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# Labour would fast-track countryside wind turbines and solar panels under net zero drive

Starmer is pushing hard to win over rural voters but Tories have accused him of planning to 'concrete over the countryside'

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Labour has pledged to fast-track the building of wind and solar farms in the countryside, raising concerns rural communities will struggle to block net zero projects.

Under the party's plans, the wait farmers face to have green energy schemes approved and connected to the grid by new pylons will be "slashed from years to months".

Writing in The Telegraph, Daniel Zeichner, the shadow farming minister, said that the proposals showed that "Labour is the party that will deliver for rural Britain".

He added that the reforms would "put money into the pockets of thousands of farmers and landowners" by allowing them to profit from the generation of clean power.

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Labour is pushing hard to win over rural voters ahead of the election after admitting it has become "too detached" from the countryside over the past two decades.

But its plans sparked a backlash from Tory MPs and risk alienating some communities who oppose the building of wind turbines and solar panels on their doorstep.

Mr Zeichner, the MP for Cambridge, said the proposals would "protect the land, support farmers and bring down bills" whilst ensuring the agricultural sector achieves net zero.

"We must also support farmers as they diversify their income streams and make use of land that is not suitable for food production – by enabling them to build renewable energy and plug into the National Grid faster," he wrote.

"Under the Conservatives, farmers and landowners have been left waiting years to plug their renewable energy into the grid. No more.

Mr Zeichner accused Rishi Sunak of "flip-flops and backtracks on net zero" which would leave British farmers more exposed to severe weather in future.

He added: “With Labour, Britain’s rural communities will get their future back.”

But the remarks will add to fears that Labour could water down the powers of rural communities to block new solar panels, wind farms and pylons.

Sir Keir Starmer has pledged to “bulldoze through” opposition to development and rewrite planning law to end local vetoes over green energy projects.

The Labour leader said last June that “there has to come a point where, if we’re going to move forward, we don’t have simple individual vetoes across the whole of the country”.

He also told his party conference in October that he would “fight the blockers” to build more wind and solar farms and “lay the cables our future prosperity needs”.

Polling by Public First published last October showed one in three Britons would oppose new power lines being built within three miles of their home.

But the consultancy firm said Labour would be “less vulnerable” to local protests because most green energy projects were set to be built in Tory constituencies.

Planning reform will be one of the major dividing lines at the next election, with the Conservatives accusing Sir Keir of planning to “concrete over the countryside”.

Labour plans to set councils binding targets for how quickly they approve green energy projects. It also wants officials to proactively identify sites for them.

It has unveiled proposals to cut electricity bills for people living in communities near new wind farms, solar panels and lines of pylons.

Steve Reed, the shadow environment secretary, admitted last autumn that Labour has been “too detached” from rural voters and promised a more “respectful attitude”.

But the plans sparked a backlash from Tories who warned that despite Mr Ziechner’s assurances they risked “undermining our food security” and blighting the countryside.

Dr Caroline Johnson, Tory MP for Sleaford and North Hykeham, said: “What that means is we then have to import food, which is more expensive and worse for the environment.

“There are also visual implications for people who live in the countryside. Having solar panels in a few fields here and there is one thing, but a large solar farm is very unattractive and is essentially industrialising the landscape.

“We should be putting solar panels on top of homes, factories and warehouses instead.”

A Tory source added: “Unlike this Government’s action to incentivise farmers to put solar equipment on farm buildings, this shows Labour want to take prime agricultural land out of food production, undermining our food security.

“This empty pledge is a smoke screen to try to hide the fact that Keir Starmer and Steve Reed have no plan for our farmers or our countryside. Labour would take our vital rural economy back to square one.”

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## **Fine words butter no parsnips**

*By Daniel Zeichner Labour’s shadow farming minister*

The world has just experienced the hottest 12 months on record, while Brits have felt the steepest food price inflation in 45 years. These two events are not isolated.

Research shows that unusual weather patterns created by climate change are responsible for a third of our food price inflation. This is fuelling the cost of living crisis, adding a staggering £361 to British household bills since the start of 2022.

Last year’s summer harvests were threatened by drought, and this winter’s heavy rain and flooding has destroyed crops. This perfect storm has left shortages in our supermarket shelves and driven up prices.

These runaway receipts are hitting the poorest hardest. Struggling families have had to fork out for the equivalent of an extra 10 weekly shops’ worth of food over the past two years.



Daniel Zeichner claims Labour will protect families from unaffordable food prices by backing British farmers | CREDIT: James Manning/PA archive

Meanwhile, this Tory Government flip-flops and backtracks on net zero, failing to recognise the cost of inaction. Labour will protect families from unaffordable food by backing British agriculture, supporting farmers to reduce emissions and make their land more resilient to the shocks of extreme weather.

Seven years since Britain voted to leave the EU, despite promises to overhaul agricultural payments, farmers are still in the dark. Michael Gove set out a vision in 2018 for sustainable agriculture but – to borrow an old farming phrase – fine words butter no parsnips.

Since then, Tory chaos has left farmers guessing how they'll be supported to regenerate the land and reduce emissions. Labour will keep environmental land management schemes – payments for sustainable farming – but will fix the turmoil in their rollout. We will cut through the Tory bureaucracy that has blocked farmers from receiving funding for work that includes protecting nature and wildlife habitats on their land.

We must also decarbonise the farming sector. That is why Labour will switch on Great British Energy, a new publicly owned company that will bring together public and private investment to harness clean home-grown British power: wind, wave, solar and nuclear.

That means cheaper bills for our farmers.

We must also support farmers as they diversify their income streams and make use of land that is not suitable for food production – by enabling them to build renewable energy and plug into the National Grid faster.

Under the Conservatives, farmers and landowners have been left waiting years to plug their renewable energy into the grid. No more. Labour will slash the wait for planning decisions from years to months, putting money into the pockets of thousands of farmers and landowners.

The Tories are U-turning on net zero while the climate crisis knocks at our doors. They are rowing back on climate commitments while our farmers’ fields are waterlogged and inaccessible. And they are stalling on protecting nature and farmland while family food bills go through the roof.

Labour is the party that will deliver for rural Britain. Our plan will protect the land, support farmers and bring down bills. With Labour, Britain’s rural communities will get their future back.

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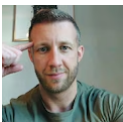
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