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Campaign for an **E**nglish **P**arliament

Think of England Number 90: April 2019



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Number 90: April 2019

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RECOMMENDED READING: England: The Making of the Myth from Stonehenge to Albert Square by Maureen Duffy ;
Publisher: Fourth Estate (1771)
ASIN: B01K912ZXY



Campaign for an English Parliament Aims, Principles and Policies.

We campaign for an English Parliament, meaning a parliament for the people of England, for whom England is their chosen or inherited home and who are legally entitled to vote.

We campaign for an English Parliament with powers at least as great as those of Scotland's, i.e. a Parliament and Executive (Government) that can make Acts (primary legislation) on the same domestic issues (e.g. health, welfare & education) that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

The CEP works with academics, business groups, trades unions, think tanks and the media to create the conditions whereby UK MPs see that there is no alternative to the re-establishment of the English Parliament.

The CEP is a pressure group. It is not a political party. It does not contest elections.

The CEP is not and will not be affiliated to or formally linked with any political party

Editorial: We copy in this edition a letter from one of our members to her MP. We encourage all members to do the same and let us know their answers.



The everincreasing costs to the taxpayer of the HS2 juggernaut is unlikely to be opposed by Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish MPs as it results in increased funding for their constituents via the Barnett formula. So their taxpayers are re-imbursed and are free to use the facility.

So Theresa May in her increasingly panicked effort to get Brexit to the starting gate has offered 'needs based' funds to deprived areas in England. If that is so easy why are not Barnett funds distributed according to need?

The UK government is only responsible for funding education and health in England. Schools in England are struggling as funding per head for pupils decreases. Similarly in the English health service local funding for life preserving operations is being rationed irrationally. There are charities campaigning for funds for cataract operations in developing countries should our people apply to them too?

Local income tax in England would further accentuate differences in prosperity and be very divisive.

Needless to say the Westminster Brits are full of concern for the effect of Brexit on Scotland and Wales. None of them is concerned about England. Meanwhile an inflated House of Lords stuffed with apparatchiks from across the UK will continue to review and revise England's, and only England's legislation.

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Campaigning for England:

www.irishtimes.com/opinion/why-fintan-o-toole-has-got-brex-it-all-wrong. John Lloyd in response to Fintan O'Toole. "England – Britain – voted Brexit not because its citizens regretted the loss of empire, thought it could be re-assembled, believed that the commonwealth could take its place or saw the EU as a sadomasochistic monster. They wished to be governed by a parliament and an administration that they understand, and on which they have a direct influence through their vote."



From a member to [oliver.dowden.mp <oliver.dowden.mp@parliament.uk>](mailto:oliver.dowden.mp@parliament.uk)

Sent: 28 Mar 2019 : Subject: Who speaks for England .

Dear Oliver,

Once again watching the debates, if they can be called that, the thing that comes over has nothing to do with the EU, more to do with Momentum only interested in voting against whatever the Tories put forward calling for an election, then we have the Irish Scots and Welsh bemoaning they are not being treated right. They are on all the political programmes saying how hard done by they are.

So, tell me sir WHO SPEAKS FOR ENGLAND? You have, as a party, allowed the warmonger b.liar to divide the country leaving England to be divided into regions. I repeat, Who Speaks For ENGLAND (the cash cow)?

Current English Affairs:

HS2 splashes thousands on gyms and party booths

March 2 2019, The Times: Lucy Skoulding

The rail project's total spending reached £5.5 billion before full construction of the line had even begun, it was revealed

HS2 Ltd has been accused of wasting "eye-watering" sums of taxpayers' money as it emerged that the government-owned company spent almost £54,000 on gym memberships and £6,360 hiring party photo booths. The spending by the company building the high-speed rail line was revealed in official financial returns. Analysis showed that £640,000 was spent on aerial promotional films and £96,712 went on an HS2 "pop-up shop" at Euston station.

The Times previously revealed that HS2's total spending reached £5.5 billion even before full construction of the line has started. The equivalent of one-tenth of the project's entire £55.7 billion budget has been spent in the last nine years as part of preparations for Europe's biggest infrastructure project.

The latest figures prompted fresh accusations that spending on the scheme was out of control.

HS2 will eventually link London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, with the Y-shaped network due to open fully by 2033. The first phase of the line between London and Birmingham is expected to be completed in 2026, with extensive work already under way.

Penny Gaines, chairwoman of the Stop HS2 group, said: "These figures show the eye-watering scale of expenditure. This spending is funded entirely from the taxpayer. If it hadn't gone on HS2 it could have been used for other priorities, such as schools or the NHS."

Brexit: Theresa May accused of bribery with £1bn to help towns: PM trying to buy Labour support for Brexit deal, say critics

March 4 2019, The Times: Sam Coates, Deputy Political Editor

Theresa May was accused last night of trying to bribe Labour MPs to back her Brexit deal in the Commons after she announced a £1.6 billion fund for struggling communities.

The prime minister declared that "prosperity has been unfairly spread" as she revealed details of the Stronger Towns Fund, which she claimed would create jobs, help to train local people and increase economic activity.

Her comments triggered a backlash from across the political spectrum, and there was anger at the suggestion that the cash would be spread over up to seven years. Some Conservatives were angry that the money would go mainly to Labour-held areas, and the opposition front bench accused Mrs May of attempted bribery to win backing for her Brexit agreement.

A total of £1 billion will be allocated to **English regions**, excluding London, on a "needs-based formula". The largest sum, £281 million, will go to the northwest, where 54 Labour MPs were elected in 2017 and



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20 Conservatives won seats. The smallest sum, £25 million, will go to the east of England, where the Tories won 50 seats at the last general election compared with Labour's seven. The money will be distributed by Local Enterprise Partnerships, which some Tory MPs have campaigned to abolish.

There was confusion over the scale of the investment, however. *The Times* understands that the £1.6 billion will be spread over four years starting from next year, which could amount to only £400 million a year. However, James Brokenshire, the communities secretary, told BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme this morning that it would cover the period until 2026.

Labour MP Lisa Nandy told *The Times*: "This is a long overdue and welcome recognition that our towns have been inexcusably ignored for decades and people won't put up with it any longer. It must mark a fundamental change in approach with long-term investment, greater powers and more respect for the millions of people who live outside cities."

The Labour front bench dismissed the £1.6 billion fund as a bribe. John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, said: "The reason our towns are struggling is because of a decade of cuts, including to council funding, and a failure to invest in businesses and our communities."

Backbenchers were similarly dismissive. Gareth Snell, MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central, said that the announcement was a "huge disappointment", tweeting: "The entire allocation for the West Midlands over four years is LESS than the total value of cuts faced by Stoke-on-Trent City Council alone over the same period." Chris Bryant, Labour MP for Rhondda, tweeted: "And not a penny for Wales. The trouble with bribes is they embody injustice."

Mrs May also faces Brexiteer anger at the move. Sheryll Murray, a Tory MP from the southwest, which would receive the second-lowest allocation at £33 million, said: "The fact this money appears to be directly routed to Labour-voting areas smacks of pork-barrel politics."

Ministers deny that the funding has been routed to areas with Labour MPs. They say that the formula is based on productivity, income, skills, deprivation and the proportion living in towns.

'Bribe' towns stay secret after funding row

March 5 2019, *The Times*: Sam Coates, Deputy Political Editor

Ministers abandoned plans to spell out which towns would benefit from a new £1.6 billion fund for deprived areas after a backlash over the Brexit "bribe". Labour MPs who had pushed for the fund expressed disappointment after it emerged that the money would be spread over seven years.

Several of the group, including Lisa Nandy, MP for Wigan, and Caroline Flint, who represents Don Valley, had been negotiating directly with Theresa May. Some signalled that they were increasingly unlikely to back her Brexit deal next week after declaring the fund a "missed opportunity".

A total of £1 billion from the pot has been allocated to the regions under a needs-based formula. However, a plan to release town-by-town figures, which was hinted at on Sunday, appeared to have been abandoned yesterday.

Parents asked to pay for teachers' salaries and school repairs

March 5 2019, *The Times*: Nicola Woolcock, Education Correspondent | Louis Goddard | Sam Joiner | Chris Hutchinson | Lucy Skoulding | Elsa Maishman

State schools are asking parents to donate hundreds of pounds a year to pay for salaries, buy textbooks and equipment and repair leaking buildings, a *Times* investigation has revealed. Grammars, comprehensives and primaries are increasingly relying on families to pay for essentials and in one case have asked for up to £1,200 per child each year.

School funding was debated in parliament yesterday after a petition on budget cuts, started by head teachers, garnered more than 100,000 signatures. Growing numbers of schools are adopting a four and a half day week to save money, with one saying it would charge parents for their children to stay in school on Friday afternoons.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies said last year that, between 2009-10 and 2017-18, school spending per pupil in England fell by about 8 per cent. Head teachers say they are left short but the government insists it is putting more money than ever into schools. Although the total amount of funding may be going up, this differs from per-pupil funding and does not take inflation into account.

About 700 schools responded to Freedom of Information Act requests, of which more than 200 said they had asked for parental donations in the past year. About half asked for specific amounts. Some requested payments only for school trips but many said they were using donations and funds raised by parent



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teacher associations on classroom basics.

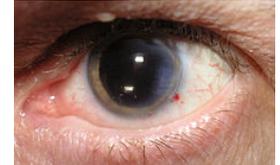
In the Commons debate Liz Twist, a Labour MP, quoted a head teacher from her Blaydon constituency who said: "I feel every cut I have to make. Well concealed, painfully made, shamefully felt." She also read correspondence from a parent whose child refused to visit her school's "dilapidated" toilets. "There's no spare money to replace them, nor has there been for many years," the parent wrote. "My daughter regularly runs straight to the loo after school, after holding it in all day."

Tim Loughton, a former Tory education minister, described school funding as a "national emergency". Schools relying on parents to pay for capital projects said they had funded new roofs, heating systems, a stairlift for a disabled child and replaced obsolete computer servers. Others felt forced to choose between sacking teachers and repairing classrooms. One school introduced a "staff over stuff" policy, another had a "frugality campaign".

More than half of NHS authorities rationing cataract operations

The Daily Telegraph 20 March 2019: Laura Donnelly, health editor

Patients are being left in pain and misery amid widespread rationing of cataract operations and hip and knee surgery, research suggests. The study shows that more than half of NHS authorities are restricting access to cataract surgery, with many refusing operations until patients are almost blind.



The research, which covers all 195 clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in **England**, found that 53 per cent of them had classified the eye operations as of "limited clinical value," limiting NHS funding for them. And more than one third are only authorising surgery if patients were found to fare badly enough in "visual acuity tests".

Charities said the findings were "shocking," warning that vulnerable pensioners were being left at increasing risk of suffering harm such as falls. NHS watchdogs say such restrictions - which mean patients can be left to go nearly blind - should not be used.

The research by the Medical Technology Group, a not-for-profit coalition of patient groups, charities and medical device manufacturers, also found that 45 per cent of CCGs are limiting access to hernia operations, instead forcing increasing numbers of patients to "watch and wait".

Experts said the approach could mean an increase in emergency cases and worse patient outcomes. And the study found that four in 10 CCGs are rationing hip and knee operations, despite clear evidence of their effectiveness.

Guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence says the NHS should not restrict the surgery. Professor Derek Alderson, President of the Royal College of Surgeons, said: "It is wrong for commissioning groups to label operations for hip and knee replacements, and hernia surgery, as of limited value - thereby delaying or denying surgery to patients in pain. "Hip and knee surgery, for example, remains one of the most effective and life-enhancing treatments available in modern medicine. With the NHS about to receive a significant cash boost in April, we need an unambiguous message from Government that restricting such treatment is wrong."

NHS Clinical Commissioners said: "CCGs are led by GPs whose first priority is always to the patient. Wherever possible they want to give them what they need. Unfortunately the NHS does not have unlimited resources and ensuring patients get the best possible care against a backdrop of spiralling demands, competing priorities and increasing financial pressures is one of the biggest issues CCGs face. "

Council taxes to rise by 5% but service cuts 'still needed'

March 28 2019, The Times: David Byers, Assistant Personal Finance Editor

The average council tax bill in **England** is to rise by almost 5 per cent, the second-largest increase in ten years. Figures released yesterday by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government showed the levy on a typical Band D property going up by £78 to £1,750 from next week - a rise of 4.7 per cent. This is largely explained by councils struggling to cover social care because of austerity cuts, an ageing population and insufficient mental health provision.



The 2019-20 rise, more than twice the rate of inflation, is just short of the record 5.1 per cent increase for the past decade that took place last year, and can mostly be accounted for by rising social care costs.

Local income tax would pay for social care

Times 21/3/19: Philip Aldrick Economics Editor

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Councils should be able to levy a "local income tax" on residents to meet rising social care costs and drive further devolution, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has said. The think tank warned that council funding in **England** was becoming "unsustainable" after years of cuts and rising demand for services, and the Local Government Association has claimed that councils face an £8 billion funding gap by 2025. Local authorities have called for new powers to help fill the gap while delivering the government's goal of giving them greater financial independence. Among the powers they have called for are tourist taxes, sales taxes or retaining some income tax. The IFS looked at the proposals and decided "a local income tax would be the best option". The additional levy could raise £6 billion a year if imposed at 1 per cent on all tax bands. However, the policy would favour richer parts of the country so would have to involve "a system to redistribute revenues between councils". As a result only "a portion" of the local income tax would be fully devolved. The government already plans to devolve 75 per cent of business rates by 2020, and to cut an equivalent amount in revenue support and other grants. The IFS pointed out that other proposals, including tourist taxes, would also "raise useful amounts only in some heavily visited parts of the country". Even at £5 per night, it would raise only £2 billion across England. Richard Watts, chairman of the Local Government Association's resources board, said: "If local areas are given control over their own finances, and responsibility for growing their local economies, they will be able to take a new approach to funding services." Nickie Aiken, leader of Westminster city council, said her authority was looking at imposing levies on hotels "in the same way many other world-leading cities make a charge to visitors"

Teenagers in care left on Own at B&Bs

Times 14/3/19: Greg Hurst Social Affairs Editor

Thousands of teenagers in care are living on their own in hotels, bed and breakfast rooms and caravan parks as local authorities struggle to cope with a rising number of children. Most of the children were aged 16 or 17 but a small number were as young as 14 or 15, according to a report by children's charities and campaigners. The Children's Rights Alliance for



England (CRAE), which champions young people's human rights, called on councils to stop housing children in temporary accommodation. Local authorities said that funding constraints meant it was sometimes necessary and the government said supporting older teenagers in care to live independently could be a stepping stone as they prepared to leave care. The report cited figures from the Department for Education showing that last year 3,090 children were housed in independent accommodation that often lacked support from live-in staff and included unsupervised B&Bs. The previous year the number was 2,420.

Growing population risks water shortages in next 25 years

March 21 2019, The Times: Paul Simons

Water levels fell at Howden reservoir in Derbyshire last year as the weather was unusually dry. Rain-soaked **England** is perhaps the last place in the world that you would imagine running short of clean water. Yet the country may face serious water shortages in the next 25 years, Sir James Bevan, the chief executive of the Environment Agency, has warned. He urged action to cut water use and leakages from water company pipes.



Longer waits could increase negligence claims, NHS told

March 22 2019, The Times: Kat Lay, Health Correspondent

The NHS could face a rise in negligence claims because waiting times are getting longer, the spending watchdog warns today in a report that says too many beds may have been cut. The report by the National Audit Office links the longer waits to a lack of beds, warning that the NHS has lost 8,000 since 2010.



NHS logo in England

The number of emergency readmissions to hospital within a month of a patient being sent home has risen by 14 per cent in five years. Doctors believe that the increase could be a sign of patients being sent home too soon to create space.

Failing prison, Hollesley Bay, criticised for letting inmates out at night

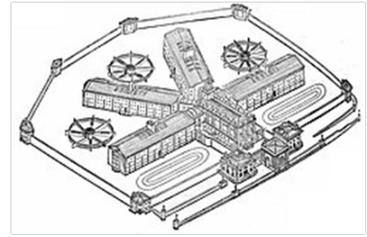
March 5 2019, The Times: Richard Ford, Home Correspondent

Prisoners have been temporarily released into the community without restrictions intended to limit the risk they pose to the public, a watchdog report said. Public protection failings at Hollesley Bay jail, near

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Woodbridge, in Suffolk, had allowed two prisoners to stay overnight with their families even though they posed a potential risk to children. About 20 per cent of the open jail's 490 prisoners were judged to be high risk, with about 10 per cent presenting a medium or high risk to children. Inspectors found that eight inmates had risk assessments that were outstanding but in the interim the jail had not applied restrictions on who they could be in contact with.



One in three state nurseries failing to offer free 30 hours

Times 29/3/19: Greg Hurst Social Affairs Editor

A third of local authority nursery schools have refused to offer places under the government's offer of 30 hours of free childcare a week for dual-income parents, a study has found. An evaluation of the policy said only 67 per cent of nursery schools had made the free childcare available to parents of three and four-year-olds, compared with 77 per cent of childminders and 90 per cent of pre-school nurseries run by groups. Maintained nursery schools have much higher costs as they employ qualified early years teachers, which pushes up their salary bills. There were also regional differences, with nurseries in London the least likely to offer the free childcare to eligible parents, while almost all providers did so in southwest and northeast **England**. In 2017 free childcare for three and four-year-olds was doubled to 30 hours a week for working parents earning up to £100,000 a year each. The government made the offer voluntary for providers of pre-school childcare. Many nursery operators have attacked the policy, saying that the government's funding per child does not cover costs, forcing them to raise fees for younger children and to introduce or raise charges for expenses such as lunches, trips and nappies. Nadhim Zahawi, the children's minister, said the evaluation showed that the policy was working.

Repairing pothole backlog would cost £10bn and take a decade

March 26 2019, The Times: Graeme Paton, Transport Correspondent

Almost £10 billion needs to be spent on local roads as councils struggle to complete a huge backlog of pothole repairs, according to research.

The one-time cost of fixing the entire network across **England** and Wales rose by more than 5 per cent in the past 12 months, from £9.3 billion to £9.7 billion, despite an increase in the number of potholes being filled, the study by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) said. At the present rate of repair it would take about a decade to clear the backlog, it said.

Much of the additional money used to repair roads is said to have been spent on "patch and mend" work that fails to improve the resilience of road surfaces. The study found that local roads are resurfaced once every 67 years on average. Potholes pose a serious risk to cyclists, with 22 killed and 368 seriously injured because of defective surfaces between 2007 and 2016. Motoring groups have also warned that drivers are now twice as likely to face expensive repairs caused by roads than in 2006.

The AIA found that average council highway maintenance budgets in **England** and Wales were up by almost a fifth this year, following the allocation of an additional £420 million in last autumn's budget. The study, based on information from two-thirds of councils, found each filled an average of 11,072 potholes in the last year.

Nicholas Lyes, head of roads policy at the RAC, called on the government to ring-fence 2p a litre from fuel duty to create a dedicated local roads fund. Martin Tett, the Local Government Association's transport spokesman, said councils were fixing a pothole every 17 seconds, but added: "It is clear our roads are deteriorating at a faster rate than can be repaired by councils."

The Department for Transport said: "The government is providing more than £6.6 billion for roads maintenance and pothole repair in the six years to 2021. We are trialling technologies to stop potholes from forming as well as new ways to repair roads."



English politics:

06 March 2019: Commons Select Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

The Committee has announced a new inquiry into local government finance.

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Ahead of the Spending Review 2019 expected this autumn, the inquiry will consider how effective the existing funding set-up for local government is in providing resources to meet need and demand for local services both now and in the future. The Committee's work will seek to directly inform government policy towards local government funding in the Spending Review and beyond.

Committee Chair, Clive Betts MP, said: "As the Government this week announced targeted funding to some struggling local areas, and ahead of the forthcoming spending review, it is the perfect time to look at the bigger picture of local government funding. We have launched this inquiry to understand the impact of the current arrangements for funding local government services, and the effect this has in different areas, with different challenges and demands – the total local funding and how this is calculated.

We will also investigate how the government arrives at its spending decisions and what mechanisms are in place to assess local need. Our aim is to provide constructive recommendations that can feed in to the upcoming Spending Review to provide a fair and effective funding system to support the provision of local services.

07 March 2019: The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee continues its inquiry into funding of local authorities' children's services on Monday 11 March when it takes evidence from independent care providers and Government ministers, Rishi Sunak MP and Nadhim Zahawi MP.

Purpose of the session: The Committee will question independent care providers on their role in the provision of children's services. It will assess how well the present system for commissioning and buying care is providing high quality, value for money care. It will also ask if the market is providing choice to local authorities and consider if the need for profits is driving up costs.

The Committee will also investigate the Government's perspective on the challenges facing children's services and their response to them. It will look at how the Government allocates funding, and the services that it expects local authorities to provide from this. It will also look at how the Government is promoting innovative solutions to address current and future challenges.

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### **08 March 2019: Commons Select Transport Committee**

The Transport Committee hears from Allan Cook, who was appointed Chair of HS2 Ltd in December 2018, following the resignation of Sir Terry Morgan.

**Purpose of the session:** The Committee will be asking what Mr Cook brings to the role and his views on some of the key strategic challenges facing the high-speed rail project such as management capability, delays, costs and scope.

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Commons Select Welsh Affairs Committee: 05 March 2019

Welsh Affairs Committee launches an inquiry examining Wales and the Armed Forces, looking specifically at the impact of Armed Forces reform on the Ministry of Defence estate and personnel in Wales, recruitment in Wales and to Welsh units, and how to encourage historic links between units and Wales.

Background: The Armed Forces have undergone significant restructuring since 2010 which has led to decrease in regular military personnel numbers, an increase in reserve capabilities and a rationalisation of the Ministry of Defence estate. Wales has historically been a strong base for the Armed Forces, particularly the Army with a long history of Welsh regiments.

Following these reforms, however, bases in Wales have been or are due to be closed or downsized. Further questions have been raised around recruitment to the Armed Forces. Army recruitment in particular has been the centre of controversy where the contract has been outsourced to Capita who have failed to hit recruitment targets. The Committee will investigate the effect of these issues on Wales

29 March 2019: Committee questions Secretary of State for Wales

As Brexit uncertainty continues, the Committee seek an update from the Secretary of State for Wales on the implications of Brexit, future funding for Wales.

Purpose of the session: Secretary of State Alun Cairns MP will give evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee on a wide range of issues such as the impact of Brexit on agriculture and trade and preparations for no-deal. The Committee may ask about the role of the Secretary of State in representing the views of Wales in ongoing talks.

Questions will also likely focus on ongoing assessments of issues affecting the Welsh economy such as the



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suspension of nuclear works on Wylfa Newydd and proposals for funding to boost economic growth throughout Wales. The Committee will also draw on evidence taken during its recent inquiry into the devolution of air passenger duty, which the Welsh Government has argued could bring economic benefits to Wales.

11 March 2019: Commons Select Scottish Affairs Committee

The Scottish Affairs Committee publishes its report on *Scotland, Trade and Brexit*, outlining the need for the devolved administrations to be closely involved in each stage of negotiating UK trade deals, including having a seat at the negotiating table to ensure the distinct priorities of Scottish trade are represented.



19 March 2019: Commons Select Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee launches an inquiry into coastal flooding and adaptation to climate change.

Sea levels are rising due to melting ice sheets and glaciers, and the physical expansion of the water as it warms. Although it has not yet been directly attributed, it is broadly thought this is due to climate change and the warming atmosphere.

Sea levels are expected to continue to rise in the coming decades and centuries. Coastal erosion and an increasing incidence of coastal flooding are predicted to represent an increasing risk to coastal communities, businesses and infrastructure.

The Environment Agency's Climate Change impacts and adaptation report (2018) highlighted that it may not be cost effective to protect or adapt some of **England's** coastline as currently planned. Some coastal flood defences may possibly fail as sea levels rise, meaning some currently defended land may not continue to be defended from flooding in the future.

29 March 2019: Commons Select Health and Social Care Committee

Following its report last year on Integrated care: organisations, partnerships and systems, the Health and Social Care Committee is scrutinising the legislative proposals put forward to support the implementation of the NHS Long-term Plan. In its first evidence session, the Committee will hear from think-tanks, academics, the CEO of NHS **England** and the Chief Executive of NHS Improvement.

Witnesses: Panel 2 : Simon Stevens, Chief Executive, NHS **England**

Purpose of the session: The start of the inquiry will focus on the detailed proposals published by NHS **England** and NHS Improvement on Thursday 28 February.

Questioning is expected to explore the barriers to and consequences of legislative change as well as what effect they will have on patients using the NHS and social care services.



25 March 2019: The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) today publishes its report examining the performance of the Public Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) in 2017/18.

The report acknowledges progress made over the past twelve months, but highlights areas where deficiencies remain. It also criticises the ongoing Government inaction on introducing reforms, which continues to hamstring the PHSO.

The PHSO is the final tier of complaint for people unhappy with their experience of the NHS in **England** and Government departments. Ombudsman Rob Behrens assessed a total of 32,389 new complaints in 2017-18. Of these, 2,429 were referred for investigation, of an eligible 8,291.

PACAC has produced its report based on the PHSO's annual report and accounts, evidence sessions with the Ombudsman and PHSO Chief Executive Amanda Campbell, and the team that carried out the independent peer review of the PHSO published in November 2018. Its findings centre on the review's outcomes, the PHSO's performance in 2017-18, and its future role in improving public services.

Chair of the Committee, Sir Bernard Jenkin MP said: "As a Committee, we have heard from individuals and families who have had existing traumas compounded by an ineffective, inefficient complaints process, at both NHS and PHSO level. Whilst nobody doubts the complex nature of the Ombudsman's role, there has been a need to rebuild public trust and ensure the service is up to scratch.

"Our report finds that this process is underway. Completing the task depends on Government support

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however – support that has been promised and not yet delivered. There is also no good reason for the draft Public Services Ombudsman Bill to have been languishing at pre-legislative scrutiny stage for over two years. The Ombudsman and his team must be empowered if they are to build on what has been achieved over the past twelve months.”

Another area where the Bill’s lack of progress is being felt is the urgent need to improve the complaints handling process at local NHS level. Whilst the PHSO is to be commended for aiding where possible, it is NHS **England** and Government Ministers who should be held accountable for the current state of affairs. Having promised an update on its complaints strategy as a matter of urgency last year, the Department for Health and Social Care cannot evade its responsibilities to patients.

05 March 2019: In its response to the PACAC Committee’s report on reducing the size of the House of Lords the Government indicates that reducing and capping the number of Lords to 600 members is not a priority ahead of the next general election.

Reforms to the House of Lords unlikely to be implemented in this Parliament

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) published its report 'A Smaller House of Lords' in November, recommending that the Government reduce and cap the number of Lords to 600 as a matter of urgency – based on the recommendation made in the Burns report on the size of the upper chamber. In its response to the Committee, the Government indicates that despite agreeing in principal with reducing the size of the Lords, it is not a priority in this Parliament.



The Committee has also published correspondence between the Chair, Sir Bernard Jenkin MP, and Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith MP, in which Sir Bernard requests further detail from the Government on this matter, including asking the Government to outline the criteria being used to ensure its commitment that appointments of the Lords are made “fairly”.

The Chair’s letter stresses the committee’s view that the Burns Report proposals represent a “minimal incremental reform” of House of Lords and “remains a vital and pressing issue that needs to be addressed.” It is therefore puzzling that The Minister’s response to this suggests that such reform is “radical” and “longer-term reform”

27 March 2019: Lords EU exit regulations:

On Tuesday 26 March, the House of Lords examined 17 statutory instruments preparing for Brexit.

A statutory instrument (SI), a type of secondary legislation, is a law created under powers given by an Act of Parliament. It is used to fill in the details of Acts (primary legislation).

The proposed SIs make changes to laws on:

Common Fisheries Policy and aquaculture

Common Agricultural Policy, agriculture and livestock

Local Audit (**England** and Wales) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Instruments subject to annulment SI 2019/180 Plant Health etc. (Fees) (**England**) (Amendment) Regulations 2019

England's heroes/heroines: Grinling Gibbons (4 April 1648 – 3 August 1721)

was an English sculptor and wood carver known for his work in England, including Windsor Castle and Hampton Court Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral and other London churches, Petworth House and other country houses, Trinity College Oxford and Trinity College Cambridge. Gibbons was born and educated in Holland of English parents, his father being a merchant. He was a member of the Drapers' Company of London. He is widely regarded as the finest wood carver working in England, and the only one whose name is widely known among the general public. Most of his work is in lime (tilia) wood, especially decorative Baroque garlands made up of still-life elements at about life size, made to frame mirrors and decorate the walls of churches and palaces, but he also produced furniture and small relief plaques with figurative scenes. He also worked in stone, mostly for churches. By the time he was established he led a large workshop, and the extent to which his personal



Detail from
Carved Room,
Petworth House



Grinling Gibbons
by Godfrey Kneller

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hand appears in later work varies.

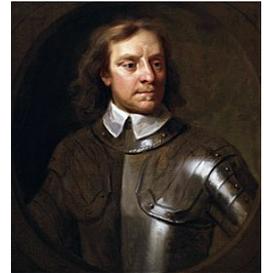
England's history: Dissolution of the Long Parliament by Oliver Cromwell.
Speech given to the House of Commons, 20 April 1653.

“It is high time for me to put an end to your sitting in this place, which you have dishonored by your contempt of all virtue, and defiled by your practice of every vice; ye are a factious crew, and enemies to all good government; ye are a pack of mercenary wretches, and would like Esau sell your country for a mess of pottage, and like Judas betray your God for a few pieces of money.

Is there a single virtue now remaining amongst you? Is there one vice you do not possess? Ye have no more religion than my horse; gold is your God; which of you have not barter'd your conscience for bribes? Is there a man amongst you that has the least care for the good of the Commonwealth?

Ye sordid prostitutes have you not defil'd this sacred place, and turn'd the Lord's temple into a den of thieves, by your immoral principles and wicked practices? Ye are grown intolerably odious to the whole nation; you were deputed here by the people to get grievances redress'd, are yourselves gone! So! Take away that shining bauble there, and lock up the doors.

In the name of God, go!”



A 1656 Samuel Cooper portrait of Cromwell

English culture: St George & St Marys, Church Gresley, Swadlincote, Derbyshire www.facebook.com/savegresleychurchbuilding/
SAVE GRESLEY CHURCH BUILDING - THE OLDEST ST GEORGES CHURCH IN ENGLAND ·

In December 2017, Gresley Church Building was sadly closed to the public due to safety issues. The long term aim is to refurbish this historic building and create a legacy for the future promoting the local area and the Church together. The church's name was actually a mistake; it was only supposed to be dedicated to St George, but a scribe added the Virgin Mary's name too. It is the oldest St George's Church in England. The church dates from 1100 and incorporates the remains of the nave of a small Augustinian Priory, Gresley Priory.

The church was ruinous and restored in 1786. In 1872 a new chancel was added by Arthur Blomfield and all the seats were turned to face eastwards. In May 1932 the church was closed for 2 years because of the dangerous state of the ceiling. It re-opened in July 1934 after restoration.



St George and St Mary's Church, Church Gresley

Promotion: English produce—Spinach

Like most brassicas, spinach thrives in rich soil, like that found in Lincolnshire.

Spinach can take from 28 to 85 days between sowing and harvesting.

Spinach is a leafy green vegetable that is generally cooked, but can also be eaten raw when young enough to be tender. It has a bittersweet taste and its strong colour can be used to dye pasta green, for example.

Recent studies continue to underscore the amazing versatility of spinach. This leafy vegetable is rich in water-soluble vitamins, fat-soluble vitamins, minerals, and a wide variety of phytonutrients and there are many different ways to incorporate spinach into a meal. For example, a recent study showed that the sautéing of spinach was best able to retain its total carotenoid content (in comparison with steaming or boiling or frying). Alternatively, an equally recent study showed far less loss of vitamin C from spinach when this vegetable was steamed for 5 minutes instead of being microwaved or boiled for that same amount of time. Yet numerous studies also point to the nutrient benefits of raw spinach. For example, about 25% of the folate in spinach can be lost from cooking, and spinach can be thought of as a special nutritional contributor in terms of folate.

Used in almost every cuisine across the world, spinach is an enormously popular green vegetable. The leaves can be either flat or slightly ruffled, and are a bright green when young, deepening to a more intense colour when older. The bitter flavour is distinctive - you either love it or hate it - and particularly complements dairy products and eggs.

The milder, young leaves can be eaten raw in a salad, while the older ones are usually cooked (spinach has one of the shortest cooking times of all vegetables). It reduces very dramatically during cooking;



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Spinach is thought to have originated in ancient Persia (modern Iran and neighbouring countries).

The plant was subsequently introduced to ancient China, where it was known as "Persian vegetable"; The earliest available record of the spinach plant was recorded in Chinese, stating it was introduced into China via Nepal (probably in 647 AD). In AD 827, the Saracens introduced spinach to Sicily.

The first written evidence of spinach in the Mediterranean was recorded in three 10th-century works: the medical work by al-Rāzī (known as Rhazes in the West) and in two agricultural treatises, one by Ibn Waḥshīyah and the other by Qusṭus al-Rūmī. Spinach became a popular vegetable in the Arab Mediterranean and arrived in Spain by the latter part of the 12th century, where it was called *raʿīs al-buqūl*, 'the chieftain of leafy greens'. Spinach was also the subject of a special treatise in the 11th century by Ibn Ḥajjāj.

The prickly-seeded form of spinach was known in Germany by no later than the 13th century, though the smooth-seeded form was not described until 1552. Spinach first appeared in England and France in the 14th century, probably via Spain, and it gained quick popularity because it appeared in early spring, when other vegetables were scarce and when Lenten dietary restrictions discouraged consumption of other foods. Spinach is mentioned in the first known English cookbook, the *Forme of Cury* (1390), where it is referred to as 'spinnedge' and/or 'spynoches'. Smooth-seeded spinach was described in 1552.

Recipe: Spinach & walnut salad with blue cheese dressing

www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/1263680/spinach-and-walnut-salad-with-blue-cheese-dressing

Prep: 10 Mins

Serves: 4

Just four ingredients, but this simple spinach salad really packs a punch

Ingredients

75g blue cheese

100g baby leaf spinach

4 tbsp crème fraîche

50g walnut pieces



Method: Mash the blue cheese, crème fraîche and some seasoning in a bowl with 50ml water until smooth and pourable. Put the spinach onto a serving plate, scatter over the walnut pieces and drizzle with the blue cheese dressing.

Trivia: The English Whisky Co is one of more than 20 new distilleries

English take on Scots at whisky: From Bannockburn to Culloden, Hampden to Murrayfield, rivalry between England and Scotland has been played out on many a battlefield. Now the English have opened an audacious new front: almost two dozen English distilleries have started making whisky. For more than a century nowhere south of the border distilled the spirit, but that changed in 2003 when a small Cornish brewery teamed up with a cider farm to start their own brand. Since then 20 English whisky distilleries have opened, with more expected to follow buoyed by the "craft gin" revolution.

In England, the spirit must be matured for a minimum of three years in wooden casks before it can be called whisky, but gin can be distilled and bottled in a day. This has allowed many distillers to use gin as a stopgap while their whisky is ageing.

OUR PRECIOUS UNION! Theresa May June 2017

(Sucking England dry)

Join at www.thecep.org.uk or send name and address with cheque for £20 (£15 concessions) made out to The Campaign for an English Parliament to Ms P Cullen, 9 the Meadows, Breachwood Green, Hitchin, Herts., SG4 8PR

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