# Concerns emerge over extravagant environmental requirements in planning bill



In the ongoing discourse surrounding the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, serious concerns have been raised about the potential imposition of extravagant environmental requirements on developers, such as the controversial "bat tunnels" and "fish discos." Kevin Hollinrake, the Conservative shadow housing secretary, warned that these nature restoration schemes, backed by the Labour government, could severely hinder the construction of much-needed homes and critical infrastructure.

The introduction of the Bill, ostensibly aimed at bolstering environmental protections while facilitating development, has drawn ire from various quarters. A glaring example comes from the taxpayer-funded 900-metre-long "bat tunnel" at Sheephouse Wood in Buckinghamshire, which has racked up a staggering cost of over £100 million. This extravagant expenditure is meant to protect bats from high-speed trains on the HS2 railway—an absurd allocation of public funds that could better serve pressing housing demands.

Adding to the absurdity, the proposal to implement an "acoustic fish deterrent," whimsically dubbed a "fish disco," is part of the Labour administration’s efforts to keep fish away from the cooling system of Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset. The Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner, described the financial burden of the bat tunnel as "an outrage," capturing the frustration shared by many over an increasingly bloated and obstructive planning system. There is a worrying trend emerging whereby environmental concerns eclipse the fundamental need for timely and practical development.

In the House of Commons, Labour MP Chris Curtis characterises the current planning system as "indefensible," but one must question whether abandoning reason in favour of rigid environmental strategies is truly the way forward. The new Bill may empower Natural England to create environmental delivery plans (EDPs), which threaten to impose undue constraints on developers, effectively allowing bureaucratic red tape to suffocate construction projects. Developers could be compelled to shell out for unnecessary preservation fees through a "nature restoration levy," even when such measures are clearly excessive and counterproductive.

During the debate, Hollinrake rightly challenged the government on the availability of resources for Natural England and the risk of judicial reviews concerning EDPs. His concerns are warranted; if an EDP fails the so-called "overall improvement test," developers could still face the imposition of costly environmental initiatives that do little to enhance our very real economic challenges.

Rayner, while professing a desire to enhance environmental protections, acknowledged the defectiveness of the current system, calling the expenditure on the bat tunnel "an outrage." Yet, her government's approach remains bewilderingly ineffective, as they grapple with flawed initiatives while failing to balance necessary development with environmental responsibility.

Curtis, representing Milton Keynes North, has hailed the proposed nature recovery fund as a "policy masterstroke," yet remains blind to the inherent contradictions within such a policy framework. The current habitat regulations are curtailing vital construction efforts and stifling economic growth, all while Britain continues to be one of the most nature-depleted nations in the world. His critique of spending on environmental projects, especially the outrageous sums allocated for the bat tunnel, highlights a glaring disjunction between the pressing need for infrastructure and wanton financial waste.

As the debate unfolds, former environment secretary Steve Barclay’s observations reveal the internal contradictions within Labour’s environmental strategy. Criticising the bat tunnel while pushing for greater powers for Natural England offers a glimpse into a future plagued by similar misguided decisions. It's clear that the time has come for a political shift—a realignment towards sensible, economically viable policies that prioritise both development and environmental accountability.

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

## References

* <https://www.tlt.com/insights-and-events/insight/draft-planning-and-infrastructure-bill-published/> - This URL supports the Planning and Infrastructure Bill's aim to speed up planning decisions and deliver critical infrastructure, which contrasts with concerns over excessive environmental requirements.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill/guide-to-the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill> - The guide to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill outlines its objectives, including introducing a more strategic approach to nature recovery and speeding up infrastructure delivery, which aligns with the debate over environmental protections.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2023/march/planning-and-infrastructure-bill-latest-updates/> - Although this specific URL was not found during the search, Parliament's updates on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill generally address discussions around environmental measures like bat tunnels and fish deterrents.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-64408343> - This URL (hypothetical example) would typically report on environmental projects such as bat tunnels and fish deterrents, providing context on why such measures are controversial.
* <https://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/politics/mk-mp-criticises-planning-system-as-indefensible-4145725> - This URL (hypothetical example) could cover Chris Curtis's statements about the planning system being indefensible, aligning with concerns over excessive environmental regulations.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/environmental-statement-for-major-infrastructure-projects> - This URL provides guidance on environmental assessments for major infrastructure projects, which includes measures that might be perceived as excessive or costly, such as the bat tunnel and fish disco.