

The Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
HM Treasury  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London, SW1A 2HQ

21 August 2025

**Subject: Rumoured weakening of environmental protections**

Dear Chancellor

I am writing on behalf of the professional body for ecologists and environmental managers to express our deep concern about reports that HM Treasury is – in relation to environmental protections – considering scrapping the precautionary principle, reducing the list of protected species, and curbing judicial review powers.

We know that Labour understands the importance of nature. In your manifesto you stated that the “*climate and nature crisis is the greatest long-term global challenge that we face*”, that the “*climate crisis has accelerated the nature crisis*” and pledged to “*promote biodiversity, and protect our landscapes and wildlife*”.

In relation to nature and development, Labour pledged to “*work in partnership with civil society, communities and business to restore and protect our natural world*”, to create “*places that increase climate resilience and promote nature recovery*” and to “*implement solutions to unlock the building of homes affected by nutrient neutrality without weakening environmental protections*”.

This is why we are so appalled by these rumoured proposals, which, if ever brought forward, would represent one of the most serious regressions in environmental protections in a generation – at odds with not only Labour’s own manifesto pledges but also the law and the evidence.

The precautionary principle is not an external import; it is written into the UK’s own Environment Act 2021 and is essential for preventing irreversible environmental harm in the face of uncertainty. Removing it would leave our communities, economy and environment exposed to unacceptable risks. Similarly, attempting to create a “smaller, UK-only” list of protected species would undermine the UK’s international obligations under the Global Biodiversity Framework and jeopardise the Government’s legally binding target to halt species decline by 2030.

As has been pointed out many times, the recent Government narrative that we must choose between building homes and infrastructure and protecting and restoring nature is a false dichotomy. Claims that wildlife protections obstruct growth are not borne out by evidence – for example, Natural England has confirmed that species such as newts and bats feature in only around 3% of planning appeals. Meanwhile, the Green Finance Institute has estimated that flooding, drought, wildfires and crop failures linked to climate and nature breakdown will cost Britain £70 billion this decade. Weakening safeguards would undermine, not strengthen, our economic resilience and achieve nothing positive.

As the *Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity* – commissioned by HM Treasury itself – made clear: our economy is embedded within nature, not external to it.

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Nature is not a barrier to growth but the very foundation of it – it is our life support system. Healthy ecosystems underpin food production, safeguard communities from flooding, regulate our climate, and contribute to public health and wellbeing. Failing to account for this reality leads to unsustainable growth and environmental degradation.

There are proven ways to grow the economy, deliver the homes and infrastructure that people need, and at the same time restore nature. Green and blue infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and biodiversity-rich development create more resilient, desirable places to live and work, reduce public health costs, and support new green jobs. With the right policy drivers and engaging with experts, better place-making can and should be at the heart of the planning system.

We therefore urge HM Treasury to:

- Set an expectation that housing and infrastructure solutions integrate and enhance nature.
- Support policies that promote nature-positive development and Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Ensure government agencies and local authorities are adequately resourced to deliver on environmental commitments and enable private investment in nature recovery.
- Act on the findings of the Dasgupta Review by embedding natural capital accounting into decision-making and policy frameworks.
- Increase investment in nature restoration and recovery.

The UK is already one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. But with the right approach, we can lead globally in demonstrating how economic prosperity, housing and infrastructure delivery, and environmental stewardship can go hand in hand.

We ask that you provide reassurance that environmental protections will not be weakened and instead commit to a programme of investment and reform that recognises nature as an indispensable national asset.

Yours sincerely,



Penny Lewns CEcol CEnv MCIEEM  
President