



ENGLAND'S Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Professor Chris Whitty, has warned that the next few weeks will be “the worst” of the pandemic for the NHS, as seven new vaccine ‘super-hubs’ open up across the UK.

Professor Whitty urged people across the UK to try to avoid unnecessary contact with others as much as they possibly can, as the NHS is under so much pressure.

In an interview, he said that there were more than 30,000 people in English hospitals with COVID-19, compared to about 18,000 at the peak of the first wave of infections in April.

Some hospitals have had to cancel urgent operations for cancer patients.

Fortunately, the UK has been quick to roll out vaccines, and last week a third vaccine was

approved. Created by the American company, Moderna, it will be available in the spring.

As First News went to press, more than 2.6 million jabs had been given out to around 2.2 million people, including the Queen, who received hers at Windsor Castle.

New ‘super-hubs’ are being set up around the country, which the Government hopes will help reach its target of 2m vaccinations a week.

However, the PM says that people shouldn’t get careless, now that a vaccine is on its way – saying the UK is at a “very perilous moment”.

EDITOR'S COMMENT



PRINCE Charles has spoken for 50 years about his passion for the planet.

He was talking about his concerns about single use plastic way before it had become a common worry for the environment. At the time, some people even thought his views were a bit crazy.

But he has been proven right and it was good to see him launching his Terra Carta project this week – which he writes about on our front page. Big businesses and every single one of us can do our bit for the planet’s recovery, he says.

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GOOD WEEK FOR...

CHRISTINA McANEA

THE UK’s biggest trade union, Unison, has elected its first female leader, former NHS worker Christina McAnea. Unison represents 1.3 million people who work in public services, such as education, health, energy and police.



BAD WEEK FOR...

GREEN ENERGY IN AFRICA

A NEW study in the journal *Nature Energy*, by scientists at the University of Oxford, has predicted that it’s unlikely Africa will “leapfrog” into using renewable energies, and is set to be “locked into” using coal, oil and gas until 2030. But the report also says that it’s not too late for that to change.



BEE-HARMING PESTICIDE ALLOWED



A PESTICIDE banned in the EU and believed to harm bees has been approved for use in England.

In 2018, the European Union and the UK agreed to a ban on all outdoor uses of the pesticide thiamethoxam to protect bees.

At the time, former Environment Secretary Michael Gove promised to uphold the ban, even after Brexit.

However, the UK has now allowed the “emergency use” of the pesticide to protect sugar beet crops in east England.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has said that there are no other ways to protect the crops, and that Belgium, Denmark and Spain have also approved the pesticide for the same reason.

DEFRA also said that the pesticide will only be used on ‘non-flowering’ crops which bees don’t visit and that “protecting pollinators is a priority for this government.”



BUNGLING BURGLARS BUTT-DIAL THE POLICE!

TWO burglars are being called “the world’s unluckiest”, after one of them sat on their phone and called 999 – mid-burglary!

After listening closely to the accidental call, officers in Staffordshire realised that the pair were talking about their illegal antics.

Officers worked out where the call was coming from, and sent a patrol out to arrest the careless pair.

At no point did the burglars realise that they had accidentally rung the police, so officers at the station could hear the patrol arriving, over the phone!

Chief Inspector John Owen tweeted the details of the arrest, alongside an image of the world’s most famous bungling burglars – Home Alone’s Wet Bandits.

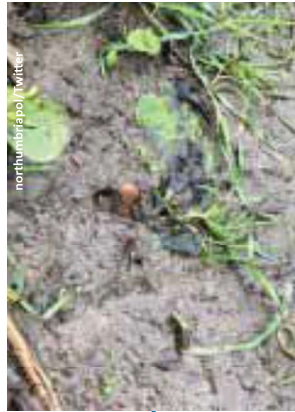




UK

● Festivals ask for help

The music industry is asking the Government for a plan for this summer's festivals, or some may have to pull the plug. Jamie Njoku-Goodwin from UK Music, which campaigns on behalf of the British music industry, said: "We have a matter of weeks in which we can convince major events to hold off cancelling." UK Music is asking the Government to provide a scheme to insure events, so that if they all have to be cancelled for a second year, there will be some compensation.



TYNE AND WEAR

● Is that a pota-toe?

When a dog walker saw what looked like a toe poking out of the ground in a muddy field, she understandably called the police. But when Northumbria Police came to survey the scene, it turned out (thankfully!) it was just a potato. Inspector Phil Hamrani said: "The search team did have a chuckle when they realised it was a potato, but the call was made in good faith and we can only praise the vigilance of the woman who made the call."

EAST AYRSHIRE

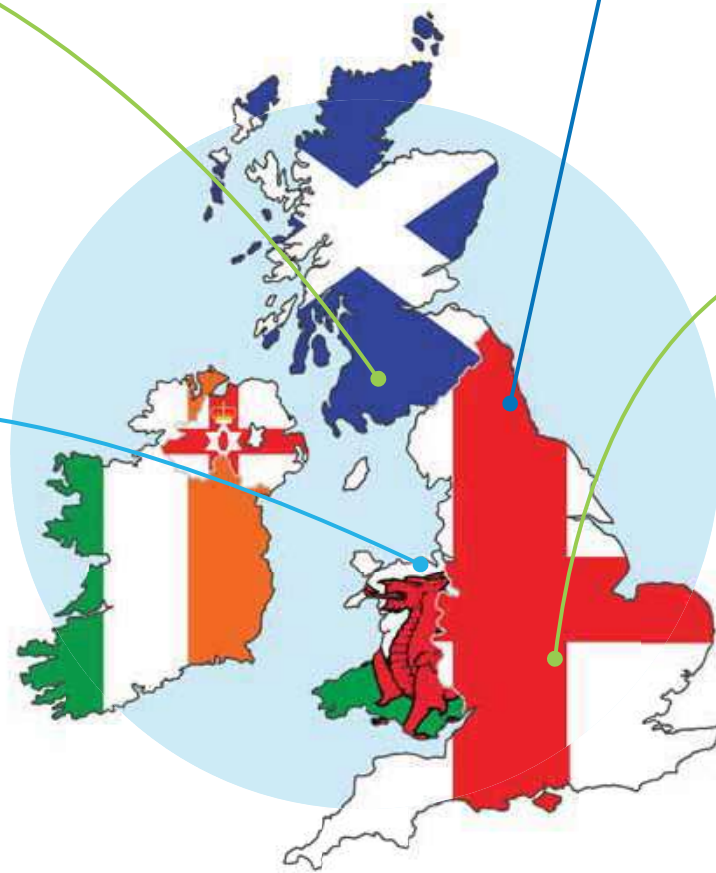
● Sledge shock

If the snow is tempting you to take the sledge out for your daily exercise, make sure you check there are no fences or other obstacles in your path. Finn Johnston, 18, learned a very painful lesson while sledging at Afton Reservoir, after he collided with a fence and a long chunk of wood pierced his bum cheek and he had to be rushed to hospital. "It was horrific, I'm still in shock," he told the Daily Record from his hospital bed.

WALES

● Weather warnings

Police in Flintshire have warned people not to break lockdown rules, particularly after snow and ice warnings. When officers were called to help a driver who skidded off the road, they also got stuck in the hazardous conditions. Police said: "This is why we say to you do not come out. [The incident] is now involving two agencies, two police vehicles, two mountain rescue vehicles, three police officers and the casualty."



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



● Iguana escapes fire

An iguana made a daring escape from a house fire by jumping onto a firefighter's helmet. A spokeswoman for Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service said: "The fireman didn't realise the iguana had climbed on top of him. What a surprise he had to find an iguana chilling on his head, eager to escape the burning building!" The fire was caused by a heated mat for the reptile, but luckily no-one was hurt, including the iguana. According to the London Fire Brigade, the number of animals being rescued increased in 2020. They saved 755 animals in 2020, including 337 cats, 214 birds, 73 dogs, 61 foxes, 17 horses, 17 deer, seven squirrels, a goat, a sheep and a cow. The figures show a big jump from the 602 animal rescue calls in 2019.

UK

● Protesters taken to court

Hundreds of people involved in Extinction Rebellion (XR) protests are being taken to court. The protest movement aims to push the world's governments into taking more decisive action to stop climate change. XR protests have been common since 2018 and XR says around 1,700 people are being charged, mostly for minor offences like obstructing the highway. Lawyers say that some may still be expected to travel to London to face trial in person, despite the risk of the pandemic and current lockdown.



XR protesters outside oil company Shell's offices

UK

● Black Lives Matter funding

Black Lives Matter UK will start funding black-led organisations across the country in January, using the £1.2 million in donations that the group received over the summer. Educational projects, campaign groups, police monitoring projects, and some new protest groups will be receiving the donations. More than 260 towns and cities held protests in June and July last year, and activists from a youth group called All Black Lives UK say more protests will take place this year.





A NEW study has found that, at just four months old, ravens are as smart as fully-grown orangutans and gorillas!

Ravens and other crows are well known for being proper clever-clogs, with the ability to work with others to find food, and collect and use tools.

Now we know just how smart they are in comparison to other animals, thanks to the work of Professor Dr Simone Pika and her team from the University of Osnabrück.

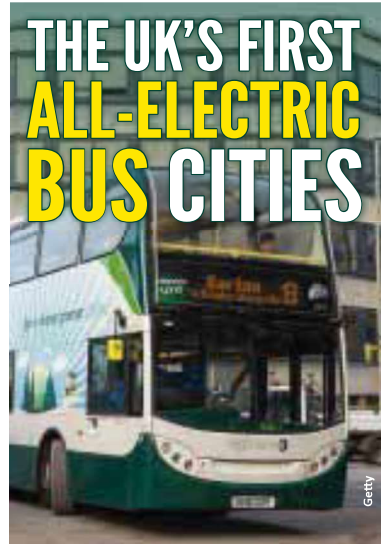
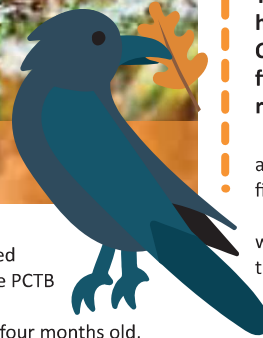
They adapted an exam designed to test the brain power of different primates, called the Primate Cognition Test Battery (PCTB), so that it could be completed by ravens.

The adapted PCTB tested the ravens' learning abilities, their social skills and their ability to understand where objects go

when they can't see them any more.

Eight young ravens were hand-raised especially for the study, and given the PCTB at 4, 8, 12 and 16 months old.

The researchers found that, at just four months old, the ravens were able to complete the test just as well as adult apes could. The scientists also say that the birds' performance didn't change much over time, which suggests that their brains develop very quickly after birth. At just eight weeks old, they can already follow another bird's or human's gaze to see what they're looking at.



THE UK'S FIRST ALL-ELECTRIC BUS CITIES

TRANSPORT Secretary Grant Shapps has announced that Coventry and Oxford are set to become the UK's first cities to have a bus network run entirely on electricity.

Coventry and Oxford beat 17 other towns and cities in a competition to become the first all-electric bus cities.

They were judged on how difficult it would be to install an electric bus network, the impact it would have, and whether they'd had investment in electric buses before.

Now, the two cities are developing proposals to deliver to the Government, explaining how they'll use a £50 million grant to transform their bus networks.

If their proposals are accepted, the cities could replace all their buses with electric versions, and install other necessary equipment, such as charging stations.

RICHEST MAN SHUFFLE



ELON Musk, the man behind Tesla cars and the SpaceX programme, briefly became the richest man in the world last week.

He overtook Amazon founder Jeff Bezos to hit the No1 spot, but slipped back to second after losing \$14bn (about £10bn) in a single day! The fall was down to his electric car company, Tesla, which lost 8% of its value.

The ups and downs of the stock market, where the value of mega-companies is decided, shows how quickly and easily huge sums of money can come and go.

At the time of writing, Musk is worth about \$176.2bn (£128bn), while Bezos is worth \$182.1bn (£132bn). Musk is still well ahead of the third richest person, French luxury tycoon Bernard Arnault, who is around \$20bn behind him.

Musk, who also helped found PayPal, has been focused on his SpaceX programme in recent years. SpaceX uses rockets to deliver cargo to astronauts aboard the International Space Station. Also, it has been putting its Starlink satellites in the sky to offer faster broadband. The goal of SpaceX is to reduce the costs of taking things to space and, eventually, to put people on Mars and build a colony there.

WOW!

IN 2020, more than half of the cars sold in Norway were electric.

That's a first for anywhere in the world. The four best-selling vehicles in the country were the Audi e-tron, the Tesla Model 3, the Volkswagen ID.3 and the Nissan Leaf – all fully electric.

Norway aims for all new cars sold to be "zero emission" by 2025.



Prince Charles uses an Audi e-tron

8. WORLD NEWS



● Film festival for one
The Gothenburg Film Festival will carry out the ultimate social distancing cinema experience this year, inviting one person to spend a week watching all 60 of the festival's films while isolated on an island in the North Sea! The winning applicant will not be allowed to take anything with them: no phone, no computer, no books, but they will be staying in a luxury converted lighthouse. They'll be expected to review the movies, using the theme of 'social distance', in a daily video blog.

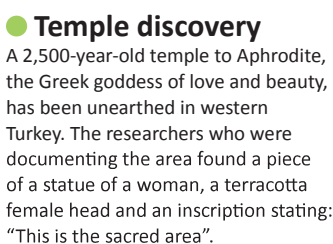
● Farmers' protest continues
Up to 250 million farmers in India have been on strike for almost two months, protesting against three new laws they claim are "anti-farming". The government says the new laws will improve the industry, but protesters say that they change decades-old rules on how crops are produced, stored and sold, and give big, private companies lots more power in the agriculture industry. In December, thousands of farmers captured world headlines when they marched through India in protest, making it past police with tear gas, and eventually setting up a huge camp on the borders of the capital city, New Delhi. Talks between the farmers and the government are ongoing, and while the government has tried to compromise, farmers want all three laws repealed (cancelled). There is a lot at stake in the protests – around half of all workers in India are in agriculture.



● Opposition crackdown
Last week, dozens of politicians, campaigners and activists were arrested in Hong Kong for allegedly breaking the state's new national security law (NSL). The law was created by the Chinese government last year. The government said that those arrested had taken part in an illegal poll. A few days later, most were released, but were required to give authorities their passports, and will have to report their whereabouts.



● Temple discovery
A 2,500-year-old temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty, has been unearthed in western Turkey. The researchers who were documenting the area found a piece of a statue of a woman, a terracotta female head and an inscription stating: "This is the sacred area".



● Nude fugitive found
Two fishermen laying crab traps near Darwin caught more than they bargained for, when a wanted man called for help from a tree. They then noticed Luke Voskresensky, 40, who was naked and clinging to a tree. The man was on the run and had broken free from his location-monitoring ankle bracelet and escaped into the crocodile-infested waters. He told the two fishermen that he was very thirsty, and had survived for four days eating snails. They rescued him, and returned him to the authorities.



● Surprise Brexit charges
European customers of UK businesses have been hit by unexpected charges when ordering products across the Channel. Others have found that certain companies, such as Fortnum & Mason, are no longer shipping products to Europe at all. The deal signed with the EU means that while there aren't any taxes on goods shipped between the two regions, certain products will now be subject to charges called customs duties.



● Flight disappears
Sixty-two people are thought to have died after a flight from Jakarta crashed into the sea, shortly after taking off. Since the crash last week, pieces of the plane have since been recovered in the Java Sea. As First News went to press, divers had recovered one of the plane's black box flight recorders.

