# Legal challenge launched against UK planning bill over environmental protections



A legal campaign group is gearing up for a judicial review of the UK government's new planning bill, contending that the legislation poses a serious threat to hard-won environmental protections. Wild Justice has taken a proactive approach, urging Housing Minister Angela Rayner to amend a parliamentary statement in which she claimed the bill would not diminish these safeguards. Echoing this sentiment, Nature Minister Mary Creagh asserted in a letter to The Guardian that the bill does not repeal vital habitat or species protections. However, the concerns raised by Wild Justice suggest a starkly different interpretation of the bill's implications.

The group has sent Rayner a pre-action protocol letter demanding that she rectify her statement or face judicial scrutiny. At the heart of the matter lies the removal of stringent requirements for developers, which previously mandated scientific certainty that projects would not negatively affect protected sites. Instead, the new framework proposes a Nature Restoration Fund (NRF), allowing developers to contribute financially and subsequently bypass direct environmental assessments. Critics argue that this model inadequately guarantees that ecological compensation will occur in the same locations impacted by development, raising concerns about the feasibility of reinstating ancient woodlands or other natural features elsewhere.

This legislative shift has not gone unnoticed by the Office of Environmental Protection, the oversight body established in the wake of Brexit. Their warnings indicate that the draft bill could undermine existing safeguards for nature and jeopardise protected environments. Chris Packham, co-director of Wild Justice, emphasised the crucial need for effective wildlife protection, stating, "good people fought long and hard to put proper wildlife protection into law... we need to save every last tree, bird, butterfly, or bug." His sentiments encapsulate the broader public dread regarding biodiversity decline, especially in light of recent environmental crises.

Ministers herald the new bill as a necessary measure to accelerate housing developments and major infrastructure projects, ostensibly to overcome bureaucratic slowdowns. However, a recent government impact assessment revealed a lack of substantiating evidence linking environmental obligations to development delays, calling into question the rationale for the proposed changes. The bill is currently under parliamentary debate, where several amendments have already been proposed to address these contentious issues.

Dr Ruth Tingay, another co-director of Wild Justice, underscored the inaccuracies in portraying the bill as beneficial to both nature and development. She asserted that misrepresenting its consequences could mislead lawmakers into endorsing a bill likely to inflict severe damage on protected species and habitats. Legal representation for Wild Justice, Ricardo Gama of Leigh Day solicitors, indicated that the government has pressed MPs to weigh the merits of a "growth at all costs" agenda against established environmental protections. This decision hinges on a complete understanding of the bill’s ramifications.

Moreover, the reactions from environmental organisations have been predominantly sceptical. The Wildlife Trusts have expressed their disappointment, highlighting an absence of substantial measures in the bill aimed at facilitating nature recovery. They advocate for stronger provisions to counteract environmental degradation resulting from development activities.

The current climate of environmental advocacy underscores the urgency of these discussions. As the government pushes for expedited development through legislative reforms, the pressure from both campaign groups and environmental watchdogs reveals an ongoing conflict between economic ambitions and ecological stewardship. As the debates unfold, it will be essential for lawmakers to navigate this complex landscape, ensuring both growth and the integrity of the UK's natural heritage are preserved.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 6
2. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 6
3. Paragraphs 4, 6, 7
4. Paragraphs 4, 7
5. Paragraph 7
6. Paragraph 5
7. Paragraph 5

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/12/wild-justice-judicial-review-labour-planning-bill-angela-rayner> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/12/wild-justice-judicial-review-labour-planning-bill-angela-rayner> - Wild Justice, a legal campaign group, is planning a judicial review against the UK government's new planning bill, arguing it will weaken environmental protections established over decades. The group has sent a pre-action protocol letter to Housing Minister Angela Rayner, urging her to correct a parliamentary statement claiming the bill would not reduce protection levels. If no correction is made, Wild Justice intends to proceed with the judicial review. The bill's provisions, including the removal of the requirement to be certain beyond reasonable scientific doubt that a development would not negatively impact a protected site, are central to the group's concerns.
3. <https://bylinetimes.com/2025/03/26/labour-housing-planning-and-infrastructure-bill/> - Environmental groups and conservationists have criticized the UK government's Planning and Infrastructure Bill, branding it a 'pay-to-kill' system for developers that could lead to the injury and killing of protected species. The bill, which aims to tackle the housing crisis and boost the economy, proposes allowing developers to bulldoze habitats without determining the wildlife present, provided they contribute to a newly established Nature Restoration Fund. Critics argue this approach could result in significant biodiversity loss and environmental harm.
4. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/wildlife-trusts-disappointed-see-nature-largely-missing-planning-infrastructure-bill> - The Wildlife Trusts have expressed disappointment over the UK Government’s Planning & Infrastructure Bill, noting that measures to boost nature recovery are largely absent. While the bill includes some safeguards for the Nature Restoration Fund, these need to be stronger. The Wildlife Trusts emphasize the need for action to address environmental damage quickly to prevent further loss of wildlife and habitats due to development.
5. <https://www.theplanner.co.uk/2025/02/03/legal-reformers-blast-judicial-review-reforms-major-schemes> - Legal reform campaigners have criticized government reforms to judicial reviews for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), arguing that limiting challenges to only one per case could dilute the rule of law and sideline public accountability. The reforms aim to tackle delays to NSIPs and end a 'challenge culture,' but critics contend that such changes could undermine a critical mechanism for upholding the rule of law and ensuring public accountability.
6. <https://www.leighday.co.uk/news/news/2024-news/wild-justice-challenges-second-bid-to-relax-water-pollution-rules/> - Wild Justice is challenging a bid by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to change water pollution rules, permitting house building in sensitive water catchment areas without enforcing measures to protect them from sewage pollution. The group argues that this is an unlawful attempt to introduce changes that were previously defeated in the House of Lords, potentially allowing environmentally damaging activities to proceed without appropriate assessment.
7. <https://www.irwinmitchell.com/news-and-insights/expert-comment/post/102j0gp/environmental-weekly-news-round-up-16-february-2024> - Environmental campaign group Wild Justice has sent a pre-action protocol letter to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, claiming that a notice sent to planning authorities and water companies represents an unlawful attempt to introduce changes defeated in the House of Lords. The notice seeks to require water companies to upgrade sewage infrastructure by 1 April 2030, but Wild Justice contends it could permit environmentally damaging activities without appropriate assessment.