# Shadow Housing Secretary raises concerns over costly environmental proposals



In a contentious debate over the proposed Planning and Infrastructure Bill, Shadow Housing Secretary Kevin Hollinrake has rightly raised alarm bells regarding the potential for new nature restoration proposals to stifle construction times and inflate costs. His pointed references to expenditure on unnecessary constructs such as "bat tunnels" and "fish discos" starkly highlight how this Labour-led government prioritises environmental over economic sanity, a move that threatens the very projects needed to rejuvenate the country’s infrastructure.

The "bat tunnel" at Sheephouse Wood, at an astonishing £100 million cost, is emblematic of government mismanagement that could ultimately cripple our construction industry. This costly initiative, designed to accommodate bats and prevent them from clashing with high-speed trains, is a prime example of how misplaced priorities can financialise environmentalism at the expense of taxpayers. Similarly, the so-called "fish disco," intended for the Bristol Channel to guide fish away from the Hinkley Point C power station's cooling system, further exemplifies the absurd costs of Labour’s environmental agenda, which is more concerned with appeasing niche interests than fostering necessary growth.

Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner's dismissive characterisation of costs related to the bat tunnel as "an outrage" ironically points to the fiscal irresponsibility brewing within her own party. While introducing the Bill that threatens to impose even greater burdens on developers, Labour seems oblivious to the tangible impacts on our housing market and the economy. Labour MP Chris Curtis' assertion that the planning system is "indefensible" reveals the hollowness of Labour's environmental rhetoric, as it is their own policies that are making the situation more untenable.

If passed, the Bill would hand increased power to Natural England, enabling them to formulate Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) that not only fail to address the unique challenges of our construction sector but also impose nature restoration levies on developers. This means that rather than fostering growth, the government will entrench a bureaucratic nightmare that could lead to costly delays, fundamentally harming the economy.

Hollinrake's concerns over Natural England's capability to shoulder the burden of implementing these plans are well-founded. With anticipated judicial reviews looming, developers could find their hands tied, both financially and logistically. Should an EDP falter the "overall improvement test," developers would still be forced to pursue costly mitigation measures like bat tunnels and fish discos, even when such initiatives may deliver little benefit to the broader ecosystem or public.

Rayner's recognition of a shared ambition among MPs to improve environmental outcomes does not absolve Labour of their part in fostering a system that is both inefficient and counterproductive. Curtis highlights how the current legislative framework deters urgently required housing development and infrastructure projects, a failure that also deals a blow to economic health.

As critiques of the bat tunnel expenditure continue, it is clear that the argument posed by Steve Barclay, that there exists a contradiction in Labour's stance, highlights their inability to strike a balance between environmental aspirations and economic realism.

As discussions unfold, the consequences of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and its proposed nature restoration measures could prove detrimental not just for environmental conservation but for the broader construction industry that is critical to the UK's economic recovery and growth. This government must be held accountable for its costly, misguided focus, ensuring that taxpayer money is directed towards the urgent improvements the country needs.

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 provides an overview of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, including its aims to speed up planning decisions and support the delivery of nation-wide infrastructure projects.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill/guide-to-the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill> - The guide details the Bill's objectives, including plans to introduce a more strategic approach to nature recovery and enhance infrastructure delivery.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This is the source article discussing concerns over the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, including potential impacts on construction times and costs.
* <https://www.naturalengland.org.uk/> - Natural England's website provides context on environmental delivery plans and their role in the proposed legislation.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/biggest-building-boom-in-a-generation-through-planning-reforms> - This government press release outlines the ambitious building plans, including the role of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill in achieving these goals.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/> - The UK Parliament's website is a resource for following discussions and debates on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, including statements from Shadow Housing Secretary Kevin Hollinrake.