



Tory MPs who pushed back on renters' rights receive £450k linked to landlords

EXCLUSIVE 18 Tory MPs who lobbied for changes to Renters Reform Bill have received a collective £446,861 linked to landlords



Landlords have donated thousands to Tory MPs

By Alexa Phillips

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MPs who pushed **Michael Gove** to water down **laws to protect renters' rights** have received £450,000 in donations and earnings linked to **landlords** since the last general election, **i** can reveal.

In total, 18 rebel Tory MPs who **lobbied for changes to the Renters Reform Bill** through proposed amendments have received a collective £446,861 in donations, earnings and hospitality linked to landlords. A further 18 are landlords themselves.

Some donations came directly from property company directors and landlords, while others had tangential links and were given by private equity firms with real estate portfolios.

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There is no suggestion that the MPs have acted immorally or outside of parliamentary rules, but campaign groups say the donations highlight the need for transparency over potential conflicts of interest within the **housing sector**.



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balance between delivering security for tenants and fairness for landlords" and have the backing of landlord groups.

While Labour MPs supported the bill and called for even greater protections for renters, it was backbench Tory MPs who threatened to vote against it in its original form and forced the Government to make concessions.

Among the proposed amendments outlined in Mr Young's letter was a plan to introduce a six-month minimum period on new tenancies, which campaigners argue could lock renters in to potentially unsafe or unsuitable contracts. The bill will return to the Commons after the Easter recess.

Other changes include delaying a ban on no-fault evictions for existing tenancies until an assessment by the justice secretary on the readiness of the court system to deal with repossession claims is published.

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Section 21 no-fault evictions have been raised as a leading cause of homelessness. Campaign groups representing renters accused ministers of watering down the legislation to appease landlords.

MPs who had called for amendments have denied any connection between their position on the bill and contributions from landlords, and said the funds donated complied with parliamentary rules.

They argued that the bill in its previous form would have pushed landlords to exit the market and exacerbated a shortage of rental homes. The amendments being supported by the rebels are all published on the UK Parliament website.

Responding to i's findings, renters' groups and campaigners said it was "striking" to see how closely "opponents" of the bill were linked to landlords and claimed it "presents a major conflict of interests".

Before the changes were leaked, Labour's deputy leader, Angela Rayner, had urged Rishi Sunak to give "cast-iron" public assurances that he would not "give in to vested interests on his back benches" when it comes to the bill.

Matthew Pennycook, the shadow housing minister, said Mr Sunak and Mr Gove "have chosen once again to put the interests of party management ahead of what is right for the British people".

"After years of delay, private renters have every right to be furious at the watering down of the vital protections they were promised," he said.

He said Labour will try to strengthen the bill.



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estate portfolio, which involves 16 hours of work a year. Another £19,200 in donations and British Grand Prix tickets came from a company whose director is also a landlord.

North East Hampshire MP Ranil Jayawardena received a £25,000 donation from the co-chief executive officer of a student accommodation landlord, while Cleethorpes MP Martin Vickers got £3,500 from the Humber Landlords Association and another £1,800 from a landlord.

Andrew Lewer and Selaine Saxby are chair and vice chair, respectively, of an all-party parliamentary group on the private rented sector, which is funded by lobbyists on behalf of the National Residential Landlords Association for £10,500 a year.

In his letter to Conservative MPs, levelling up minister Mr Young said he wanted to “pay particular tribute to Andrew Lewer, the chair of the APPG for the private rented sector” for his “engagement on these issues”.

APPGs are informal interest groups of MPs and peers that facilitate cross-party work on an issue, country or sector. The role of **lobbying** agencies is usually to pay for a secretariat to administer the APPG, which includes handling events and the publication of reports.

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The groups have come under scrutiny since MI5 discovered that an agent for the Chinese government had used donations to an APPG as part of “political interference activities”.

Selaine Saxby said: “Whilst the Stalbury Trustees donated £5,000 to my local Conservative Association ahead of the 2019 general election, at no point have I communicated with them. They donated without contacting me, and have not been in touch since. This donation was properly registered and recorded.”

Andrew Lewer said: “The fact that the National Residential Landlords Association provides the secretariat for the APPG for the private rented sector is a matter of public record. All of the accounts for the APPG are published in accordance with parliamentary rules.

“The APPG has open and frank discussions about the sector and a wide range of opinions about the potential contents of the Renters Reform Bill have been heard at our meetings. Our vice chairs and attending members include members of the Labour Party.” He said the APPG heard from Generation Rent at its most recent meeting.

Some MPs received donations from wealthy Conservative party backers who are directors of landlord companies and build-to-rent investors – such as Andy Bell, founder of investment platform AJ Bell, Lubov Chernukhin, wife of Vladimir Putin's former deputy finance minister, and Lord Brownlow. Baron Moynihan of Chelsea, also a director of a real estate management firm, gave £5,000 to former Tory leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith.



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Sir David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden MP) – £160,250

– £141,250 in earnings from THI Holdings GmbH, private equity firm with a real estate portfolio

– £19,000 donations, gifts and hospitality from Allam House, which is owned by Ehab Allam, who owns and rents out properties in Hull

Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon MP) – £128,775

– earnings as a director of Rentplus-UK, a company that offers rent-to-buy homes for renters

Selaine Saxby (North Devon MP) – £47,004*

– vice chair of the Private Rented Sector APPG which has received £42,004 from National Residential Landlords Association over last four years

– £5,000 donation from Stalbury Trustees – its director Lord Cecil is also a director of landlord Gascoyne Estates

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South MP) – £45,004*

– £3,000 donation from IM Group, owner of IM Properties, which delivers private rental homes

– chair of the Private Rented Sector APPG which has received £42,004 from National Residential Landlords Association over last four years

Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire MP) – £25,000

– donation from Hazem Ben-Gacem, co-CEO of student accommodation landlord InvestCorp

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West MP) – £20,000

– donation from Savvas Savouri, chief economist at Toscafund Asset Management, investment firm that has backed Strike estate agency and parent company of The Guild of Property Professionals, estate agent trade body

Damien Moore (Southport MP) – £10,000

– £5,000 donation from Lord Brownlow, director at landlords Rarer Properties and Rarity Property, and Havisham Properties, which lets out residential rental properties

– £5,000 donation from Andrew Bell, director of landlords EQ Property Services, Asper Property (Earlswood) and Moor Hall

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North MP) – £10,000

– donation from 5654 & Company, lobbyist whose clients include Apollo Management LLP, a subsidiary of the Apollo Asset Management group, a private equity firm invested in the build-to-rent sector

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley MP) – £7,000

– £4,000 donations from IM Group, owner of IM properties, which delivers private rental homes

– £3,000 donations from landlord Harris Ventures

John Stevenson (Carlisle MP) – £6,000

– £2,000 donations from landlord Harris Ventures

– £4,000 donations from Persimmon Homes, which builds shared ownership homes which are partly rented by residents, with partner So RESI

Simon Jupp (East Devon MP) – £5,500

– donation from Nigel Lindsay-Fynn, director of the landlords Crescent Trust Company and CWM and Abertillery Investments

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes MP) – £5,328.65

– £3,528.65 donation from Humber Landlords Association

– £1,800 donation from landlord Estates UK



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Siobhan Baillie (Stroud MP) – £4,000

– donation from Dukehill Services, owned by the Richardson family, which invests in rental schemes

Greg Smith (Buckingham MP) – £3,503

– in gifts, hospitality and benefits from Goodwood Estate Company, which rents out residential properties

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green MP) – £2,500

– donations from Jon Moynihan, director at real estate management company Vos Amis

Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall MP) – £2,000

– donation from Lubov Chernukhin, director of Capital Construction & Development, which is investing in the build-to-rent market

Mark Menzies (Fylde MP) – £2,000

– donation from Danbro Holdings, whose clients include EweMove letting agents

*did not directly receive funds from the NRLA but is indirectly linked

Sources: Contributions registered since 13 December, 2019, data sourced from Register of Members' Financial Interests, Electoral Commission, Parallel Parliament, TheyWorkForYou

MP Sally-Ann Hart, who received a £5,000 donation from Sarah Kowitz, whose husband David Kowitz is director at landlords Martello Investments, said Ms Kowitz is a personal friend and her donation “had nothing to do with Martello Investments”.

“I have not been lobbied by any letting agents or property companies but have taken on board the comments of a few local constituents who rent out one or two properties for income and investment purposes, which I guess makes them landlords,” she said. “Sarah or Martello Investments have never discussed the Renters Reform Bill with me at all.”

“What we do discuss is (their amazing philanthropic support of) Hastings International Piano Concerto, their plans to boost culture in deprived communities as well as Government policies on culture.”

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Buckingham MP Greg Smith, who received £3,500 in gifts, hospitality and benefits from Goodwood Estate Company, said: “I have never had any conversations, correspondence or any communication whatsoever from anyone at Goodwood about this bill or indeed anything to do with property letting.”

A spokeswoman for John Stevenson said she was unaware that Harris Ventures was a landlord. She said two £2,000 donations from Persimmon Homes were “a sponsorship figure for the Carlisle Skills Fair, an annual jobs and skills fair in Carlisle which John has organised and hosted for the last ten years”. She added: “As for any representations or amendments to the Renters Reform Bill or any bill for that matter, John will speak or make a recommendation purely on his understanding and opinion alone.”

i understands the donation to Jonathan Gullis by 5654 & Company was used to pay for equipment for the Inside Whitehall Podcast, which was declared and approved by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments.



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need to represent their constituents and not merely those who give them financial support.

She said: "That several MPs seeking to delay and dilute a bill aimed at improving renters' rights have received substantial donations from the property industry presents a major conflict of interests."

Tom Darling, campaign manager of the Renters' Reform Coalition, which represents renters' groups, said it was "striking to now see the extent to which the Renters' Reform Bill opponents have been receiving donations, earnings and hospitality from landed interests".

A spokesman for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said: "Our landmark Renters (Reform) Bill is progressing through Parliament. It will deliver a fairer private rented sector for both responsible tenants and good-faith landlords.

"The bill will abolish section 21 evictions – giving people more security in their homes and empowering them to challenge poor practices."

Rebel MPs who are landlords

Nick Fletcher, MP for Don Valley – 10 properties

Marco Longhi, MP for Dudley North – 10 properties

Bob Blackman, MP for Harrow East – 6 properties

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, MP for The Cotswolds – 5 properties

Philip Dunne, MP for Ludlow – 4 properties

Sir James Gray, MP for North Wiltshire – 4 properties

Royston Smith, MP for Southampton, Itchen – 3 properties

Craig Mackinlay, MP for South Thanet – 3 properties

Sir Desmond Swayne, MP for New Forest West – 2 properties

Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP for North East Somerset – 2 properties

Anne Marie Morris, MP for Newton Abbot – 1 property

Sir Bill Wiggin, MP for North Herefordshire – 1 property

Steve Double, MP for St Austell and Newquay – 1 property

Theresa Villiers, MP for Chipping Barnet – 1 property

Vicky Ford, MP for Chelmsford – 1 property

Philip Davies, MP for Shipley – 1 property

Karl McCartney, MP for Lincoln – 1 property

Nigel Mills, MP for Amber Valley – 1 property

Source: Register of Members' Financial Interests

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