

18/7/2025

**Helena Dollimore MP**

House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Helena Dollimore MP

I am writing as a deeply concerned Green Councillor for Ore Ward and a Green Party member about the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, specifically Part 3, which will allow developers to bypass environmental protections by paying into a central nature recovery fund.

Recent reporting by The Guardian on 16 July 2025 revealed that the government has pressured leading nature charities, including the RSPB, National Trust, and Wildlife Trusts, into softening their opposition by offering minor amendments in return for silence. This is deeply troubling, not only for the protection of nature, but for what it says about democratic process, transparency, and accountability.

At its core, this Bill will:

- Undermine decades of environmental protections built up by campaigners, scientists, and communities
- Threaten over 5,000 sensitive and irreplaceable nature sites including chalk streams, ancient woodlands and floodplains
- Replace proper ecological scrutiny with a vague pay to pollute model where damage in one place is offset by weak promises somewhere else.

But the issue goes deeper than this. We are repeatedly told that Britain is full and that public land must be sacrificed to meet housing needs. In reality, over 90 percent of land in England is privately owned, much of it unused or locked away. Yet instead of challenging this outdated and unequal model of ownership, the government has chosen to push through a planning system that protects land wealth, fuels speculation, and drives development onto the few public spaces left.

It is in this context that I must express my disappointment in your decision to vote in favour of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill at third reading. Your support for the Bill, and the absence of any public statement explaining your

position on Part 3, is deeply concerning. These are issues that affect the future of Hastings, Rye and the surrounding villages, the future of our natural environment, and the right of local people to have a say in what happens to the places they live in.

I was also deeply disappointed that Labour councillors on Hastings Borough Council chose to vote against the amended motion declaring a Nature Emergency. The original motion, which I proposed and was seconded by Green Councillor Julia Hilton, set out a constructive, science-based plan to address biodiversity loss, support sustainable development, and contribute to national targets such as managing thirty percent of land for nature by 2030. The friendly amendment, brought forward by Green Councillor Amanda Jobson, strengthened the motion further by drawing attention to the serious local implications of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. It highlighted the risk of developers bypassing site based environmental responsibilities, the erosion of democratic planning rights, and the false choice being presented between housing and habitat. These are urgent concerns that deserve political honesty and bold leadership.

Yet not one Labour councillor spoke either in support or against the motion. No questions were asked. No explanation was offered. Their silence, followed by a vote against the motion, sends the wrong message to the people of Hastings, Rye and the surrounding villages. It suggests that the ecological emergency remains politically uncomfortable rather than morally urgent.

Their decision to withhold support becomes even more troubling in light of recent national reporting. It has now emerged that the Labour government attempted to pressure environmental charities into silence by offering minor amendments to the Bill in exchange for them softening their public opposition. This raises an unavoidable question. Were local Labour councillors discouraged from speaking out against the provisions of the Bill, even when those provisions directly threaten the natural environment, democratic planning, and public confidence in our local institutions? If so, was that discouragement from yourself as the MP for Hastings and Rye, or from the central party? Because if local representatives feel unable to challenge legislation that undermines the future of their communities, then democracy itself is being compromised.

At a time when we are already well past the tipping point for climate and ecological collapse, only brave and principled action will make a meaningful difference. This was not that.

As our MP, you have a responsibility to make your position on these matters clear. Communities in Hastings and Rye deserve to know whether you support a planning system that works with nature and the public interest, or one that benefits developers at the expense of local accountability and environmental protection.

I therefore urge you to:

- Publicly oppose Part 3 of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill
- Defend the right of nature charities and civil society organisations to speak out freely
- Support strong legal protections for nationally important habitats including chalk streams and Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- Champion a nature positive planning system that supports fair access to land, strong local decision making and long-term ecological recovery.

If the government is serious about reversing biodiversity loss and rebuilding public trust, it must act with honesty, courage, and accountability. I hope you will now take the opportunity to explain your decision, stand up for nature, and support a more just and sustainable approach to planning for the sake of Hastings, Rye and the surrounding villages.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Jo Walker

**Green Councillor for Ore Ward**

Green Party Member