# Chris Packham warns UK Nature Restoration Fund could become a licence to destroy nature



In a recent panel discussion at the Hay Festival of Literature and Arts, renowned naturalist Chris Packham delivered a scathing critique of the UK government's proposed Nature Restoration Fund, branding it a “licence to destroy nature.” His comments highlight a growing unease among the public about the Labour government's handling of environmental issues in the wake of their election win, which has left many questioning their commitment to preserving the UK’s natural heritage.

Under the Planning and Infrastructure Bill currently making its way through Parliament, the proposed fund would allow property developers to meet environmental obligations by merely contributing financially to nature restoration projects elsewhere. This alarming loophole effectively sidesteps the need for developers to address the direct ecological damage their projects inflict. Packham spelled out the grim implications of this initiative, revealing that developers could quantify environmental destruction, such as the felling of ancient oak trees, in simple monetary terms.

With Natural England already reeling from budget cuts and staffing shortages, there are serious doubts about their capacity to supervise or ensure genuine environmental restoration. “What’s happened is the government has come up with this piece of legislation... essentially that developers will be able to destroy nature to an agreed pound value,” he said, underscoring the inadequacy of governmental oversight in safeguarding our natural resources.

The ramifications of this funding model are alarming, raising significant concerns among environmental watchdogs and conservation organisations. Many fear that this approach could contribute to major habitat degradation without any assurance that the allocated funds will be used for effective local restoration. Reports highlight that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill could erode existing protections for local ecosystems, allowing developers to neglect essential on-site mitigation efforts crucial for biodiversity preservation.

The Wildlife Trusts have voiced their discontent, pointing out that while the Nature Restoration Fund purports to promote sustainability, it lacks the necessary safeguards to enforce meaningful ecological recovery. There is a real danger that this initiative could create a climate where developers bypass their responsibilities to local ecosystems, risking irreversible habitat destruction.

Critics underscore that the government’s own impact assessments reveal a disquieting deficiency in evidence regarding the actual effects of existing environmental obligations on development. The absence of solid data raises serious questions about the rationale for introducing what many are calling a “licence to kill nature.” This initiative exemplifies a broader legislative trend under the new Labour administration that could seriously undermine decades of environmental progress in the UK.

As the legislative process unfolds, Packham has urged concerned citizens to voice their opposition to local representatives. His appeal highlights the urgent need for public advocacy against proposals that could devastate the natural landscapes vital for wildlife and the wellbeing of communities across the country.

The ongoing debate over the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and its associated Nature Restoration Fund illustrates a critical juncture in the UK’s environmental policy. The prevailing sentiment among the public is that the new government's prioritisation of short-term economic benefits should not come at the expense of our critical natural heritage and the long-term health of our ecosystems.

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

## 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.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 under parliamentary review, could weaken environmental protections by allowing developers to pay into a Nature Restoration Fund instead of directly mitigating environmental impacts on-site. This approach may lead to habitat degradation without immediate local restoration, raising concerns among environmental watchdogs about the potential loss of protected habitats and species.
3. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/wildlife-trusts-disappointed-see-nature-largely-missing-planning-infrastructure-bill> - The Wildlife Trusts express disappointment over the Planning and Infrastructure Bill's lack of substantial measures for nature recovery. They highlight that while the bill introduces a Nature Restoration Fund, it lacks strong safeguards to ensure effective environmental restoration, potentially allowing developers to bypass on-site mitigation efforts and undermining existing environmental protections.
4. <https://www.cnp.org.uk/news/planning-and-infrastructure-bill-threatens-to-bulldoze-nature-protections/> - The Campaign for National Parks warns that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill could dismantle essential protections for wildlife and habitats. The bill proposes enabling developers to contribute to a Nature Restoration Fund, which may not guarantee effective restoration, potentially leading to irreversible habitat loss and species extinction.
5. <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 own impact assessment reveals limited data on how environmental obligations affect development, challenging the justification for the Nature Restoration Fund. Critics argue that the fund could serve as a 'licence to kill nature' without clear evidence of its economic benefits.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/09/planning-bill-throws-environmental-protection-to-wind-uk-nature-chiefs> - UK nature conservation leaders express concerns that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill could undermine environmental protections. They argue that the bill's provisions may expose vulnerable species and habitats to unsustainable development, with insufficient guarantees for nature recovery.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/land-use-biodiversity/comment-how-renewables-projects-uk-could-deliver-10-times-more-nature-2025-01-15/> - Reuters discusses how renewable energy projects in the UK could significantly enhance biodiversity. By aiming for a 100% biodiversity uplift, these projects can contribute to nature recovery, potentially offsetting environmental impacts and aligning with the UK's climate change mitigation efforts.