# Chris Packham warns UK’s Nature Restoration Fund risks legalising habitat destruction



At the recent Hay Festival of Literature and Arts, Chris Packham, the esteemed TV naturalist, issued a powerful denunciation of the UK government's proposed Nature Restoration Fund, labelling it as a “licence to destroy nature.” This initiative, linked to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill currently under parliamentary scrutiny, has attracted substantial criticism from environmentalists and experts alike.

The focal point of Packham's critique is the allowance for property developers to bypass environmental obligations by making a monetary contribution instead. The funds collected would be managed by Natural England to support nature restoration elsewhere. However, as Packham articulated during a panel discussion, this creates a troubling premise: developers can legally obliterate habitats—such as ancient oak tree glades—based on a predetermined monetary value assigned to the ecological destruction they cause. He warned that this commodification of nature undermines the integrity of local ecosystems and the health of the environment at large.

Packham’s assertions are supported by a growing chorus of critics who view the Planning and Infrastructure Bill as a significant rollback of environmental protections. This proposed reform raises alarms about the potential for local extinctions and its likelihood of hindering the UK’s commitment to protecting 30% of its land and sea by 2030. Opponents, including wildlife advocates, argue that the ability to pay into a nature restoration fund instead of preserving existing habitats could destabilise ecosystems, posing risks to biodiversity across the nation.

The government has positioned these reforms as an essential mechanism to expedite infrastructure projects and stimulate economic growth. However, there is considerable apprehension that such initiatives will pave the way for unsustainable development practices. The government's own impact assessment seems to contradict the narrative that environmental protections significantly obstruct development, revealing scant evidence to support the claim. Nonetheless, the directive aims to streamline environmental compliance processes, leading critics to question whether ecological recovery efforts can be adequately prioritised in this new regulatory climate.

Packham highlighted the diminishing resources of Natural England, asserting that the organisation is facing repeated budget cuts and staff redundancies. This deterioration raises doubts about the agency's ability to effectively monitor and manage the proposed restoration efforts funded by developers. The implication is stark: the same entities responsible for ecological destruction would ostensibly oversee the reparative actions, a scenario fraught with potential conflicts of interest.

Moreover, environmental organisations have criticised specific provisions within the bill, including the proposed removal of obligatory bat surveys that protect vulnerable species. This could expose fragile habitats and lead to unsustainable building practices, further undermining local biodiversity. Such concerns spotlight the necessity for amendments to the bill that would ensure effective protections for nature are not merely an afterthought in the rush towards economic expediency.

Throughout his remarks, Packham urged festival attendees to engage with their MPs regarding these critical issues, encouraging a grassroots response to legislative developments that could irrevocably alter the environmental landscape of the UK. His call to action reflects a wider sentiment among environmental advocates who believe that with increased public engagement, it is possible to challenge the adverse impacts of such policies.

The discussions at the Hay Festival underscored a fundamental tension between developmental ambition and the urgent need for environmental stewardship, a conflict that will likely shape the discourse around UK planning reforms in the years to come. With influential voices like Packham championing the cause, the hope remains that robust arguments for ecological integrity will resonate through the corridors of power.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/chris-packham-interview-nature-restoration-fund-controversy-b2757209.html), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/02/labour-planning-bill-threatens-protected-habitats-says-environment-watchdog)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/chris-packham-interview-nature-restoration-fund-controversy-b2757209.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7a971bac-981d-447d-853e-d215f183594d)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/a9896bcb-f64b-4e58-b098-5214b16287c0), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/uk-government-admits-almost-no-evidence-nature-protections-block-development)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/09/planning-bill-throws-environmental-protection-to-wind-uk-nature-chiefs)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7a971bac-981d-447d-853e-d215f183594d), [[7]](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/wildlife-trusts-disappointed-see-nature-largely-missing-planning-infrastructure-bill)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/chris-packham-interview-nature-restoration-fund-controversy-b2757209.html)
* Paragraph 7 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/02/labour-planning-bill-threatens-protected-habitats-says-environment-watchdog), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/uk-government-admits-almost-no-evidence-nature-protections-block-development)

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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.ft.com/content/7a971bac-981d-447d-853e-d215f183594d> - Proposed UK planning reforms aimed at expediting infrastructure projects could lead to significant job losses among ecologists. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill introduces a 'nature restoration fund' allowing developers to offset environmental obligations through upfront payments, raising concerns about potential ecological harm and delays in habitat restoration. Critics argue that the bill represents a major rollback of environmental protections, potentially causing local extinctions and hindering the UK's goal of protecting 30% of its land and sea by 2030.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/a9896bcb-f64b-4e58-b098-5214b16287c0> - The UK government plans to refocus the roles of the Environment Agency and Natural England to support economic development and reduce obstacles to nature restoration and infrastructure projects. This includes streamlining environmental compliance and assigning lead regulators for major infrastructure projects. Critics warn that these changes could weaken ecosystems if habitat redevelopment timelines are misaligned, but the government insists the reforms will balance development with environmental protection.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/02/labour-planning-bill-threatens-protected-habitats-says-environment-watchdog> - 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 avoiding disturbance to nature on-site. While aiming to boost economic growth by reducing regulatory burdens, environmental organizations warn that the bill could weaken protections for specific species and habitats, potentially leading to biodiversity loss.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/uk-government-admits-almost-no-evidence-nature-protections-block-development> - The UK government's own impact assessment reveals very limited evidence that environmental protections hinder development. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill proposes allowing developers to bypass on-site environmental obligations by contributing to a central nature recovery fund, raising concerns about potential ecological harm and the adequacy of habitat restoration efforts.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/09/planning-bill-throws-environmental-protection-to-wind-uk-nature-chiefs> - UK nature organizations express concerns that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill could undermine environmental protections. The bill includes measures such as removing guidance around conducting bat surveys before building, potentially exposing vulnerable species and habitats to unsustainable development. Environmental groups advocate for amendments to ensure stronger safeguards for nature.
7. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/wildlife-trusts-disappointed-see-nature-largely-missing-planning-infrastructure-bill> - The Wildlife Trusts express disappointment over the lack of measures to boost nature recovery in the UK's Planning and Infrastructure Bill. While the bill introduces a nature restoration fund, the organization calls for stronger safeguards to ensure protected sites are not damaged and emphasizes the need for immediate action to address environmental damage resulting from development.