# Chris Packham condemns UK Nature Restoration Fund as green light for habitat destruction



Television naturalist Chris Packham has strongly condemned the UK government's proposed Nature Restoration Fund, labelling it a “licence to destroy nature.” The fund is part of the contentious Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which, if passed, would allow property developers to forgo environmental obligations by paying into a fund intended for nature restoration elsewhere. This controversial provision has drawn significant criticism, arising from concerns that it could enable developers to sidestep their responsibility to protect vital habitats.

Speaking during a panel discussion at the Hay Festival of Literature and Arts, Packham voiced his deep apprehensions about the implications of the bill. He highlighted that developers could essentially monetise the destruction of natural sites, such as ancient woodlands, by compensating with a financial contribution that would then be overseen by Natural England. However, he pointed out that this agency has suffered substantial budget cuts and is currently undergoing further redundancies, raising questions about its ability to monitor and ensure effective restoration efforts.

Packham's severe critique reflects wider concerns from environmental groups regarding the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. The Wildlife Trusts have expressed disappointment at the bill's failure to incorporate measures aimed at enhancing nature recovery. They caution that, instead of fostering conservation, the Nature Restoration Fund could act as a “get out of jail free card” for developers, effectively undermining existing environmental safeguards.

Further criticism has emerged from watchdogs such as the Office for Environmental Protection, which warns that the bill could dilute protections previously established under EU legislation. This has prompted fears that the new funding mechanism may inadvertently redirect focus away from on-site conservation efforts, incentivising developers to choose financial contributions over responsible environmental stewardship. A parliamentary debate reiterated these concerns, as members voiced apprehensions about the fund being used as a means to legitimise habitat destruction without adequate oversight.

The ramifications of this legislation extend beyond just immediate environmental impacts. The government's recent acknowledgment of limited evidence regarding how environmental protections influence developmental projects further complicates the justification for such measures. Critics argue that this lack of data undermines the government's rationale, suggesting that protections may not actually inhibit housing development as claimed.

As public discourse around the bill intensifies, Packham urged festival attendees to engage with their local MPs to voice opposition to the proposed legislation. He emphasised that the implications for biodiversity and ecological health are too significant to overlook. The ongoing debate underscores a critical moment for environmental governance in the UK, with nature conservation leaders advocating for stronger protections that prioritise habitat preservation ahead of economic interests.

This growing unrest among conservationists and the general public alike highlights an urgent need for a more balanced approach to development—one that adequately considers the environmental costs of infrastructure growth and prioritises ecological integrity for future generations. The discussions at the Hay Festival, featuring prominent figures across cultures and disciplines, continue to illuminate the complexities surrounding these issues, reaffirming the crucial role of informed public dialogue in shaping a sustainable future.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/chris-packham-interview-nature-restoration-fund-controversy-b2757209.html), [[2]](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/wildlife-trusts-disappointed-see-nature-largely-missing-planning-infrastructure-bill)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/chris-packham-interview-nature-restoration-fund-controversy-b2757209.html), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/02/labour-planning-bill-threatens-protected-habitats-says-environment-watchdog), [[4]](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-24/debates/6C99E365-F6AF-4B7C-8A0C-1D326D76D90D/PlanningAndInfrastructureBill)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/wildlife-trusts-disappointed-see-nature-largely-missing-planning-infrastructure-bill), [[5]](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-03-13/debates/c7c5c853-b6a2-4032-b9b6-67fc3fd796ae/GrandCommittee)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/uk-government-admits-almost-no-evidence-nature-protections-block-development), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/09/planning-bill-throws-environmental-protection-to-wind-uk-nature-chiefs)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/chris-packham-interview-nature-restoration-fund-controversy-b2757209.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/02/labour-planning-bill-threatens-protected-habitats-says-environment-watchdog), [[4]](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-24/debates/6C99E365-F6AF-4B7C-8A0C-1D326D76D90D/PlanningAndInfrastructureBill)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/chris-packham-interview-nature-restoration-fund-controversy-b2757209.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/wildlife-trusts-disappointed-see-nature-largely-missing-planning-infrastructure-bill> - The Wildlife Trusts express disappointment over the UK Government's Planning & Infrastructure Bill, highlighting the absence of measures to boost nature recovery. They emphasize the need for stronger safeguards to prevent developers from using the Nature Restoration Fund as a 'get out of jail free card' and advocate for the inclusion of Wildbelt designation to protect areas earmarked for future nature recovery.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/02/labour-planning-bill-threatens-protected-habitats-says-environment-watchdog> - The Guardian reports that the UK's Planning and Infrastructure Bill, currently in Parliament, overrides EU-derived habitat protections, allowing developers to pay into a nature restoration fund instead of preserving habitats on-site. The Office for Environmental Protection warns that this approach could weaken environmental safeguards and put protected sites at risk.
4. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-24/debates/6C99E365-F6AF-4B7C-8A0C-1D326D76D90D/PlanningAndInfrastructureBill> - In a UK Parliament debate, concerns were raised about the Planning and Infrastructure Bill's potential to undermine environmental protections. The bill introduces a nature restoration levy requiring developers to meet environmental obligations related to protected sites and species, but there are fears that Natural England may lack the resources to properly monitor and enforce the fund.
5. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-03-13/debates/c7c5c853-b6a2-4032-b9b6-67fc3fd796ae/GrandCommittee> - During a UK Parliament Grand Committee session, a concern was raised that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill could incentivize developers to destroy habitats rather than preserve them. The bill proposes a fixed tariff into a nature restoration fund, which could lead developers to opt for demolition over conservation, undermining environmental protections.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/uk-government-admits-almost-no-evidence-nature-protections-block-development> - The Guardian reports that the UK government's impact assessment of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill reveals 'very limited data' on how environmental obligations affect development. This admission challenges the government's argument that such protections hinder housing projects and raises concerns about the bill's potential impact on biodiversity.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/09/planning-bill-throws-environmental-protection-to-wind-uk-nature-chiefs> - UK nature conservation leaders criticize the Planning and Infrastructure Bill for weakening environmental protections. They argue that the bill exposes vulnerable species and habitats to unsustainable development and propose amendments to ensure upfront environmental benefits and prioritize avoiding harm to nature before resorting to mitigation.