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

Think of England Number 102: April 2020



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Number 102 April 2020

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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: Well, after Brexit was agreed we thought we would be able to resume campaigning and lobbying an audience that was now able to receive our message. How wrong



we were! We are living in unprecedented times such that we could not foresee. I am living in isolation with my husband for 12 weeks. I have plenty to do as I can edit the newsletter and respond to members online. As we are unable to carry out campaigning on the ground and politicians are unable to function I am trying to make our voice heard online through commenting on news reports, other than on Coronavirus. Reports that ignore the fact that England is treated differently and our country is unrecognised, which is the true nature of our constitution.

Clearly, particularly in relation to the NHS, news reports and politicians are now forced to acknowledge the different governance within the UK. We must keep reminding them of that fact. My comment to the news report of major UK capital expenditure in Scotland .funded by 'the taxpayer' was "The taxpayer" Now who would that be then? Where do most of them live? What advantage would that UK capital expenditure be to them as they do not benefit from the Barnett formula?

Do keep our presence felt online by commenting and correcting those who do not understand how England has been treated.

We wish all our members good health in these difficult times. Please keep safe

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Campaigning for England: With lockdown and self isolation it is clear that we cannot campaign on the street. However we can **all** continue to lobby and challenge MPs, academics the media and others and maintain our voice for England via the internet. I look forward to hearing of members' interactions with those who would deny us a parliament and executive.

Current English Affairs: *Some of our reports predate the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic. Clearly the focus of government has now and will be, in the near future, shifted. Ed.*

Devolution aka decentralization

Cash-starved councils face big bills after buying up shopping centres

With retail in crisis, town halls are exposed by £7bn splurge buying up far-away malls
29 February 2020, Telegraph: Tom Rees



Almost 150 miles and a three-hour drive separate Malvern Shopping Park, Worcestershire and Surrey County Council's offices in Kingston. Surrey's £74m acquisition of the rather tired retail park in mid-2017 was among the most eyebrow-raising of a wave of deals by local authorities in the commercial property market. "It was insane," says an industry insider. "They bought it at the top of the market, rents are high, everyone knew there was going to be a dip in retail warehousing and they paid yesterday's price for this big lump.

The deal was followed by an avalanche of acquisitions by councils that saw them spend almost £7bn on commercial property in 2017-19, a 14-fold increase. Many sites were a long way from the buyer and bought purely for income rather than regeneration purposes.

Surrey has become the epicentre of the local government borrowing binge with three of its borough councils in the top five local authorities for commercial property deals. CoStar data reveals that Spelthorne, Runnymede and Woking have spent a combined £1.5bn on retail property and offices since 2016, many well away from their boroughs.

The logic of Spelthorne's £385m swoop for a BP campus has been one huge deal questioned by industry insiders. Elsewhere, Warrington Borough Council and Torbay Council have also made distant, big investments.

The pressure is mounting on the Government to rein in a local authority borrowing boom after a damning National Audit Office (NAO) report into the investments. It told the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to consider if the framework for borrowing is "fit for purpose".

Meg Hillier, chairman of the Commons public accounts committee, also urges the department to look closely at the issue and to beef up its oversight: "There needs to be some kind of framework, support and an early warning system. Some district councils are investing more than their budget. There are really quite big exposures out there."

Councils have become creative in plugging gaps left by hefty cuts in central government funding after the financial crisis. Some borrow big to snap up property that can provide an income to top up budgets.

"They are being driven into making commercial investments, often without any real understanding or knowledge," warns Hillier. "If you have lots of councils investing in shopping centres and you have a collapse in high street retail, then you have got a big gap in local government funding suddenly emerging," she says.

Most worryingly, in 2018-19 councils spent almost as much on properties outside their areas as they did on assets within their own boundaries, the NAO revealed. More than £1bn was used to acquire properties out of area, a 47pc share of total spending on such assets – the spend on non-borough sites in 2010-2013 was just £1m.

In a few years, councils have gone from sprucing up their decaying town centres to rolling the dice on distant areas. Analysts fear many may be left out of pocket by tenants closing stores, by a slump in property values or big redevelopment costs.

"We think this will all end in tears as local authorities have a patchy record when it comes to investing taxpayers' money in commercial property," warns Mike Prew, an analyst at Jefferies. "[They were] overspending on assets that at some time in the future will need a wholesale redevelopment which will be a nasty surprise in people's council tax bills."

Adam Hesse, managing director at land agent Aston Mead, says councils will face difficulties if they lose key tenants and cannot find replacements: "If you had Topshop on a 10-year lease, it's £100,000 rent and

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you can buy the building for £1m, that's brilliant. But if they go under all of a sudden you have no income. It's quite a risky strategy in retail at the moment because even the big boys can go under."

Councils have been allowed to borrow cheaply from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) – their central government lender. "They have been picking up failing local shopping precincts and financing it with almost free money to fund local services," says Prew. "The problem is there is the good, the bad and the high-yielding ugly."

An MHCLG spokesperson said councils are "responsible for managing their finances and must properly consider the risks and opportunities when they make commercial decisions". They added the ministry has already taken steps to "tighten" the framework for councils "with the aim that taxpayers' money is managed wisely so residents benefit".

The Government clampdown on these risky investments began quietly in October. The Treasury hiked the interest rate on the PWLB by 100 basis points to curb the spree. Higher borrowing costs make it harder for councils to make acquisitions add up.

The NAO report revealed the Government is worried about "risks to the financial sustainability of local authorities from commercial spending and borrowing". In the wake of that, sources say talks are taking place at MHCLG on tightening the rules.

For Surrey's big-spending councils, the damage may have been done.

From one of our correspondents: Whenever I encounter an enthusiast for devolution in England, ie, the Balkanisation of England, I also ask them one question: have you ever attended a council meeting in your area? The answer is almost invariably no. I urge them to do so and then come back to me to report their feelings about devolving powers to English local government. Those who do report back are generally so horrified by the ineptitude of local councillors and senior council officers that their enthusiasm for devolution has died.

If members of the list wish to test what I say I recommend that they go on a plan(n)ing application day or when a large expenditure such as the purchase of shopping centres (is discussed). RH

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The Spectator 29 Feb 2020

### **LETTERS: From one of our members**

Devolved or Decentralised?

Sir: Paul Collier (Northern Lights, 22 Feb) conflates what devolution has come to mean, in UK terms, with decentralisation of authority. Thus it is adrift to imply that Edinburgh has benefited from conscious decentralising of powers from central government. It was simply that Scotland as a whole got devolution and Edinburgh is the capital city, where it administers devolved responsibilities.

Until such time as commentators and politicians distinguish properly between devolution and decentralisation, they will continue to prompt fears that England could be balkanised rather than treated as a national entity on a par with Scotland. Situate its devolved English parliament in a more northerly latitude of England, with London becoming UK federal territory, and that will do more for the North, and elsewhere that granting crumbs of local power to a few other cities.

Ken Stevens, Sonning Common, Oxfordshire.

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Health and Welfare

Tories are edging towards social care taxation

Realisation is growing that there is no market-based solution to the crisis in elderly care and the state must intervene

March 10 2020, The Times: Rachhel Sylvester

Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, has promised "whatever action is required" in the budget to help the NHS cope with coronavirus and yet the government still has no answer to the crisis in social care.

The Covid-19 outbreak is another reminder that the divide between the health and social care systems is not only artificial, it is counterproductive. With elderly people more vulnerable to the disease, the pressure on hospitals is sure to grow but what could turn difficulty into disaster is the lack of social care for those who are well enough to go home.

Already NHS wards are full of elderly patients who have no medical need to be in hospital. More than 148,000 bed days were lost in December alone as a result of delayed discharges. There has also been a 35 per cent rise in the number of dementia patients turning up at accident and emergency departments over the past five years following day care centre closures.

The system is driven by perverse incentives. It costs about £250 a day for someone to be on a hospital



NHS logo in England

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ward and £100 for a domiciliary care package, so from the point of view of the NHS (and the taxpayer) it makes sense for elderly people to go home quickly — but councils, which are responsible for funding social care, have a financial motive to transfer the cost to hospitals. Although health funding has been ring-fenced, local authorities face a shortfall of almost £4 billion by 2025 in social care budgets.

According to Age UK, 1.5 million elderly people are not getting the care and support they need. More than 1,600 residential and nursing homes have closed in the past five years and the government's post-Brexit immigration policy, which includes a minimum salary threshold, will only make matters worse. There are already 122,000 vacancies in the sector and one in 11 care workers is from the EU.

Social care provision is also confusing and unfair for elderly users. People with assets worth more than £23,500 have to pay for their own care and these “self-funders” are charged 42 per cent more on average than local authorities for the same service. Care “black spots” have developed in poorer parts of the country where there are not enough self-funders to cross-subsidise the council provision. Many of them are, of course, in the so-called “red wall” areas that the Tories won from Labour at the last election. This will soon be a political crisis as well as a public policy catastrophe but, although the prime minister declared on his first day in No 10 that he had a “clear plan” for social care he has still not set it out. Last week the government announced cross-party talks. Ministers, however, cannot agree a position between themselves. The dilemmas created by an ageing population have challenged traditional Conservative assumptions.

Insurance companies will not get involved because the costs are completely unpredictable. And, although Conservatives like to say that they support those who “work hard and do the right thing”, old age has become a condition lottery in which those with cancer have their treatment funded by the NHS while those with Alzheimer's have to pay for the cost of their care. The only fair response is to pool the risk among as many people as possible.

Last year a report from Policy Exchange, the centre-right think tank founded by Michael Gove, proposed bringing social care into line with the NHS and making it free at the point of use. The £11 billion cost should, it argued, be funded from general taxation, with a £5,000 means-tested annual contribution from those who need social care. The plan was even more generous than Labour's manifesto pledge to introduce free personal care (help with washing and dressing) but it is now being taken seriously by ministers. The third model under consideration — referred to in Whitehall as “free personal care plus” — would give the elderly help with washing and dressing and also remove the value of a home from the means-test for residential care. Senior Tories accept, however, that there is a simplicity in creating a universal system that creates a level playing field between those with different conditions.

(In Scotland help with washing and dressing for those over 65 is free. Ed.)



Transport

Budget 2020: The chancellor will announce plans to fill up to 50 million potholes as part of a drive to “level up” Britain.

March 11 2020, The Times: Francis Elliott, Political Editor | Steven Swinford | Philip Aldrick, Graeme Paton

Rishi Sunak is set to announce a £2.5 billion investment in local roads over the next five years in his budget. The cash is part of a spree that will take public investment to levels not seen since Margaret Thatcher came to power. The budget will lay out plans for £600 billion on capital projects over five years, £100 billion more than forecast.

Mr Sunak will promise to triple the average net investment made over the past 40 years in a budget overshadowed by the coronavirus crisis. Efforts to nurse the economy through the next few months will dominate but Mr Sunak will seek to plot a course beyond and flesh out Conservative manifesto promises to spread opportunity around the country in today's statement.

By the end of the parliament Britain will be spending more on capital investment as a share of GDP than at any time since the mid-1970s. Details of housing, roads, rail, broadband and other projects will be spelt out later this year.

First the chancellor will seek to address concerns over the country's roads. The investment will target the northwest, southwest and the east of England. Defective road surfaces contributed to 9,549 accidents in 2018, including 114 fatal crashes, the latest figures show. Breakdowns related to potholes are estimated to cost drivers an average of £230 to repair.



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Mr Sunak said that the government “can’t level up Britain and spread opportunity if we are spending our journeys dodging potholes and forking out for the damage they cause”. He will announce that £500 million a year will go to councils to be spent on road repairs — enough to fix ten million potholes annually. The money will act as an incentive to local authorities to undertake longer-term road resurfacing works to prevent potholes from appearing.

The announcement is unlikely, however, to make a huge dent in the backlog of repairs to local roads. A report last year warned that this had reached almost £9.8 billion, adding that it would take ten years to repair all potholes.

Nicholas Lyes, head of roads policy at the RAC, said: “Additional funding is always helpful [but] our local roads need sustained, guaranteed funding over a long-term period and ringfencing a proportion of existing fuel duty revenues could have done this.”

While Mr Sunak is expected to tweak rules on day-to-day spending he is likely to stick to a limit on capital spending of 3 per cent of GDP.

That will, nevertheless, take investment in housing, road, rail, broadband and other capital projects back to a share of the economy last seen in 1978. As a real-terms amount, his promise to triple annual net investment to about £70 billion by 2025 will make it the highest since records began in 1955.

The budget will also include a doubling in flood defence investment to £5.2 billion.

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### **Budget 2020: Dozens of smart motorways will give £27bn boost to busiest roads**

March 12 2020, The Times: Graeme Paton, Transport Correspondent

More than a dozen new stretches of smart motorway will be built over the next five years subject to a major review of safety standards. The government unveiled a £27 billion upgrade of England’s motorway and major A-road network yesterday as part of plans to cut congestion on the busiest routes.

There were questions from motoring groups over the decision to announce additional smart motorways before a safety review of the system had been completed. So-called “all-lane running” smart motorways involve removing the hard shoulder to create an additional vehicle lane. Lay-bys are positioned up to 1.5 miles apart to allow vehicles to pull off the road.

The roads, which are also managed by differential speed limits to improve traffic flow, were labelled a “death trap” by the head of the Police Federation earlier this year. Figures show that 38 people have been killed on the network in five years.

The Department for Transport is carrying out a “stock-take” of the network with a view to making new safety improvements. This could include closer spacing of lay-bys and technology to automatically detect car breakdowns.

Those outlined included new smart motorways on parts of the M62, M56, M1, M25 and M5, as well as three separate upgrades of the M6 between junctions 2 and 4, 10a and 13 and 21a and 26.

The document makes clear that all designs could be altered in line with the review: “Those that have yet to start major works or which are still in development may have to be rescheduled subject to the findings of the stocktake.”

The government will also push ahead with the Lower Thames Crossing, the UK’s longest road tunnel, which will be built east of London. In all, it will lead to upgrades of 4,000 miles of road, improvements to 100 principal junctions and improved connections to 20 ports and airports.

The funding, released in the budget, includes a renewed commitment for a two-mile long tunnel under Stonehenge, ending decades of indecision over the scheme. The A303, a popular route for motorists travelling to and from the southwest, is often severely congested on the single carriageway stretch near Stonehenge. The tunnel plan, opposed by some environmentalists and archaeologists, is designed to provide an out-of-sight dual carriageway alternative.

Mr Sunak told the Commons that the A303 was “one of our most important regional arteries” but had become “one of those totemic projects symbolising delay and obstruction”. “Governments have been trying to fix it since the 1980s,” he said. “Every year, millions of cars crawl along it in traffic, ruining the backdrop to one of our most important historic landmarks.”

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Environment

Best Places to Live 2020: winner Altrincham is ghost town raised from dead

March 22 2020, The Sunday Times: David Collins, Northern Correspondent

Some towns boast glorious architecture, charming shops or famous festivals. Until



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recently the Greater Manchester commuter town of Altrincham was best known for its empty high street. All that has changed, though, and the ghost town that turned into a boom town is today named by The Sunday Times as the best place to live in Britain.

Our judging panel was most impressed by the community spirit, which has helped turn Altrincham around since the disclosure in 2010 that it had the highest proportion of empty shops in the country.

A combination of competition from Manchester shopping centres, high local business rates and customer-unfriendly parking charges had left the town centre in a spiral of seemingly irreversible decline.

The emergence of a flourishing indoor market proved the catalyst for renewal. “Since we took over the market in 2013 it has been an amazing force in the local community and that’s part of what makes living here so special,” said Nick Jones, who runs the Market House food hall.

Known to its residents as “Alty”, the town has two of the best secondary schools in the country, according to The Sunday Times Parent Power guide, along with 10 primary schools rated outstanding.

The National Trust’s Dunham Massey parkland is nearby, there is a selection of golf courses and a leisure centre about to get a £20m upgrade. Motorways, trains and planes are on the doorstep and a tram service to Manchester city centre takes just 25 minutes.

The Sunday Times judges cited evidence of community spirit in the local book clubs, groups for mothers and a family-friendly football club famous for its FA Cup giant-killing exploits.

The town also boasts one of the few ice rinks in northwest England — the Altrincham Icedome, home to the Altrincham Aces ice hockey club.

The 2020 Best Places to Live guide also features regional picks, including Victoria Park Village, in east London, and Cheltenham, in Gloucestershire.

Back in Altrincham, the famed community spirit is reflected in the fight against the coronavirus. A Facebook group for volunteers to visit sick and vulnerable locals has 3,500 people offering to help.

“We desperately want to keep people’s spirits up during these uncertain times,” said Jones.

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### **A community is rooted in its local park, so muck in to stop yours being pruned**

March 22 2020, The Sunday Times: Rosie Kinchen

In 1850, Frederick Law Olmsted, an American journalist and farmer, arrived in Liverpool from New York. Soon afterwards, he visited Birkenhead, then a genteel but rapidly expanding new town. He was told that in no circumstances should he leave without first visiting its new park, a 226-acre quasi-pastoral paradise designed by the great architect and gardener Joseph Paxton.

Olmsted had never visited a public park before — they did not exist in America — and he was blown away by what he saw. He could scarcely believe, he wrote, that “all this magnificent pleasure ground [was] entirely, unreservedly and for ever the people’s own”. Seven years later, back in New York, he designed Central Park.

I thought about that last week when, like many people, I slipped out of self-imposed confinement for a walk around my local patch of green. There is nothing very special about this park. It is next to one of London’s biggest hospitals and is a popular hangout for the drunks and addicts who spill over from A&E. But as joggers pounded past me and people walked their dogs, it provided a precious moment of peace. We don’t really need science to tell us that, even in normal times, there is something innately soothing about being outdoors.

Public parks were a Victorian innovation, a means of improving the health and morality of the urban poor. Today, they matter even more. Millions of us are living in cities with limited outdoor space of our own. We rush through the day and spend more of our lives than ever online. Even if you live in the countryside or are lucky enough to have a garden, there is something special about being in a park, something quite different about being alone together outdoors — as the size of the memberships of the National Trust and the Royal Horticultural Society attests.

Green spaces are good for the body and mind, but as funding has dried up, some councils have slashed park budgets by 90%

But parks face an uncertain future. The Heritage Lottery Fund announced in 2017 that it would stop ring-fencing park funding, amid concerns that the sector had become overreliant on its aid. Unlike housing and waste disposal, local authorities have no legal duty to maintain parks. As their funding has dried up, park budgets have been slashed — some by more than 90%.

The solution to this is not to grumble but to roll up our sleeves and step into the breach. Because Olmsted was right: parks don’t belong to local authorities; they belong to us. The volunteers I have met in my



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local park are fascinating people, a mix of ages and backgrounds, many of them not really gardeners at all. But they get something important out of being there, just as I do.

It was only when I joined them that I realised how much a ragtag group of local people could achieve. In two years, they have installed a new greenhouse, put labels on the trees so people can identify them (as the Victorians did) and remodelled the community garden so that people in wheelchairs can access the raised beds. They have persuaded the council to fund the transformation of a 19th-century stable block into a “recovery college” for mental-health patients, and are planning to resurface the sports pitches. Parks come into their own in times of national crisis — they were annexed for vegetable growing and hospital wards in the world wars — but every day they help us in all sorts of quiet ways.

As I made my way to the park gate last week, I walked past the wildlife garden, where an elderly lady was sitting on a bench enjoying a moment of contemplation and birdsong. I realised that those few hours messing about in the mud were probably the most productive thing I could have done.

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Coronavirus lockdown: asparagus crop will be left to rot if unfit Britons refuse to replace foreign pickers

March 29 2020, The Sunday Times: Jonathan Leake, Environment Editor

The asparagus season, one of the highlights of the culinary year, may have to be cancelled because of a lack of pickers, say farmers, who fear that millions of succulent spears will end up being left to rot in the fields.

Asparagus is harvested from April to June, meaning it will be one of the first crops to need picking during the lockdown. Travel restrictions mean that most of the 5,000 or so pickers, mainly Bulgarians and Romanians, cannot reach the UK.

After asparagus, the next big problem for British growers is strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries. All four will need harvesting from May, a seasonal industry that normally brings about 27,000 foreign workers into the UK.

“We are considering letting it die in the field and just missing the year,” said Andrew Brice of Brice Church Farm at Hoo, near Rochester, Kent, who has 50 acres of asparagus getting ready for cropping. Cutting and thinning the spears is a skilled job, so the pickers are well paid. The same workers return year after year.

Brice and other farmers had been seeing a surge in applications from self-employed British workers, left without pay by the lockdown, but on Friday the interest suddenly dried up.

He said the chancellor’s offer to pay 80% of the income of the self-employed meant many were no longer interested in farm work. Some farmers also questioned the physical fitness of Britons for such work.

The loss of a lucrative crop such as asparagus could be damaging to UK agriculture. A farm such as Brice’s might produce 70 tons in a season. At last year’s wholesale prices, of about £13 a kilo, such a crop would be worth more than £900,000.

Jack Ward, chief executive of the British Growers Association, said: “People just don’t understand how dependent we are on casual overseas labour for producing fresh food.

“About 90% are from overseas and most are from eastern Europe. But this year they will not be coming.”
(would it not be great if CEP members could volunteer as CEP members to help pick the crop? Ed.)



English politics:

Tunnel link in Irish Sea ‘£16bn less’ than bridge

March 28 2020, The Times: Jonathan Morrison, Architecture Correspondent

The £36 billion Norwegian Coastal Highway was an inspiration for plans for a crossing to Northern Ireland. A tunnel between Northern Ireland and Scotland could cost the taxpayer up to £16 billion less than a bridge, according to the architect whose plans for a crossing were backed by Boris Johnson.

Alan Dunlop, who first proposed a bridge across the Irish Sea in January 2018 and subsequently won the support of the prime minister, has now produced a design for a submarine tunnel that would be moored 12 metres below the waves and tethered to giant pontoons.

Alister Jack, the Scotland secretary, told MSPs this month that a crossing was being seriously considered by the UK government.

Harry Dimitriou, the Bartlett professor of planning studies at University College London and an expert on



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large infrastructure projects, said that there were “fundamental strategic questions over the need and benefit of a crossing”. “There is a danger of over-focusing on the engineering and technical challenges,” he said. “The quoted figures are only ball-park costs and the price typically escalates when such a mega-project begins: just look at HS2 [the high-speed rail link].”

Budget 2020: £640m for Scotland ‘not enough’ after a decade of austerity

March 12 2020, The Times: Mark McLaughlin

Kate Forbes, the Scottish finance secretary, said the funding was welcome but still below 2010-11 in real terms

Scotland will receive a bumper £640 million budget boost from the chancellor’s spending plans but the SNP claims it is still not enough to compensate for a decade of austerity.

Employment benefits are also reserved to Westminster so Scots working in the “gig economy” — many of whom are self employed with no right to sick pay — will also be able to claim employment and support allowance from the first day of unemployment instead of day eight. Scottish workers will also save about £100 a year through the uplift in the national insurance threshold from £8,632 to £9,500.

However, business rates north of the border are set by Holyrood so small Scottish firms will not benefit from the 50 per cent discount on businesses with a rateable value below £51,000.

The Scottish government said that it has “the most competitive non-domestic rates regime in the UK, ensuring that over 95 per cent of properties pay a lower poundage than they would in other parts of the UK.”

Ms Forbes said: “We expect full consequential (By way of the Barnett formula. Ed.) from this additional funding and need urgent clarification to provide clarity for Scottish businesses and NHS Scotland to ensure we can respond effectively . . . while this funding is welcome, our resource budget is still lower in real terms than it was in 2010-11.”

The chancellor announced £1 million to promote Scottish food and drink overseas and £10 million to help distilleries go green. The Treasury will open offices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and provide £25 million for Argyll and Bute, as part of a “City and Growth Deal” for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Alister Jack, the Scottish secretary, said that the £640 million, with spending already announced, represented “a £2 billion boost for the Scottish block grant” to over £35 billion next year.

England's heroes/heroines: Abraham Darby III

(24 April 1750 – 1789) was an English ironmaster and Quaker. He was the third man of that name in several generations of an English Quaker family that played a pivotal role in the Industrial Revolution. Abraham Darby was born in Coalbrookdale, Shropshire, in 1750, the eldest son of Abraham Darby the Younger (1711–1763) by his second wife, Abiah Maude, and educated at a school in Worcester kept by a Quaker named James Fell.



At age thirteen, Darby inherited his father's shares in the family iron-making businesses in the Severn Valley, and in 1768, aged eighteen, he took over the management of the Coalbrookdale ironworks. He took various measures to improve the conditions of his work force. In times of food shortage he bought up farms to grow food for his workers, he built housing for them and he offered higher wages than were paid in other local industries, including coal-mining and the potteries. He built the largest cast iron structure of his era: the first cast-iron bridge ever built, as a crossing over the Severn near Coalbrookdale. The bridge made it possible for the village of Ironbridge to grow up around it, with the area being subsequently named Ironbridge Gorge.

In 1776 Darby married Rebecca Smith of Doncaster, and they had seven children, of whom four survived to adulthood. He died in Madeley aged only 39 and was buried in the Quaker burial ground in Coalbrookdale. His sons Francis (1783–1850) and Richard (1788–1860) both worked in the Coalbrookdale Company.

England's history: The mutiny on the Bounty took place on 28 April 1789 during the ship's return voyage from a mission to collect and transport breadfruit plants from Tahiti to the West Indies. It was led by Fletcher Christian and supported by eighteen of the crew. They had seized firearms during Christian's night watch and surprised and bound the captain, Bligh, in his cabin. Despite being in the majority, none of Bligh's loyalists put up a significant struggle once they saw Bligh

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bound, and the ship was taken over without bloodshed. The mutineers provided Bligh and eighteen loyal crewmen a 23-foot launch (so heavily loaded that the gunwales were only a few inches above the water). They were allowed four cutlasses, food and water for perhaps a week, a quadrant and a compass, but no charts, or marine chronometer. Most of these were obtained by the clerk, Mr Samuel, who acted with great calm and resolution, despite threats from the mutineers.

Bligh and his crew first made for Tofua, only a few leagues distant, to obtain supplies. However, they were attacked by hostile natives and John Norton, a quartermaster, was killed. Fleeing from Tofua, Bligh did not dare to stop at the next islands to the west (the Fiji islands), as he had no weapons for defence and expected hostile receptions. Bligh completed a voyage of more than 3,500 nautical miles (6,500 km; 4,000 mi) to the west in the launch to reach safety north of Australia in the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia) and began the process of bringing the mutineers to justice.

Because the vessel was rated only as a cutter, *Bounty* had no officers other than Bligh (who was then only a commissioned lieutenant), a very small crew, and no Marines to provide protection from hostile natives during stops or to enforce security on board ship. To allow longer uninterrupted sleep, Bligh had divided his crew into three watches instead of two, placing his protégé Fletcher Christian—rated as a Master's Mate—in charge of one of the watches.

The reasons behind the mutiny are still a subject of debate. Some sources report that Bligh was a cruel tyrant whose abuse of the crew led them to feel that they had no choice but to take over the ship. Other sources argue that Bligh was no worse (and, in many cases, objectively gentler) than the average captain and naval officer of the era, and that the crew—inexperienced and unused to the rigours of the sea—were corrupted by the freedom, idleness and sexual licence of their five months in Tahiti, finding themselves unwilling to return to the "Jack Tar's" life of an ordinary seaman.

This view holds that most of the men supported Christian's prideful personal vendetta against Bligh out of a misguided hope their new captain would return them to Tahiti and allow them to live out their lives in hedonistic peace, free from Bligh's acid tongue and strict discipline.

The mutiny is made more mysterious by the friendship of Christian and Bligh. Christian was well acquainted with the Bligh family. As Bligh was being set adrift he appealed to this friendship, saying "you have dandled my children upon your knee".

The mutineers variously settled on Tahiti or on Pitcairn Island.



Fletcher Christian and the mutineers sent Lieutenant William Bligh and 18 others adrift; 1790 painting by Robert Dodd.

English culture: St George and the dragon



Dacian Draco as from Trajan's Column

The legend of Saint George and the Dragon tells of Saint George (died 303) taming and slaying a dragon that demanded human sacrifices; the saint thereby rescues the princess chosen as the next offering. The narrative was first set in Cappadocia in the earliest sources of the 11th and 12th centuries, but transferred to Libya in the 13th-century Golden Legend.

The oldest known record of Saint George slaying a dragon is found in a Georgian text of the 11th century. The legend and iconography spread rapidly through the Byzantine cultural sphere in the 12th century. It reached Western Christian tradition still in the 12th century, via the crusades. The knights of the First Crusade believed that St. George, along with his fellow soldier-saints Demetrius, Maurice and Theodore, had fought alongside them at Antioch and Jerusalem. The legend was popularised in Western tradition in the 13th century based on its Latin versions in the *Speculum Historiale* and the *Golden Legend*.

At first limited to the courtly setting of Chivalric romance, the legend was popularised in the 13th century and became a favourite literary and pictorial subject in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance, and it has become an integral part of the Christian traditions relating to Saint George in both Eastern and Western tradition.

The iconography of military saints Theodore, George and Demetrius as horsemen is a direct continuation of the Roman-era "Thracian horseman" type iconography. The iconography of the dragon appears to grow out of the serpent entwining the "tree of life" on one hand, and with the draco standard used by late Roman cavalry on the other.

The draco ("dragon" or "serpent", plural dracones) was a military standard of the Roman cavalry. Carried

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by the draconarius, the draco was the standard of the cohort as the eagle (aquila) was that of the legion. Later, the draco became an imperial ensign.

The dragon was originally a Dacian emblem. According to Fiebiger, the Romans adopted it from the Dacians, after their defeat or from the Parthians.

The Dacian Draco was the standard ensign of troops of the ancient Dacian people, which can be seen in the hands of the soldiers of Decebalus in several scenes depicted on Trajan's Column in Rome, Italy. It has the form of a dragon with open wolf-like jaws containing several metal tongues. The hollow dragon's head was mounted on a pole with a fabric tube affixed at the rear. In use, the draco was held up into the wind, or above the head of a horseman, where it filled with air and gave the impression it was alive while making a shrill sound as the wind passed through its strips of material.

The first sculptural representation of a draco borne by a Roman soldier dates from the time of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (r.161 to 180 AD).

Draco probably continued in use in Sub-Roman and Anglo-Saxon Britain; the Bayeux tapestry has Harold's standard bearer holding one. The legendary King Arthur and his knights may have their origins in the Sarmatian heavy cavalryman stationed in Britain, the surname "Pendragon" borne by Arthur and his father Uther may refer to draco standard. It is also possible that the story of a fight between a Red and a White Dragon related in the Historia Brittonum refers to two Draco standards carried by rival sub-Romano British factions.

Promotion: English produce: Mussels

The most commonly found species in the UK is the blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*), also known as the common mussel. They are very common and can be easily collected from shorelines around the UK. They have been harvested for centuries. Blue mussel shells have been found in kitchen middens dated at 6000 B.C. Until the 19th century, blue mussels were harvested from wild beds in most European countries for food, fish bait and as a fertilizer. The initial step for mussel aquaculture was based upon storage and relaying fishery products.



The intertidal wooden pole culture, called "bouchots" dates back to as early as the 13th century in France. This technique spread widely along the French Atlantic coastline over the 19th century, while Northern European countries developed subtidal culture using bottom culture plots. The rental of mussel culture plots in the early 19th century resulted from the overfishing of natural beds. At the turn of the 1970s, traditional culture was improved by new technological developments using suspended (rope) culture (longlines). While wild beds are still in use for juvenile supply in several countries, reliability was obtained through the development of spat collecting techniques.

Most mussels are a maximum of 4 to 5cm in length, but they can grow to over 10cm in length. Mussels live in the intertidal zone and use their byssal threads (often referred to as their 'beard') to attach themselves to rocks or man-made structures between the high and low water marks. Mussels usually group together in large groups which can consist of hundreds or even thousands of individual mussels. They are filter feeders which consume tiny planktonic sea creatures which are found in

Mussels are found across the whole of the UK coastline. Mussels are found on rocks or man-made structures such as harbour or pier walls and find. They can be removed by twisting them and pulling them away from the surface they are attached to.

Fresh mussels can be kept in the fridge for around a week. It is best to keep them semi-submerged in seawater with a damp towel over the top of them. The seawater should be replaced with fresh, refrigerated seawater after a few days to keep them in good condition.

Mussel Fisheries

Kent and Essex

The Wash: The major fisheries of the two Wash ports Boston and King's Lynn nowadays, are cockles, mussels, and brown shrimp. Market sized adult mussels from January to March or mid-April, and juvenile "seed" mussels during spring or as available;

Fishermen within The Wash devote most of their time to fishing for cockles, mussels and shrimps. Demand for all three species, mainly for Continental markets, has increased rapidly in recent years leading to heavy investment in vessels and sophisticated equipment both afloat and ashore. In turn this has resulted in unprecedented pressure being placed on stocks particularly the sedentary cockles and mussels.

Both these species are managed through the provisions of the Wash Fishery Order which came into force

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on 4th January 1993. Under the terms of this Order the Committee, working in close co-operation with the industry itself, can close shellfish beds, allocate areas of intertidal flats to individual fishermen for the cultivation of shellfish, impose quotas and limit the number of vessels licensed to work the beds. Along the North Norfolk coast fishermen utilise the nutrient rich and pollution free waters of the many creeks to cultivate mussels and pacific oysters.

Dee Estuary: There are five areas containing mussel situated off of West Kirby and Thurstaston on the English side of the Dee Estuary.

Ribble Estuary: Seafield Road Mussel Bed, Training Walls Mussel Bed

Morecambe Bay: Knott End Sea Life Centre South Mussel Bed, Knott End Spit Mussel Bed, Heysham Flat Seed Mussel Fishery, Heysham Flat Size Mussel Fishery, North Morecambe Bay Incl. Foulney Mussel Beds

Duddon Estuary: Duddon Estuary Mussel Bed

Recipe: Mussels in cider with smoked bacon

<https://thecornishfishmonger.co.uk/mussels-in-their-shells.html>

A Cornish twist on a French classic - make sure you have lots of crusty bread to mop the scrumptious cider sauce!

Mussels are a great source of important vitamins; with levels of iron and folic acid to rival red meat. Mussels are also a rich source of zinc.

4 people: Total Time: 15 mins: Cooking: 15 mins

Ingredients:

25g butter

10 rashers smoked bacon, chopped into 1cm pieces

1 small bunch thyme

1 chilli, deseeded

300ml apple cider

1 handful of fresh seaweed (optional)

4 shallots, finely sliced

1 tsp wholegrain mustard

1 onion

2kg mussels, cleaned

4 tbsp creme fraiche (optional)

1 loaf of crusty bread



Instructions:

Heat the butter in a pan large enough to easily fit the mussels, then fry the bacon for 4 mins, turning occasionally until it starts becoming crisp. Throw in the shallots and thyme leaves and mustard, then cook for 1 min until softened. In a separate pan, fry the chilli and onion, then leave to cool.

Turn the heat up to maximum and add the mussels to the pan, then pour over the cider. Place the lid on the pan, give it a good shake, then cook the mussels for 5 to 7 minutes, shaking the pan occasionally, until all the mussels have opened - discard any that have not opened.

Use a slotted spoon to scoop the mussels into bowls and place the pan back on the heat. Bring the juices to the boil and stir in the creme fraiche, if using. Pour the sauce over the mussels, then sprinkle over the onions and chilli, and a little seaweed if you wish.

Slice some crusty bread and enjoy!

Quotes: Ex PM Scottish Gordon Brown's version of Britishness gives some credence to critics and cynics with his 2007 Fabian Society pamphlet, published on the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Union, failing to mention 'England' (Brown and Alexander 2007; Hassan 2009).

OUR PRECIOUS UNION! Theresa May June 2017

(Sucking England dry)

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