

Yorkshire marching into future

Forces from all around world train with latest technology in US desert

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Housing firm has homes for swifts

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England embarking on 'amazing journey'

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ISMAIL MULLA

'It is high time that fibre broadband was also treated as a utility.'

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Sewage spill water firms face bonus ban

Ofwat plan for crackdown as Yorkshire Water is punished

Ralph Blackburn
WESTMINSTER CORRESPONDENT

BONUSES similar to the £371,000 awarded to Yorkshire Water's CEO could be blocked in future if there are more sewage spills – after the company agreed to pay £40m for 'serious failures'.

In the previous financial year, Nicola Shaw was awarded a base salary of £585,000, along with a bonus of £371,000 and additional benefits of £72,000.

This is despite the company being one of the worst offenders when it comes to sewage overflows, and the Environment Agency giving Yorkshire Water a 'red' rating due to rising pollution incidents.

Yesterday, Ofwat, the industry watchdog, said a probe into the company found 'serious failures' over how it operated and maintained its sewage network, which caused excessive spills from storm overflows.

These spills have contributed to a situation in which no single river in Yorkshire is considered to be in good overall health, including Ilkley Beach, which has the highest level of untreated sewage anywhere in the UK.

Ofwat said Yorkshire Water has admitted to its failings and agreed to a £40m enforcement payout as a result.

It initially announced the company would have to pay £47m last summer, however this has been reduced due to recent improvements.

Instead Yorkshire Water will pay out £36.6m over the next five years to prioritise work on particularly problematic storm overflows in environmentally-sensitive areas.

The water firm, which supplies more than five million customers across the region, will also hand £3.4m of funding to the Great Yorkshire Rivers Partnership.

Ofwat said this would come from the company's coffers and its shareholders, and could not be passed on to billpayers.

The Yorkshire Post also understands that this kind of enforcement action would likely preclude Ms Shaw from receiving another huge bonus. It comes as Yorkshire Water is set to hike its annual bill for customers by 29 per cent from

April 1. The Government's Water (Special Measures) Bill is awaiting Royal Assent. As part of the Bill, Ofwat will consult on rules which would block executives from receiving bonuses if standards are not upheld.

While the parameters for this have not been set yet, it is understood that enforcement action, like Yorkshire Water's £40m pay-out, would see performance-related pay being limited.

Ms Shaw recently defended her £371,000 bonus to MPs on the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs Select Committee, saying the company's remuneration committee set 'really stretching targets'.

'In particular, we improved and continue to improve on leakage and in relation to our staff engagement and staff safety and they wanted to reflect that in what had been a difficult year,' she claimed.

'They also recognised that we did nowhere nearly well enough in relation to our outcomes in relation to the environment and removed any bonus in relation to the environment.'

Responding to the £40m enforcement action, Ms Shaw added: 'We know our storm overflows operate more frequently than we, or our customers, would like them to. Since 2021, we've been actively taking steps to improve our performance. We know there's still more for us to do.'

'We're at the forefront of the industry to get this resolved and we're looking forward to delivering our ambitious plans to improve river health in Yorkshire.'

'We apologise for our past mistakes and hope this redress package goes some way to show our commitment to improving the environment.'

It comes as the watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, has launched an investigation into whether the Government has failed to comply with water quality laws.

The OEP's report in May 2024 found Defra and Environment Agency were off-track to meet targets for 77 per cent of England's water bodies to reach good condition by 2027.

Watchdog probe: Page 5;
Comment: Page 10.

Sunny gallops home in country's oldest horse race



Sunny, ridden by Sophie Faulkner-Smith, wins the Kiplingcotes Derby yesterday. The race, said to have been first run in 1519, is thought to be England's oldest horse race, and starts in the parish of Eton in East Yorkshire to Londesborough Wold Farm four miles away. Victory romp: Page 5.

Chiefs to make plan for peacekeeping force

SIR Keir Starmer has said a meeting of defence chiefs will turn the idea of a peacekeeping force for Ukraine from a political concept to 'military plans'.

The Prime Minister said the 'timetable now is coming into focus', after talks between the US and Russia, and that if a deal comes to fruition, the so-called coalition of the willing needs to be ready to react right away.

Sir Keir and Defence Secretary John Healey attended a meeting of more than a dozen military leaders from the Prime Minister's so-called 'coalition of the willing' at a UK army base yesterday afternoon.

The army chiefs discussed how

peacekeepers could operate in Ukraine to deter further Russian attacks if a deal to end the war is reached.

That could mean British forces currently guarding Nato's eastern flank being redeployed to Ukraine, with other allies filling the gap.

The Prime Minister said: 'Those plans are focusing on keeping the skies safe, the seas safe and the borders safe and secure in Ukraine and working with Ukrainians.'

'Now, we're working at pace, because we don't know if there'll be a deal. I certainly hope there will be, but if there's a deal, it's really important that we're able to react straight away.'

The meeting came after Sir Keir co-ordinated a summit with 30 political leaders, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and France's Emmanuel Macron.

'What's happening here is turning that political intention into reality, the concept into plans,' he said.

'It is vitally important we do that work because we know one thing for certain which is a deal without anything behind it is something that [Russian President Vladimir] Putin will breach. We know that because it happened before. I'm absolutely clear in my mind it will happen again.'

Calls this week between US President Donald Trump, Mr Putin and

Mr Zelensky, have failed to produce the 30-day ceasefire envisaged by the White House. Instead Mr Putin agreed to a truce on hitting energy infrastructure, although Ukraine has said other civilian targets including a hospital had been struck.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy said Mr Putin should not be given a 'veto' over the presence of European peacekeepers in Ukraine if a deal is done to end the war.

He said: 'Putin should simply accept an unconditional ceasefire. That is the plan on the table, let's get on with it, what are we waiting for? What we certainly can't do is give Putin a veto over the security architecture that will govern that peace.'

Sunak's plea to help family farms

RISHI Sunak has urged the Environment Secretary Steve Reed to keep the importance of family farms at the front of his mind.

He said that the 'trust' has been broken with Mr Reed and the Department of the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The Labour Government is introducing an inheritance tax levy on farmers and abruptly ended applications for the Sustainable Farming Initiative last week.

In the House of Commons yesterday,

the former Prime Minister reiterated to Mr Reed that the importance of family farms should be at the forefront of Ministers' minds.

The Conservative MP for Richmond and Northallerton said: 'I recently visited New Sheepfold Farm in Ingleby Greenhow to see the great work that the Day family are doing to diversify their farm, help nature recovery, and improve enjoyment of our rural area.'

'Now they did this with the help of the National Park Authority, the North York Moors, but also the

Farming in Protected Landscape Scheme, which I'm glad the Government has extended for a further year. So can I ask the Minister if he agrees with me about the importance of family farms, like the Days', in landscapes like the Dales and the Moors? And will he ensure that they remain at the forefront of Ministers' minds?'

Mr Reed replied: 'Of course I agree with him, and our focus on farm profitability is precisely so family farms up and down the country can have a bright and secure future.'

New 'national forest' plan for West Country

A NEW 'national forest' is to be created across a swathe of the west of England from the Cotswolds to the Mendips, the Government has said.

The Western Forest project will create 2,500 hectares (6,200 acres) of woodland by 2030 across five priority areas in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Bristol, with plans to plant 20 million trees by 2050.

The Government said the announcement was a first step in meeting its manifesto commitment to create three new national forests, and would bring trees and woodlands closer to people in urban centres such as Bristol, Gloucester and Swindon.

The scheme is the first national forest for 30 years – following on from the establishment of the National Forest in the Midlands – and aims to increase woodlands and tree cover to boost wildlife and tackle climate change.

With 73 per cent of the forest's area being farmland, part of the project will look to integrate trees into the farmed landscape.

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Young gamblers

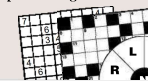
FIGURES showing more than one in 10 young people in York have gambled is the tip of the iceberg of the issue, says York Council's public health director Peter Roderick, who blamed smart phone betting apps and gambling adverts. Full story: Page 2.

'No tax changes'

CHANCELLOR Rachel Reeves is not expected to change taxes at next week's Spring Statement, it is understood. The Chancellor is set to deliver her statement next Wednesday, against the backdrop of a faltering economy and global uncertainty. Full story: Page 4.

Puzzles Post

16 daily crosswords and puzzles: Pages 2 and 16.



Wickes profits fall

WICKES has revealed a drop in profits and sales for the past year after cash-strapped customers pulled back on big-ticket purchases. However, shares in the company lifted after it pointed to a 'good start' with trading in 2025. Full story: Page 17.

Over 200 stores nationwide