

PLANNING BILL'S NATURE LEVY SLAMMED AS “LICENCE TO KILL” BY EXPERTS, THREATENING ECOSYSTEMS AND GREEN GROWTH

Experts slam Labour’s flagship Planning Bill as a catastrophic license to trash nature, warning its reckless ‘pay to pollute’ scheme could torch vital habitats, skyrocket costs, and derail the Government’s growth mission

24 APRIL, LONDON: 40 [leading economists, former government advisors, and nature experts have written to MPs](#) ahead of the opening of the Public Bill Committee today, to warn of the dangers of rushing Part III of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill into law. Part III proposes a ‘pay to pollute’ buy-out mechanism, allowing companies to pay money to Natural England in exchange for destroying vital protected sites and species.

If passed, the signatories say, Part III of the Bill would amount to an extraordinary roll-back of critical nature protections that have, until now, supported nature-positive development and growth in England for over 40 years. The Nature Levy would turbo-charge the destruction of species and habitats in England, while undermining the UK’s international reputation for pioneering high integrity, pro-growth nature markets. Worse still, introducing a Nature Levy of this kind will add cost and delays to planning and development, harming our economy rather than helping it. Previous tariff systems, such as the introduction of the unpopular Community Infrastructure Levy in 2010, have shown this to be the case.

Previous community levy schemes to fund infrastructure like roads, schools, GP surgeries and green spaces typically led to lengthy viability negotiations between developers and planning authorities, slowing down and adding cost to the planning process. Levy schemes also often struggle to raise sufficient cash to deliver the intended projects, meaning many are never implemented at all, leaving local communities without the vital infrastructure intended to deliver prosperity, health and wellbeing. We can’t let these mistakes be repeated for our most vital species and habitats.

Prof David Hill CBE, former Deputy Chairman of Natural England, a signatory to the letter, says:

I cannot believe we have come to this position. Under the watch of previous governments, the debate had always been around how far we should progress to increase protection and funding for nature and green growth. Now, regressive laws are being quietly accelerated through Parliament with no public consultation, impact assessments or pilots. Part III of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill harms our economy, rather than helps it, and will deliver a profoundly unacceptable blow to our natural environment, which, unlike the economy, may never recover.

Prof Dame E.J. Milner-Gulland who directs the Interdisciplinary Centre for Conservation Science at the University of Oxford, another signatory to the letter says:

Over the last few years, the UK has presented itself as a leader in innovative approaches to nature recovery, and a champion of biodiversity at home and abroad, with much cross-party support. Although taking a strategic approach to recovering nature in the context of other priorities is important, the Planning and Infrastructure Bill is far too vague about how this would be done—and its “licence to trash” provisions go against the evidence and threaten to undo recent progress. Nature is not an obstacle to prosperity, it underpins it.

Prof Sir Partha Dasgupta, author of the HM Treasury-commissioned *Dasgupta Review* on the economics of biodiversity, and a letter signatory, said:

Part III of the Bill allows companies to ‘buy out’ of existing nature obligations while disapplying decades of nature laws. This profoundly undermines the core value and purpose of nature markets which is to halt and reverse the decline of nature, not accelerate it. Part III of the Bill will cause economic harm, by introducing overlapping and clashing nature laws, and slowing development with complex viability-based levy systems that critically undermine the investment case for nature in the UK. Part III should not be rushed into law without a full understanding of the impacts Part III will have to our economy, and the environment on which it depends.

The letter, which is [viewable here](#), calls for a pause to Part III of the Bill to allow for proper due process, has also been signed by Isabella Tree, author of award-winning *Wilding*—and fellow Knepp Estate conservationist, Sir Charlie Burrell—alongside Sir John Lawton, author of *Making space for nature* (commissioned by Gordon Brown’s Labour Government in 2009).

The signatories also say that “rushed laws of this magnitude, passed without due process, impact assessments or pilots, will add friction, complexity and costs to the development process, while causing irreparable harm to our environment”.

MPs must, the signatories say, “fully understand the impacts of Part III of the Bill before it comes into law, as too much is at stake for our economy, and our natural environment on which it depends”.

—ENDS—

Notes to editors:

1. [Read the experts’ letter here](#), published today, Thursday 24 April.
2. The [Planning and infrastructure Bill](#) had its first reading in the House of Commons on 11 March 2025, and its second reading on 24 March 2025.
3. The Bill is intended to enable growth and boost the UK’s sluggish economy. As Labour’s flagship Bill, it is being accelerated through the parliamentary process by the Government.

4. The Bill makes provisions about, among other things, infrastructure, introduces a return to strategic spatial planning, and Part III, a stand-alone part of the legislation, enables the creation of the Nature Restoration Fund, and Environmental Delivery Plans.
5. A [working paper](#) on Development and Nature Recovery was published by the Government on 15 December. An announcement was then made on 13 February that any responses to the Working Paper would need to be submitted by 21 February. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill was then laid before Parliament 11 working days later.
6. There has been no consultation, response to consultation, pilots, published impact assessment, or published review by the Regulatory Policy Committee.
7. A ministerial statement in the preamble to the Bill states that the Bill does not constitute a regression on environmental protections (as required under Section 20 Environment Act 2021). This is legally incorrect. The Office for Environmental Protection has not yet published any advice or opinion on this, but [has asked the Government](#) how it could have come to this conclusion.
8. 32 charities have [written to the Government](#) highlighting the Bill's significant regression on environmental protections. Rather than calling for a pause of Part III for due process, they are proposing a series of rapidly drafted amendments in an attempt to salvage current protections. If those amendments are accepted by the Government in full, the Bill would still amount to a significant reduction in environmental protections, while slowing and adding cost to development. A 'lose lose' outcome for nature and our economy.
9. [The letter](#)—published today—by leading economists and environmental experts today seeks to highlight the broader range of harms Part III could cause to our economy, and the environment, and calls for a pause of Part III for due process, to ensure it delivers the promised 'win-win' for nature and the economy.
10. The Bill is in its Committee Stage, and the Bill Committee opens for oral evidence today, Thursday 24 April.

Further links:

- E.J. Milner-Gulland: [Threats to nature in Labour's Planning Bill](#) (Guardian, 15 April)
- Helena Horton: [Planning bill 'throws environmental protection to the wind', say UK nature chiefs](#) (Guardian, 9 April)
- Tom Tew: [Stop scapegoating newts and bats: a nature tax will undermine decades of environmental progress](#) (LBC, 28 March)
- Stuart Spray: [The Government's Housing Bill branded a 'licence to kill' protected species for property developers](#) (Byline Times, 26 March)
- Amy McDonnell: [We must pause Part III of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#) (Zero Hour, 24 March)