# OEP warns UK planning bill risks weakening nature protections



The UK’s newly established post-Brexit environmental watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), has issued a cautionary statement regarding the Government’s Planning & Infrastructure Bill. In a letter addressed to Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, the OEP expressed substantial concerns that the Bill, which seeks to simplify planning regulations to expedite housing and major infrastructure projects, could undermine nature protections and have detrimental ecological impacts.

Introduced to Parliament earlier this year, the Bill is aligned with Labour’s growth strategy, intended to facilitate a faster approval process for significant developments. However, the OEP has raised questions about the proposed amendments to environmental impact assessments. The initiative replaces exhaustive, site-specific evaluations with a model that requires developers only to contribute to a new Nature Restoration Fund, rather than ensuring targeted mitigation plans for affected ecosystems.

In its assessment, the OEP has remarked that the Bill offers “fewer protections for nature written than under existing law.” The watchdog’s letter underscores the risk that enhanced regulatory flexibility without adequate legal safeguards could weaken environmental outcomes over time. It stressed that while striving to improve environmental conditions is commendable, it does not equate to maintaining stringent legal protections for specific habitats and species.

The proposed Nature Restoration Fund is designed to finance extensive restoration initiatives that may not be geographically relevant to the developments in question. The OEP cautioned that this approach could establish a precarious precedent, as the existing framework permits such contributions only in limited circumstances.

The implications of the Bill, as articulated by the OEP, raise significant concerns regarding potential environmental degradation in specific regions, jeopardising the Government's ability to fulfil legally binding biodiversity targets. Moreover, there are worries about the Bill's ‘overall improvement tests’ within Environmental Delivery Plans, which may further dilute the effectiveness of conservation efforts.

This letter from the OEP has sparked wider reactions from environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academic experts, and policy figures who have likened the Bill's provisions to effectively granting developers a “licence to kill” ecosystems. As the Bill is currently being scrutinised during Parliament’s Committee Stage, the OEP has indicated that there is still an opportunity for amendments before the legislation progresses further.

Becky Pullinger, head of land use planning at the Wildlife Trusts, stated, “It is ever clearer that nature will lose out from the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. As currently drafted, the Bill stands to rip up the very foundations of our wildlife protection laws.” She added that the UK Government must heed calls for amendments and act swiftly to incorporate necessary safeguards to protect nature, suggesting that even minor adjustments could demonstrate a genuine commitment to environmental stewardship.

The OEP’s position highlights a pivotal moment in UK policy as stakeholders continue to evaluate the balance between economic development and ecological integrity within the framework of post-Brexit legislation.

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

## References

* <https://www.theoep.org.uk/report/proposed-changes-laws-developments-will-weaken-environmental-protections-warns-oep> - The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) has expressed concerns that proposed changes to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill could reduce environmental protections, particularly regarding developments, water quality, and protected wildlife sites.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/7a971bac-981d-447d-853e-d215f183594d> - Proposed UK planning reforms aimed at speeding up infrastructure projects could lead to significant job losses among ecologists, a sector that employs over 10,000 people. The changes would reduce the need for protected species surveys, a core component of ecologists’ work, causing concerns about job security and deterring new entrants to the field.
* <https://www.iema.net/resources/news/2025/significant-concerns-about-new-environmental-impact-assessment-regime-from-iema/> - The Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) has significant concerns about the proposed Environmental Outcome Reports (EORs) replacing Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), fearing they may lack sufficient detail on measuring, monitoring, and enforcing environmental outcomes.
* <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/blog/matthew-stanton/planning-and-infrastructure-bill-reforms-must-protect-nature> - The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust argues that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill could weaken protections for various species, including newts, bats, beavers, dormice, otters, and porpoises, and calls for reforms to be paused or not applied to protected species.
* <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/planning-and-infrastructure-bill-second-reading-house-commons> - The Local Government Association (LGA) supports the development of Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) at a strategic level to make the best use of limited skills and expertise, particularly in addressing issues like nutrient and water neutrality that have previously stalled housing developments.
* <https://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/sharpeedge/808-sharpeedge-planning/60256-planning-and-infrastructure-bill-what-you-need-to-know> - The Planning and Infrastructure Bill introduces a national scheme of delegation, setting out which planning functions should be delegated to officers and which should go to a planning committee or subcommittee, aiming to streamline the planning process.
* <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMiowFBVV95cUxOZDJza29TUFRNWUJIWHduT1dfSWJzNFpPU1p2YTBaSG85aVdwWDR6T1BzX0JtbXZyYlhwcjR5SDFqbzVvQ1dYZFdoamE5TFlibjhaa01NOG9nT054c1lqNVgtWkZBazBQc25jQlNxZDJMUC1vZjhtTmFFczBXUVdJQzNVYkExcWVGbGRJUUZVRXM4RDV1cDBqb3o0Mm9GRmtZSTdF?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data