# Victoria Atkins warns Labour’s inheritance tax and green policies threaten Britain’s rural communities



Victoria Atkins, the Shadow Environment Secretary and former barrister, is voicing significant concerns over recent government policies that she believes threaten the fabric of rural communities in Britain. With a background in prosecuting serious crime, Atkins has transitioned into a political role where she is now focusing on issues impacting agriculture and family farms.

In the wake of a recent change in inheritance tax laws introduced by the Labour government, which assigns a 20% tax on inherited agricultural assets valued over £1 million, Atkins claims that many are feeling a deep sense of betrayal. Speaking to the *Express*, she described the dread permeating farming families, stating, “It is widespread and it is genuine.” The looming implementation of this policy in April next year has led to troubling discussions among families about the potential financial burden posed by the tax. She recounted an encounter with a distressed farmer who expressed despair about the future, saying, “If there was a rope in the corner of this room I would use it.”

Atkins, who previously held significant roles within the Conservative government—such as overseeing Afghan resettlement, prisons, and health—now contends that the new Labour administration represents a harmful shift away from the more moderate policies of past Labour leaders like Tony Blair. “But we learned within a matter of weeks that this is full-throated Old Labour,” she asserted.

Her concerns extend beyond inheritance tax. Atkins critiques the current Labour leadership for being predominantly composed of "city MPs" who she argues lack an understanding of rural realities. This disconnect, she asserts, is evident in Labour's cancellation of the Sustainable Farming Incentive, which previously incentivised farmers to engage in environmentally friendly practices, a move she believes further alienates agricultural communities.

Additionally, Atkins expresses apprehension regarding the push for net-zero policies articulated by Energy Secretary Ed Miliband. She fears that the installation of solar panels and wind turbines on prime agricultural land could jeopardise Britain’s food security. “Once a field has been plastered in solar panels, there is very little that can be grown on it afterwards,” she warned.

In her role, she is also addressing environmental issues, particularly concerning sewage pollution in British rivers and coastal waters. Atkins has remarked on the infrastructure challenges facing sewage systems, noting, “It pretty much comes down to the way in which our sewage system has been constructed over the last century.” She highlights the importance of properly communicating the complexities involved in addressing these ecological concerns.

Atkins holds a vision of the Conservatives as custodians of the environment, emphasising their commitment to conservation and the protection of the countryside for future generations. She stated, “We are the Conservatives because we believe in conserving that of which we are proud.”

The ongoing discourse around these subjects underscores growing concerns regarding the government's approach to rural welfare and environmental protection, an issue set to remain a focal point as policies evolve under Labour's leadership.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/db76df80-de96-4799-ab67-43983733badb> - This article discusses major supermarkets, including Tesco and Lidl, supporting UK farmers in opposing new inheritance tax reforms proposed by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, which would impose a 20% levy on agricultural land exceeding certain thresholds, starting from April 2026. Farmers, particularly smaller ones reliant on agricultural and business property reliefs, have expressed significant concern, leading to protests in London and at supermarket locations. Tesco's chief commercial officer, Ashwin Prasad, emphasized the importance of pausing the policy for further consultation, citing risks to the UK's food security. Lidl also voiced concerns about the potential impact on farmer confidence and investment in sustainable agriculture. The Co-op Dairy Group has similarly contacted government departments to reconsider the changes. The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates the policy could generate an additional £500 million annually from 2027 to 2029 but notes that the receipts may decline as farmers adjust their tax planning. Critics argue the changes could devastate family farming, especially given existing challenges like climate change, subsidy cuts, and high inflation.
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/4e3e0383-d5cf-412b-892a-b32daffae4ac> - The UK Treasury has rejected a compromise from farming groups to mitigate new inheritance tax reforms on the agricultural sector. Farming leaders proposed a clawback mechanism to protect family farms, which was dismissed by Treasury Minister James Murray and Farming Minister Daniel Zeichner. Chancellor Rachel Reeves ended the historical exemption from death duties for farmers in her latest budget, sparking anger among farming groups who argue the reforms threaten food security. The government asserts that the revised Agricultural and Business Property Relief will relieve three-quarters of estates from inheritance tax and halve the tax for the remaining ones. Opposition parties and some government backbenchers have criticized the reforms, with suggestions to raise the farm value threshold or adopt an active farmer test to ensure fairness. The decision has led to significant political backlash and protests from the farming community.
3. <https://www.victoriaatkins.org.uk/news/victorias-speech-rural-affairs-debate> - In this speech, Victoria Atkins, the Shadow Environment Secretary, addresses the impact of the Labour government's budget on rural communities, particularly focusing on the removal of tax reliefs that have historically allowed families to pass on their farms to the next generation. She criticizes the government's approach, stating that it will lead to family farms being sold off and split up due to families being unable to afford massive tax bills. Atkins emphasizes the importance of these tax policies in preventing family farms and businesses from being divided and sold off, highlighting the distress and anxiety among farmers regarding the changes.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/rachel-reeves-victoria-atkins-atkins-labour-budget-b1192230.html> - Victoria Atkins criticizes the Labour government's decision to remove some inheritance tax relief for farms, describing it as a 'crass decision' that betrays the government's lack of understanding about the countryside. She argues that this move will force family farms and businesses to be sold off and split up, as families cannot afford the massive tax bills. Atkins suggests that the policy will make the UK more reliant on imports, as farmers will be forced to set aside money for potential tax liabilities rather than investing in their farms, impacting food production and increasing prices.
5. <https://www.victoriaatkins.org.uk/news/victoria-atkins-mp-article-daily-telegraph-farming-protest> - In this article, Victoria Atkins discusses the protests by thousands of farmers, farm staff, and supporters in Westminster against the Labour government's budget, which she describes as a 'Budget of Broken Promises.' She highlights the removal of tax reliefs on inheritance tax that have kept family farms and businesses together over generations, stating that these changes will destroy family farms and businesses, alter the rural landscape, increase food prices, and damage food security. Atkins emphasizes that these reliefs are not 'loopholes' but carefully designed safeguards to protect family farms for future generations.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/a753d6c4-939e-4995-950c-07eb7a80f88f> - Alistair Carmichael, chair of Parliament's environment committee, calls for a strategic rural policy in the UK to address growing dissatisfaction among farming and fishing communities. Farmers demonstrated in London against Labour's inheritance tax reforms, which will impose a 20 percent tax on agricultural land exceeding certain thresholds. These reforms are expected to raise £500 million annually for the Treasury by 2027-29 but have sparked considerable anger among farmers who fear being forced to sell land. Additional challenges for the farming sector include climate change costs, reduced subsidies, and high inflation. Carmichael criticized the fragmented approach of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and suggested adopting policies to ensure domestic food production and reconsidering exemptions for inheritance tax. The government reaffirmed its commitment to rural communities, outlining a £5 billion investment in farming over the next two years.
7. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2050285/gangster-prosecutor-now-defending-farming> - Please view link - unable to able to access data