

Comment & Opinion

Darlington & Stockton Times Water industry shame

SOUTHERN WATER has become the latest company to introduce a hosepipe ban, its customers joining those of Yorkshire Water, Thames Water and South East Water in being under restrictions.

The dusty brown countryside bears witness to what the statistics tell us: Yorkshire had its driest spring in 132 years and so a water shortage is inevitable. Perhaps, in another time, there would have been some sympathy with those who are at the mercy of the great British weather when they are tasked with ensuring that we all have enough water.

But in this privatised era, the truth is that these monopoly operators make a handsome profit – £237m for Yorkshire Water last year – while paying their bosses vast sums – the chief executive at Yorkshire got a salary and pension package of £657,000 and a £371,000 bonus in 2023-24 – and yet they give their customers a poor service: Yorkshire loses 260m litres in leaks every day and has discharged sewage into rivers for 1.5m hours since 2020. Now comes the hosepipe ban.

Customers don't have a choice to take their custom elsewhere. They have to pay their bills – which are to rise by 41 per cent over the next five years – to whichever company supplies their area. They cannot switch. In Yorkshire, a third of the money raised by bill-payers goes on serving debts and paying dividends to the four ultimate shareholders who are based in Singapore, Hong Kong, the US and Australia.

This distance makes the situation even more frustrating: there is no one to be held to account for the failures, for the sewage, for the bans, for the leaks, for the lack of obvious strategy.

Yorkshire's population has risen by 500,000 since 2000 yet no new reservoir has been built for more than 40 years.

The hosepipe ban is the latest in the drip, drip, drip of shame of this privatised industry.

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Solar farm folly

AS summer invites us outdoors, it's worth reflecting on what truly restores us: time spent in nature – amongst meadows, grazing livestock and open skies.

Yet these landscapes are increasingly being lost to industrial-scale solar farms.

Across North Yorkshire and County Durham, fields are being fenced off and covered with solar panels, electricity substations, CCTV towers and "danger of death" signs.

This is not the green future many of us envisaged. Yes, we need renewable energy – but why sacrifice agricultural land and cherished landscapes to get it?

A proposal currently being considered by North Yorkshire Council would affect the historic landscape on the edge of the Thorp Perrow estate at Bedale which is at risk from the 113 acre Stell solar farm (D&S Times, July 11).

Close to Exelby village, the proposed site surrounds a privately owned family home and two footpaths which form part of the popular walks that start in Bedale Market Place. Imagine the dire impact on the local community and tourism if by some folly this scheme was allowed to go ahead.

There are better alternatives. Rooftops, car parks, brown field and previously developed land offer space for solar development without scarring our rural environment. CPRE and others have long argued for this sensible, balanced approach.

Ed Miliband and fellow policymakers should take a staycation this year and visit the treasured countryside of North Yorkshire – and see what's at stake before waving through more countryside-destroying schemes.

Nigel Foster, Bedale.



The recent warm weather has meant a happier time for butterflies, like this Red Admiral on a buddleja, pictured in his garden by John Walton

Railway origins

UP until some ten years ago, my hobby was model engineering.

Sadly, this is no longer possible due to physical disability.

I still, however, subscribe to some of the model engineering publications just to know what other people are up to.

I quote from the magazine Model Engineer and Workshop, June 2025.

In the section titled Club News the following quotation is made by the editor of the Welling and District Model Engineering Society, Tony Riley – "listing the operational railways of 1825, of which, there were several. The reason why the Stockton & Darlington Railway is so widely known about is because the

North Eastern Railway have a very good publicity department".

Could some railway historian please comment on the validity of this statement?

And, if true, who were these other railways, when did they open, who supplied their locomotives and what was their ultimate fate?

John Davies, Billingham.

Water source

WHY is it only bad news that makes the headlines?

Locally we are told that hosepipes have been banned by Yorkshire Water yet Teessiders obtain their water from Northumbrian Water.

Many years ago I was at a water conference where water and its relevance to local industry was the subject discussed.

Alongside me sat Walter Severs who worked at BSC and who I knew from our work rebuilding the BOS plant at Lackenby to increase its production.

Lackenby and Redcar Blast furnace used two types of water, potable and industrial and Walter was a specialist in such waters.

In the 1960s and 70s, a big industrial expansion was forecast for Teesside, particularly the iron and steel sections as indicated in a report by the then chairman of BSC, Sir Monty Finniston, hence the interest in this conference by BSC and my company Ashmores.

To serve the water needs of this expansion, a new reservoir was planned at Kielder which on completion would be the largest man-made body of water in Europe.

The economic outlook for Teesside looked rosy and as an added bonus, Northumbria Water's households would never be short of water.

Alas by the time Kielder was operational, industry had declined, BSC never expanded, in fact it contracted as did industry on the Tyne. Redcar's blast furnace and Lackenby's BOS plant were demolished; ICI was disbanded, plants at Wilton and Billingham shut down and ENRON power plant is no more.

Notwithstanding its supply source, it should be recognised that potable water, drinking water, is expensive to produce and should not be wantonly wasted.

Colin Hatton, Marton, Middlesbrough.

Endangered birds

I NOTICE in the D&S Times of July 4 that record numbers of hen harriers have been killed or gone missing under suspicious circumstances in the last five years according to the RSPB, "Number of hen

Hospital's future looking bright

IT has undergone some turbulent times in the last decade, but the Friarage Hospital in Northallerton really has something to celebrate this week.

The new £35.5m surgical hub was officially opened by nurse Anne Lamb last Friday, in a ceremony attended by staff, patients and MP Rishi Sunak.

The hub means surgeries at the hospital will double – delivering around 10,000

Spectator's Notes

operations a year including hip and knee replacements, gall bladder surgery and cancer surgery.

This is fantastic news for the hospital's future, which 13 years ago was in doubt due to the downgrading of the A&E

and maternity services, much to the dismay of thousands of protesters who took to the streets in May 2012.

Then-MP William Hague joined the march, which saw 2,000 people descend on County Hall before making their way down the High Street to the stricken hospital.

Many feared the downgrading would lead to the eventual closure of the

Friarage. And while there were concerns for the maternity unit, the midwife-led centre continues to welcome about 1,200 babies each year.

With the opening of the surgical hub, alongside the fantastic £10m Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre which opened in 2018 to deliver chemotherapy, the future looks bright for the Friarage Hospital.

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harriers killed or missing at new high – RSPB" (D&S Times, July 4).

The report further states they are at a "high risk of extinction as a result of human persecution. Between 2020 and 2024 there were 102 incidents of killing or missing birds recording according to a new report from the RSPB".

In the same edition of the D&S Times, Conservative MP Rishi Sunak speaks in favour of grouse shooting, praising "the conservation efforts of gamekeepers who help protect endangered species such as curlew, lapwing and merlin". He conveniently does not mention hen harriers.

It is said that gamekeepers are to blame, but people seem reluctant to speak out. I suppose that's because it's difficult to prove.

No, I am not a member of Wild Justice or the RSPB.

William Barker, Thornton-le-Street.

The original HS2

LAST week the Westminster Transport Committee heard from Mark Wild, chief executive of HS2 Ltd, and Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill, junior transport minister, that all the problems in HS2 were the last government's fault for "starting too early".

They will try harder in the autumn to get the project back under some sort of financial control by trying to renegotiate some contracts.

However, they openly admitted the contractors didn't need to do this.

They were unable to give any estimate of how long the project will take.

Worryingly Mark Wild placated the committee by reassuring them HS2 was the best railway that money could buy. He just couldn't tell them how much money.

The Waverley Line in the Scottish Borders cost £4m per mile to relay track on old track bed. HS2 is costing £403m per mile.

No one mentioned the Great Central



After hearing about cairns/stone piles in the national news this week, it was interesting to spot this tower in Arkle Beck, Arkengarthdale, says Christian Player, who adds 'I didn't kick it over,' referring to stories about a walker who dismantles stone stacks in the Peak District, and is highlighting damage they can do to the environment

Railway taken up in the 1970s which ran from Sheffield to London 15 miles to the east of HS2.

Dr Rob Bell in his TV series "Walking Britain's Lost Railways" referred to The Great Central Railway as "Britain's original HS2".

Nigel Boddy, Darlington.

Cut the waffle

THERE have been letters published lately regarding the saturation TV coverage of tennis and football, which is way over the top.

With tennis you don't know how long a match is going to be.

If it's an interesting match then stick with it.

However the football group matches last only 90 minutes, plus half time. What is baffling is why is the coverage on for three hours? We don't need an hour of waffling and so-called expert opinions.

So why not cut it short? For most matches, only the highlights would suffice.

John Brant, Darlington.

Full house

WHILE not disputing any part of Celine Barry's arguments in sup-

port of Proportional Representation "Voting system" (D&S Times letters, July 11), I am, nevertheless, left wondering where all the extra MPs (the inevitable consequence of this method of voting) are going to sit?

Trust isn't the only thing that needs rebuilding, for one of the biggest surprises I had when actually visiting the two Parliamentary Chambers was how small they were and being told that when all the members are present, there is insufficient seating for them.

Jo Jones, Darlington.

Electric vehicle weight

I WAS interested to read the letter by Stan Wilby regarding his concern about existing load thresholds with electric vehicles for multi storey car parks. Sadly, I suspect this will not illicit a response from anyone in authority.

Two years ago I also raised similar concerns by letter to Darlington councillor Jonathan Dulston and the Darlington Fire Brigade regarding the siting of EV charging points and later the floor load capacity limits of EVs at the Darlington multi storey car park on Beaumont Street.

Even though I sent Cllr Dulston several reminders by text, I have not to this day received any reply or even an acknowledgement regarding my concerns.

By a strange coincidence, just two weeks after I had penned my letter, the Luton airport car park fire occurred – talk about fate getting involved.

Therefore, I suspect that on past performance, it must be assumed that the only way anyone in authority is willing to listen to your genuine and relevant concerns, is to just wait for a significant event to occur.

Mike Kerr, Darlington.

Win some, lose some

YET another ill-thought-out appointment by the BBC.

Having just discarded Gary Lineker from its employment, it seems to have replaced him with Wayne Rooney, whose mumbled Liverpool accent will be understood only by viewers on Merseyside, leaving the rest in need of subtitles.

Meanwhile, every cricketer should raise a glass in honour of two lads from Yorkshire achieving numbers one and two status as the best batsmen in the world, respectively Harry Brook and Joe Root.

Peter Rickaby, Selby.



A gleaming steam-powered engine parked up in Helmsley, pictured by Louise Cope, of Bilsdale



The moon shines down on a field of wheat at Lords Moor, Bedale, by Nigel Foster