bill aims to improve efficiency in delivering infrastructure projects while supporting environmental goals, which relates to the government's position on balancing growth and environmental sustainability.
* <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/> - The Wildlife Trusts are among the groups concerned about the potential environmental impacts of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, emphasizing the need for stricter protections for nature.
* <https://www.rspb.org.uk/> - The RSPB is another key organization expressing concerns over the Bill's potential to harm wildlife and natural habitats, advocating for stronger environmental safeguards.