Global chiefs fall back in love with UK

JAMES BOOTH
@Jamesbooth1

The UK has bounced back as a destination for future growth among global chief executives, according to a major survey published yesterday.

The UK remained the fourth most important territory for growth for chief executives, joint with India and Australia, and behind the US, China and Germany.

Chief executives in Europe’s largest economies rated the UK as one of the most important territories for their organisation’s future growth, the survey from audit firm PwC found.

For chief executives in Germany, France and Italy, the UK is viewed as positively now as it was in 2015, with a “notable uptick since last year”.

In Germany, the percentage of chief executives who view the UK as one of their top three growth targets jumped to 13 per cent, from six per cent last year, to match the level in 2015.

Meanwhile outside Europe, the UK has become more attractive to chief executives in the US, Australia and Japan.

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Pressure mounted yesterday on Boris Johnson to make a decision on whether to go ahead with the divisive HS2 rail line, after it emerged the project’s budget could blow out to £106bn.

As anti-HS2 opponents seethed at the latest cost estimate, up from just £56bn this time last year, business groups and rail industry voices urged the Prime Minister to put the future of Europe’s biggest infrastructure project beyond doubt.

Despite the eye-watering price tag, review author and former HS2 Ltd chairman Douglas Oakervee will recommend that the government build the rail line in his as-yet-unpublished report, which was leaked to the Financial Times. However, he will also advise the government to hit pause on a second phase of the project due to connect Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester.

Instead the review suggests the government consider conventional train lines to form part of the link between those cities. In response, more than 40 construction and rail industry bosses sought to put a stop to any lingering doubt, signing a letter which urged the PM to “get HS2 done”.

CONTINUES ON P3
BBC’s new boss must win back its audiences

The decision to step down as BBC director general has created a vacancy for one of the most prestigious and influential jobs in UK media — if, that is, anyone is brave enough to take it. Speculation is already mounting about who will take up the mantle (there’s a good chance the corporation will get its first female boss), but there’s no doubt Hall’s successor faces a wave of unprecedented challenges. Of course, the BBC is no stranger to scandals. From disputes over its political output and the coverage of historical sexual abuse allegations to the ongoing saga of its gender pay gap, the broadcaster has often found itself in crisis but always manages to come through the other side. Now, however, the public service broadcaster faces a more existential threat. Top of the list for the next BBC boss will be to forge a relationship with the government. Boris Johnson and his chief aide Dominic Cummings have already proven standoffish to say the least, instigating a boycott of Radio 4’s flagship Today programme. They have also threatened to decriminalise non-payment of the licence fee — a move that would likely kneecap the organisation’s funding. Meanwhile, Hall’s replacement will be thrust into a fierce firefight between traditional broadcasters and Silicon Valley interlopers such as Netflix, which have far deeper pockets than the BBC and are not held back by public interest obligations. In fact, with younger audiences deserting the corporation at an alarming rate and the trusty over-75 shunted by the free licence fee cut, the BBC has never looked on shakier ground. There is, therefore, no doubt that the next Beeb boss will need to implement radical reform to ensure the historic institution can hold its own in the modern world. Yet the director general will have a first, more fundamental duty: to reestablish the BBC’s purpose and value in the eyes of the British people. The broadcaster’s obligation to serve everyone in the country is — and has always been — both a blessing and a curse. But now, for the first time, it faces real scrutiny over whether its public service remit remains relevant, or is merely an anachronism. Navigating these challenges is no mean feat. Nor is the task faced by chairman David Clementi, who will lead the search for the next chief of W1A. One thing is clear, however: the BBC must revitalise its offering and reconnect with its audience, or the new chief could find themselves managing an institution in decline.

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UK to outpace Eurozone rivals

The Bees has never looked to be on shacker ground

HARRY ROBERTSON
@harryrobertson

The UK will be the fastest-growing European economy in the G7 this year and next, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said yesterday as it once again downgraded its forecasts for global growth.

The IMF predicted that the UK economy grew 1.3 per cent in 2019, its slowest growth since 1993, but will expand 1.8 per cent in 2020 and 1.5 per cent in 2021 and 2022 respectively. This puts British growth expectations third out of the G7 countries for 2020.

The updated forecasts came as the IMF cut its global growth expectations and said there are “no clear signs of a turning point” for the world economy despite the signing of a US-China trade deal.

The lender of last resort said it expects global growth for 2019 to come in at just 2.9 per cent. This is lower than its previous three per cent prediction, which would have already been the worst figure since the global financial crisis.

The international lender of last resort predicted global growth will pick up to 3.3 per cent this year, down from a previous prediction of 3.4 per cent. It foresaw growth in 2021 of 3.4 per cent.

The report came as world leaders and business figures jetted into the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Sluggish global growth and geopolitical tensions can be expected to be a key topic at the elite meeting this week.

IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath said the downward “owed largely to downward revisions for India”.

She said that “the world needs stronger multilateral cooperation” to tackle slow growth.

ECONOMIC DIGEST

UK HOUSEHOLDS GROW CHEERIER IN JANUARY
UK households became more upbeat about their finances in January, a survey from data firm IHS Markit showed yesterday, with December’s General Election result and falling inflation pushing optimism to a one-year high. The survey was the latest to show rising optimism after glowing Boris Johnson’s thumping election win in the middle of December. Firms and households can now be sure Britain is leaving the EU on 31 January, providing some economic certainty after a torrid 2019. Yet Joe Hayes of IHS Markit said: “Cooling inflation was most likely the real driving force, propping up real earnings and disposable incomes.” Households reported that living cost inflation eased in January.

GERMAN GROWTH SET FOR WORST RATE SINCE 2013
Germany’s central bank yesterday predicted that the country’s economy grew last year at its slowest pace since the Eurozone crisis as its manufacturing sector was badly shaken by global trade tensions. The Bundesbank estimated that Europe’s biggest economy grew by just 0.6 per cent in 2019, its worst figure since 2013 amid a sovereign debt crisis.
Tech bosses give new regulation a warm reception

JAMES WARRINGTON AND EMILY NICOLLE
@j_a_warrington @emyjocalle

THE BOSSES of two of the world’s largest technology companies embraced calls for updated regulation yesterday, amid an increased spotlight on such companies’ behaviour.

Apple chief executive Tim Cook yesterday acknowledged that the global corporate tax system needs to be overhauled, adding he was optimistic that upcoming reform would be fair.

Speaking in Dublin, Cook said: “I think logically everybody knows it needs to be rehauled, I would certainly be the last person to say that the current system or the past system was the perfect system. I’m hopeful and optimistic that [regulators] will find something.”

Tech giants such as Apple have come under increased scrutiny over their tax practices amid concerns they are dodging their liabilities by booking profit in low-tax countries. This has prompted the OECD to push for reform to ensure that such companies paid tax in regions where they serve customers.

Apple is currently challenging a 2016 European Commission ruling forcing it to pay €13bn (£11bn) in back taxes to the Irish government.

Separately Google chief executive und registered “I think it is important that governments and regulations tackle it sooner rather than later, and give a framework for it,” said Pichai in Brussels.

The statement was among Pichai’s first appearances as chief executive of both Google and its parent firm Alphabet, after founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page stepped down last month.

The Commission is set to take a tougher line on regulation of artificial intelligence, according to a draft proposal. One suggestion is a ban of up to five years on using facial recognition technology in public areas, in order to provide time for authorities to work out how to prevent abuses.

The more follows widespread outrage last autumn after it was revealed that King’s Cross Station in London had been using such technology for two years, without central oversight from the Metropolitan Police or City Hall.

Government criticised over HS2

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

“We want to take this opportunity to reiterate not only the devastating impact any curtailment of HS2 would have on our industry, but the detrimental effect cancellation would have on UK plc more widely in terms of jobs, manufacturing, investment and export potential,” the letter said.

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FEVER-TREE’s shares plummeted yesterday as it warned that “subdued” Christmas trading in the UK would knock 2019 profit to be lower than last year’s total.

The tonic maker now expects revenue growth of 9.7 per cent to £260.5m, compared to 2018’s 40 per cent growth rate.

That will see sales miss expectations for 2019, leading Fever-Tree to warn full-year earnings would be around five per cent lower than 2018 as a result.

The board revealed that key UK trading slipped one per cent to £132.6m, blaming weak consumer confidence and a subsequent slowdown in spending.

Chief executive Tim Warrillow said: “Despite the subdued end to the year in the UK, we have delivered a strong performance across many of our regions in 2019.”

“Whilst the UK mixer category has clearly not been immune from the consumer belt tightening seen in recent months, we remain the clear category leader and have a strong platform to return to growth during 2020 and beyond.”

Fever-Tree’s shares sank 27.2 per cent to 1,453p yesterday as investors sold out of the tonic company, marking the firm’s their lowest share price since 2017.

**BOEING** is in talks with banks about borrowing $10bn (€7.7bn) or more as 737 Max-related costs pile up, Reuters reported late last night. Boeing is said to have already secured $6bn from banks over fears that the 737 Max jet may remain grounded.

**Retail landlord Intu confirms it is in talks to raise more money**

**FEVER-TREE**

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JOE CURTIS

FEVER-TREE dips as drinks maker warns on profit

ASSAULT charges against Philip Green dropped

JAMES BOOTH

US ASSAULT charges against retail mogul Sir Philip Green have been dropped, his company Arcadia said yesterday.

Last May Green, 67, was charged with four counts of misdemeanour assault after an Arizona pilates instructor accused him of repeatedly touching her inappropriately.

Green was accused of spanking the instructor and grabbing her buttocks at the Canyon Ranch resort in Tucson, Arizona in 2016 and 2018, according to the Pima County Attorney’s Office.

The billionaire chairman of Arcadia, which owns Topshop, denied the allegations.

Yesterday, Arcadia said the cases had been dropped.

“At the request of the prosecution the cases alleging assault against Sir Philip Green, due to be heard before the Consolidated Court of Arizona in and for the county of Pima on 20 February 2020, were dismissed by the order of the honourable justice Vince Roberts on 17 January 2020,” Arcadia said.
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* 24/7 excludes the 6 hours from 10pm Friday to 4am Saturday, and 20 minutes just before the weekday market opens on Sunday night.
DEPARTMENT store chain Beales collapsed into administration yesterday, putting more than 1,000 jobs at risk.

The retailer had been in crisis talks with potential buyers, however the company was unable to secure a deal. Professional services firm KPMG was appointed as administrator, and the firm’s 23 stores will continue to trade while it assesses options for the business, including “dealing with prospective interested parties”.

Last month Beales hired KPMG to launch a strategic review and assess a potential sale of the business, following the collapse of the chain, which was founded in 1881, comes after what experts have described as the “worst year on record” for retailers, as overall annual sales dipped for the first time since 1995.

Will Wright, partner at KPMG and joint administrator, said: “For over a hundred years, Beales has been a stalwart of the high street in market towns up and down the UK, but like countless similar retailers, has found trading in recent times to be incredibly tough.

He added: “With the impact of high rents and rates exacerbated by disappointing trading over the Christmas period, and extensive discussions around additional investment proving unsuccessful, there were no other available options but to place the company into administration.

Wright said the firm will “endeavour to continue to operate all stores as a going concern while we assess options for the business, including dealing with prospective interested parties.”

Beales will continue to accept gift vouchers, customer deposits and customer returns/refunds over the next few weeks.

The collapse of the chain, which was launched in the second quarter of 2019, comes after what experts have described as the “worst year on record” for retailers, as overall annual sales dipped for the first time since 1995.

Jobs at risk after Beales falls into administration

JESS CLARK

THE PRIVATE equity owner of high street retailer Reiss is mulling putting the fashion chain up for sale following a period of strong performance.

Warburg Pincus has appointed investment bank Rothschild to launch a review of strategic options for the business, which could involve a sales process, Sky News reported yesterday.

If the US firm decides to sell the business, the process could be launched in the second quarter of this year, the broadcaster said.

Reiss has performed strongly since Warburg Pincus bought a substantial stake in the firm in 2016, bucking the trend on the UK high street which has seen retailers struggle in challenging trading conditions.

In its latest accounts Reiss reported that sales were up 8.3 per cent in the year ended 2 February 2019, while earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation increased 24 per cent to £13.8m.

The company – which has 69 standalone stores – said its expansion in store and online, focus on full price sales and investment in staff, operations, omni-channel infrastructure and customer experience had contributed to its significant growth.

Reiss has outperformed the market since Warburg Pincus bought a stake in 2016

JESS CLARK

The clothing and homeware retailer’s revenue fell from £315.6m to £311.7m in the 13 weeks ended 30 November, from £131.6m the previous year, as spending was subdued in the face of political uncertainty. Earnings before tax, interest, depreciation and amortisation fell from £40m in 2018 to £23.7m last year.

Chief Jason Hargreaves said: “The challenges faced by ourselves and the wider market have been well documented and our results released today continue to reflect that.”

Warburg Pincus hires advisers to mull offloading of strong performer Reiss

JESS CLARK

BRITISH transport firm Stagecoach has taken the government to court over claims that it was unfairly excluded from rail contracts by ministers.

Stagecoach is suing the government after being disqualified from bidding for three rail franchises after the pair clashed over pensions liabilities last year.

The company is seeking compensation as well as a judicial review, which could render already-awarded rail franchises invalid.

In the first day of the legal challenge, lawyers for the company yesterday described the rail franchise system as being “in crisis”, the Financial Times reported.

Since being disqualified for the rail bids by the Department for Transport, Stagecoach no longer runs any UK rail operations, and now solely focuses on buses and trams.

Arriva, part of German state-owned Deutsche Bahn, brought a separate claim for similar reasons, but settled out of court.

Stagecoach in court with the UK government

POPPY WOOD
PM to put ‘people before passports’

CATHERINE NEILAN
@CatNeilan
PM EMBARKS on a new immigration system with the aim of making the system fairer and more equal, ensuring EU nationals living in the UK have a physical document showing they have the right to live in the country. The amendment was passed by 270 votes to 229 – a majority of 41. The Withdrawal Agreement Bill will return to the Commons tomorrow, where the amendment is likely to be overturned by Johnson’s newly elected tribe of Conservative MPs. Lords will then decide whether to persist with the cause during the process known as ping pong.

Row over Truss’ private talks with minister

STEFAN BOSCIA
@Stefan_Boscia
INTERNATIONAL trade secretary Liz Truss has come under fire following a potential breach of the ministerial code of conduct.

Truss met Australian trade minister Simon Birmingham at the end of December. Birmingham was visiting the UK in a personal capacity and the two politicians arranged to meet for a meal, along with their families.

Over dinner, the pair discussed a potential UK/Australia trade deal. However, City A.M. understands that no civil servants were at the meeting despite the ministerial code requiring the presence of an official “for all discussions relating to government business”. A spokesperson for Truss did not deny the code of conduct had been breached.

They said: “Liz told her principal private secretary (PPS) about the meeting and the PPS asked if she wanted anyone from the civil service there, to which she said ‘no’.”

“A full read out of [the meeting] was shown to him afterwards.”

When it was suggested that Truss had broken the code by not taking an official to the dinner, the spokesperson said: “She was told that it wasn’t necessary by the PPS.”

A spokesperson for the Department of International Trade denied Truss had done anything wrong.

However, Labour’s shadow trade secretary Barry Gardiner said Truss was clearly in violation of the rules.

“The ministerial code is quite clear that any meeting with a foreign government minister where policy is to be discussed should be attended by a civil servant,” he said.

The secretary of state has to explain ‘why she did not abide by the code and cannot shuffle off the responsibility onto her private secretary.”

Downing Street declined to comment last night.

Frictionless trade just ‘not possible’, says Fox

CATHERINE NEILAN
@CatNeilan
ANY AUTOMATIC alignment to EU regulations as they change over time would be “completely incompatible with the concept of Brexit,” former trade minister Liam Fox said. He will also warn that “misunderstandings in the terminology” are already causing confusion.

“For the UK, the key element of any future regulatory environment will be the ability to determine its own rules so let us be clear at the outset that ‘alignment’ does not mean ‘control’,” he will say at a breakfast briefing.

Connecting the UK like never before.
BAE Systems to buy US military GPS and radio systems for over $2bn

EDWARD THICKNESSE

LEADING aerospace and defence company BAE Systems yesterday announced that it will purchase Collins Aerospace’s military GPS system for almost $2bn (£1.5bn). BAE said that the GPS business, which is considered a market leader, should generate revenues of £359m a year in 2020, with potential for growth of 10 per cent a year. The multinational also announced the purchase of fellow defence contractor Raytheon’s airborne tactical radio business for $275m.

The business, which supplies communications systems to the US Department of Defence, will be funded by cash from BAE’s balance sheet, while the GPS system will be bought using new debt.

The multinational will take on roughly 675 of Collins’ employees, but expects no other challenges to the integration. Both purchases are subject to the successful closure of Raytheon’s merger with United Technologies, which is expected in the first half of 2020. BAE’s shares rose 3.7 per cent, making it the FTSE 100’s top performer.

Anglo American makes £405m offer for Sirius

EDWARD THICKNESSE

Anglo American has agreed a £405m rescue deal with the board of embattled Sirius Minerals, it was announced yesterday.

Under the agreement, Sirius shareholders will receive 5.5p for each share, a 34 per cent premium to the 7 January closing price, representing a 46.5 per cent premium on the firm’s three-month price from last September. Sirius’ shares rose 2.6 per cent to 5.55p yesterday.

The offer is good news for Sirius’ share price, representing a 46.5 per cent premium on the firm’s three-month price from last September. Sirius’ shares rose 2.6 per cent to 5.55p yesterday.

TRAFIGURA takes six per cent stake in oil explorer

EDWARD THICKNESSE

COMMODITIES trader Trafigura has bought a six per cent stake in oil explorer President Energy, which has recently announced a new two-stage plan.

Anglo American said that it had been interested in the project for some time due to the “quality of the underlying asset”. In a statement, the mining giant said: “The project has the potential to fit well with Anglo American’s established strategy of focusing on world-class assets, particularly in the context of Anglo American’s portfolio trajectory towards later cycle products that support a fast-growing global population and a cleaner, greener, more sustainable world.”

The polyhalite deposit, which is the focus of the project, is believed to be the largest high-grade site in the world. The mine will be the UK’s largest in a generation.

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Octopus Energy set to take over Engie’s UK household business

EDWARD THICKNESSE

CHALLENGER energy supplier Octopus has agreed to take over Engie’s UK household energy business, after the French firm decided to leave the domestic market.

The deal, which will see Octopus supply Engie’s 70,000 UK customers, is the business’ sixth acquisition in two years.

Octopus, which currently has 1.4m customers — or five per cent of the UK market — will add the new customers to its ranks over the next couple of months.

The company remains consumer magazine Which’s only recommended energy supplier, and has recently announced a 2020 price cut for its customers.

Engie entered the UK market in 2017 but has decided to withdraw in order to focus on leading the zero carbon journey for businesses and local authorities.

The firm’s business energy customers and district energy supply operations are not impacted by this acquisition.

Greg Jackson, the company’s chief executive, commented: “It is an honour to acquire Engie’s UK home energy supply operation.”

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Oil prices rally amid pipeline closure in Libya

EDWARD THICKNESSE

OIL PRICES hit their highest levels in a week yesterday after a military blockade shut down production at two major sites in Libya, reducing crude flows from the Opec member to a trickle.

Two oilfields were shut on Sunday after forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar closed a pipeline, risking taking all of Libya’s output capacity offline. However, analysts said there was no need for concern as supply disruption is expected to be shortlived and other major producers can offset any drop in supply where necessary.

On Sunday world leaders met in Berlin to agree a truce in Libya, which has been rocked by internal discord since the death of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Brent crude rose one cent to $65.44, and West Texas Intermediate increased 0.7 per cent to $59.73.

The global shipping industry accounts for 2.2 per cent of all global emissions

Shipping industry to face £1 trillion cost for decarbonising

The shipping industry must spend at least £1 trillion (£1.2tn) on new fuel technology if it is to meet UN emissions targets by 2050. According to a new study by experts from UCL and the Energy Transitions Commission, the average that would need to be spent every year from 2030 is £50bn. Global shipping is responsible for about 2.2 per cent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions. The International Maritime Organisation has set itself the target of reducing emissions by 50 per cent by 2050. If the sector was to fully decarbonise by 2050, an additional £400bn of investment would be needed over the 20-year period.
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JESS CLARK
@jclarkjourno

OFFICE takeup in central London jumped in the final quarter of last year, as the diversity of businesses operating in the capital provided resilience for the city’s commercial property market, new data showed.

Takeup increased four per cent to 3.6m square feet (sq ft) in the three months to the end of December, above the 10-year quarterly average of 3.3m sq ft.

Business services was the most dominant sector during the quarter, representing 25 per cent of overall takeup. During the period, Convene took 67,245 sq ft at 80 Fenchurch Street, Verisk Analysts moved into a 50,418 sq ft space at 22 Bishopsgate and Adecco Alfred Marks took 44,912 sq ft at 10 Bishops Square.

Banking and finance companies accounted for 23 per cent of central London office takeup, and creative industries made up 21 per cent of the total, according to the latest research by CBRE. The amount of space London’s office market boosted by diverse firms

Government doubles funding for electric car charge points to £10m

ALEX DANIEL
@alexdaniel

THE TRANSPORT secretary yesterday announced a fresh wave of funding to build thousands more on-street residential electric vehicle charge points this year.

Grant Shapps said he hoped to help make it easier to find “affordable, reliable” charge points for electric car drivers by doubling current funding to £10m. The sum is enough to build up to another 3,600 charge points across the country, according to the Department for Transport (DfT).

Ministers also hope to make information about all public charge points openly available in future, including locations and power ratings.

“This could then be integrated into route mapping applications.”

Shapps said: “We want to make electric cars the new normal, and ensuring drivers have convenient places to charge is key to that.

“By doubling funding again... we are helping drivers easily locate and use affordable, reliable charge points.”

Wetherspoons to celebrate Brexit Day by slashing price tags on drinks

JESS CLARK
@jclarkjourno

PUB CHAIN JD Wetherspoon is planning to celebrate Brexit by slashing the prices of a selection of drinks on 31 January as the UK leaves the EU.

The offer will reduce prices of drinks from across Europe, including Estrella, Beck’s and Peroni, by around 60p. The promotion — which will run until 29 February — will be available across all of the company’s 870 pubs across the UK.

The move appears to signal a change of heart from Brexit-supporting Wetherspoon chairman Tim Martin, who previously pledged to reduce the number of EU products sold at his pubs.

Martin said yesterday that there has been “far too much political posturing” between the UK and EU during the Brexit negotiations.

“Many of our customers are keen to celebrate Brexit. At the same time we want to remain friends with our European neighbours and offer a range of drinks at an excellent price.”

In a statement yesterday Martin also said the government should remove tariffs on nearly 13,000 non-EU imports, saying “UK consumers will shun EU goods if tariffs are imposed on UK exports.”

Brexit chairman Tim Martin said Wetherspoons customers were keen to celebrate
**SPORT**

**EUROPEAN FOOTBALL AT RISK OF BEING TORN APART BY FIFA PROPOSALS, WARNS LALIGA CHIEF JAVIER TEBAS**

P28

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**LEGAL AND PUBLIC NOTICES**

**CITY OF LONDON**

**THE PLANNING ACTS AND THE ORDERS AND REGULATIONS MADE THEREUNDER**

This notice gives details of applications registered by the Department of The Built Environment Code: FULL/FULMAP/FULIA/FULIA3 – Planning Permission; LBC – Listed Building Consent; TPO – Tree Preservation Order; OUT – Online Planning Permission

27 Finsbury Circus, London, EC2M 7EA
[19/01269/FULL]
Change of use of part of the second basement level (units 1-4) from office (Use Class B1) to a flexible use for either office (Use Class B1) or ultrasound clinic (Use Class D1) (58.5 sq.m).

18 - 20 King Street, London, EC2V 5EG
[19/01350/LBC]
Partial demolition, repair, and refurbishment to the existing building known as the Madingley Court Hotel & Restaurant at ground level, first and second floors, creation of a new entrance structure on West Poultry Avenue (and associated refurbishment of the existing canopy over West Poultry Avenue) with new facade to West Smithfield and Charterhouse Street; new entrances on the corner of Farringdon Street and Charterhouse Street; Change of use to provide a museum and ancillary uses and areas, together with a flexible retail, restaurant, drinking establishment and leisure (gym) use for the perimeter houses.

Poultry Market

Partial demolition, repair, refurbishment and alteration of the existing building known as the Poultry Market, Charterhouse Street, at basement, ground, first, and second floors, creation of a triple height canopy above a public realm space; renewals to the north service bay; internal decoration; change of use from office (Class B1) to: (i) a flexible use of other retail (Class A1) or assembly and leisure (Class D2) at first floor level and ground floor level (834 sq.m GIA); (ii) a flexible use of either office (Class B1) or non-residential institutions (Class D1) or assembly and leisure (Class D2) at first floor level and ground floor level (983 sq.m GIA); (iii) a flexible use of either retail (Class A1) or financial and professional services (Class A2); or restaurant and cafes (Class A3) or non-residential institutions (Class D1) or office and cafes to office (Class D1) at first floor level and ground floor level (834 sq.m GIA); (iv) a flexible use of either retail (Class A1) or restaurant and cafes (Class A3) or drinking establishments (Class A4) or offices to Class B1 at first floor ground level (100 sq.m GIA); and (v) retail and residential units at first floor ground level (110 sq.m GIA).

1-3 Leddomain Market, London, EC3V 1LB
[19/01345/FL/LEIA]
Refurbishment of the unit, and installation of a chandelier and false ceiling.

Poultry Market and General Market and The Annesse Buildings, West Smithfield, London, EC1A 9PS
[19/01354/FUL/LEIA]
General Market

Partial demolition, repair, refurbishment and extension of the following buildings known as the General Market at 49 Farringdon Street on the basement, ground, first and second floor levels, creation of a new entrance structure on West Poultry Avenue (and associated refurbishment of the existing canopy over West Poultry Avenue) with new facade to West Smithfield and Charterhouse Street; new entrances on the corner of Farringdon Street and Charterhouse Street; Change of use to provide a museum and ancillary uses and areas, together with a flexible retail, restaurant, drinking establishment and leisure (gym) use for the perimeter houses.

Annesse Site (Red House, Iron Mountain, Fish Market and Engine House)

Partial demolition, refurbishment and extension of the existing buildings known as the Annesse Site at 25 Stave Hill and 29 Smithfield Street at basement, ground, first, second and third floors, creation of a triple height canopy above a public realm space; change of use to a flexible museum, office, retail, restaurant, drinking establishment and functions use. Refurbishment of and minor alterations to the existing buildings known as the Annesse Site at West Smithfield and Charterhouse Street; Change of use to a flexible retail and museum use.

(The proposal would provide 33,340 sq m of Museum floorpace (Class C1), 10,880 sq m of Museum floorpace (Class C2), 2,459 sq m of Flexible B1/D1 floorpace, 817 sq m of Flexible A2/A3/D3 & D2 floorpace, 23 sq m of Flexible A1/D1 floorpace and 86 sq m of Flexible A2/A3/D1 floorpace.)

This application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement. Copies of the Environmental Statement from Gerald Eve LFL73 Welbeck Street, London W1C 0AY

Poultry Market, Charterhouse Street, London, EC1A 9HL
[19/01345/LBC]
Partial demolition, repair, refurbishment, and alteration of the building known as the Poultry Market, Charterhouse Street, at basement, ground and first levels, change of use to a museum and ancillary uses and areas, including works to: provide additional office (Class B1) floor space (14,088 sq.m GEA) including: works to create an entrance structure on West Poultry Avenue; internal alterations including creation of a part new first floor level; fabric removal and refurbishment on all floors; replacement glazing; facade cleaning and other facade repair; levelling of ground floor; works to repair the roof; installation of heating and cooling equipment; new M&E services; repurposing of the south service bay and associated internal structure; remediation of north service bay; internal decoration; replacement balustrade; and other associated works as shown on the submitted plans and sections.

1-5 London Wall Buildings, London Wall, London, EC2V 2SP
[19/01435/FUL/MA]
External alterations including: (i) partial demolition of the existing roof; (ii) erection of internal extensions and two roof storey extensions to office (Class B1) floor space (1,734 sq.m GEA) including: works to create an entrance structure on West Poultry Avenue; internal alterations including creation of a part new first floor level; fabric removal and refurbishment on all floors; replacement glazing; facade cleaning and other facade repair; levelling of ground floor; works to repair the roof; installation of heating and cooling equipment; new M&E services; repurposing of the south service bay and associated internal structure; remediation of north service bay; internal decoration; replacement balustrade; and other associated works as shown on the submitted plans and sections.

Applicants can be viewed at www.planning.cityoflondon.gov.uk or at the Department of the Built Environment, North Wing, Guildhall, Bishopsgate Street, London EC2, between 09.30 and 16.30. Representations must be made within 21 days of the date of this newspaper online or in writing to PLCcomments@cityoflondon.gov.uk or the Chief Planning Officer, PO Box 270, Guildhall, London, EC2P 2E3. In the event that an appeal against a decision of the council pursuant to any type of the expedited procedure, any representations made about the application will be passed to the Secretary of State and there will be no opportunity to make further representations.

ANNA MENIN
@annamenin
UKRAINE will press Iran to hand over the black boxes from the Ukrainian airliner that crashed in the country earlier this month, foreign minister Vadym Prystaiko said yesterday.

Prystaiko told reporters he would urge Iranian urban development minister Mohammad Ismaili, who is visiting Ukraine, that returning the black boxes would show Iran wanted an unbiased investigation into the crash.

“He is a main task is to apologise and acknowledge what happened. We hope that we can go a little further than just logical discussions and discuss practical problems. Among them in particular is the return of the black boxes,” Prystaiko said.

Iran said on Sunday it was trying to analyse the black boxes from the plane shot down by its military on 8 January, denying an earlier report it would hand them over to Ukraine.

“At first they stated that they were handing them over, then the same person stated that they were not handing them over. This created some misunderstanding in Ukraine and we were starting to be asked: are they handed over or not?” said Prystaiko.

All 176 on board the plane died in the crash. Many of those who died were Iranians with dual citizenship, but Iran does not recognise dual nationality, and said yesterday it would treat victims with dual citizenship an Iranian national.

Canada, which had 57 citizens on board the flight, said there were still no firm plans for data from the recorders to be downloaded. It has joined other countries in calling for the black boxes to be sent abroad for analysis.

The downing of the plane has increased international pressure on Iran as the country grapples with an ongoing dispute with the US over its nuclear programme, with tensions flaring earlier this month.

Iranian authorities did not immediately admit responsibility for the crash, prompting days of protests on the streets of Iran.
Save a cool £200 on the Samsung Galaxy S10
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Winter Sale

Search O2 Winter Sale

Representative example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device Name</th>
<th>Duration of agreement</th>
<th>Uplfront cost</th>
<th>Monthly Device Payment</th>
<th>Total Credit Amount</th>
<th>Total amount payable for device</th>
<th>Interest Rate (%)</th>
<th>Representative APR</th>
<th>Device Cash Price</th>
<th>Airtime Plan, today to March 2020</th>
<th>Airtime Plan, April 2020 to March 2021</th>
<th>Airtime Plan, April 2021 to March 2022</th>
<th>Price â£ APR announced in Feb 2020 or Price A</th>
<th>Price â£ APR announced in Feb 2021</th>
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</thead>
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<td>12 months</td>
<td>£290</td>
<td>£15.29</td>
<td>£561</td>
<td>£591</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>£159</td>
<td>£25</td>
<td>£25</td>
<td>£25</td>
<td>Price â£ APR announced in Feb 2020 or Price A</td>
<td>Price â£ APR announced in Feb 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Annual RPI adjustment applies. Each year your Airtime Plan will be adjusted on your April bill by the RPI rate of inflation announced in the preceding February. Find out more at o2.co.uk/prices. £15.59 Device plan for 12 months and £25 monthly in any Airtime Plan. O2 Refresh T&Cs apply. Direct purchases only. Pay the cash price for your device or spread the cost over 3 to 36 months (includes dongle). The device cost will be the same whatever you choose. There may be an upfront cost. You need a monthly in any Airtime Plan as long as you have a Device plan. Pay off your Device Plan at any time and you can choose to keep your Airtime Plan or upgrade, or leave. If your Airtime Plan ends for any reason you will need to pay your Device Plan in full, or call/text to standard UK landlines and mobiles. When roaming in our Europe Zone, Europe Zone data only. Fair usage policy applies. Special and out of bundle numbers are charged. Devices are subject to availability. 0% APR. Finance subject to status and credit checks. 18+. Direct Debit. Credit provided by Telefonica UK Ltd, S1 4BX. Telefonica UK is authorised and regulated by the FCA for consumer credit and insurance. Terms apply. see o2.co.uk/terms
AFH posts strong earnings growth for the past year

ANNA MENIN
@annamenin

AFH FINANCIAL has reported strong growth in revenue and funds under management (FUM) following after the financial adviser consolidator completed a string of acquisitions.

Revenue at the Aim-listed firm jumped to £74.3m for the year ending 31 October, fuelling an 82 per cent jump in profit after tax, which hit £10.8m.

AFH Financial’s FUM stood at £6.2bn by the end of the period, compared to £4.4bn a year earlier, with a 10 per cent increase in organic gross inflows.

The firm completed eight acquisitions during the year, taking the number of acquisitions made since its 2014 float beyond 50.

“Although we have been acquiring within the sector, we’ve been doing very well... from an organic growth perspective, and I think that is in contrast with the investment-led models of the traditional wealth managers,” chief executive Alan Hudson told City A.M. yesterday.

AFH announced in September it would be easing off on further acquisitions and de-risk its business model through a “period of consolidation”. In November, it announced it had reached a £12m facility agreement with HSBC for further acquisitions, and AFH confirmed that none of the amount had yet been allocated.

Shares rose 1.3 per cent to 390p.

Rabobank joins £7.5m funding round in online mortgage platform Trussle

ANGHARAD CARRICK
@angharadcarri

RABOBANK’s strategic investment arm, Rabo Frontier Ventures, has contributed to a £7.5m funding round in online mortgage broker Trussle.

Rabo Frontier Ventures joined the latest round of funding alongside existing investors Goldman Sachs Merchant Banking Division, Finch Capital and Propel Venture partners. It brings Trussle’s total funding to £26.7m after it raised £13.6m in series B financing in May 2018.

Harrie Vollaard, head of Rabo Frontier Ventures, said: “The slow-moving and complex mortgage market is one of the biggest pain points of owning a home. Trussle is leading the way in reshaping the way people interact with their mortgage by utilising technology to make mortgages smarter, faster and fairer.”

The tech startup recently expanded its senior leadership team, appointing chief technology officer Todd Zino and veteran banker Simon Williams as chairman.

Williams said the business is at a “pivotal” stage. Their appointments follow the abrupt departure of Trussle co-founder and chief executive, Ishaan Malhi at the start of the year.

Malhi set up Tressle with Jonathan Galore, a partner at private equity firm Silver Lake, in December 2015.

The tech startup has so far raised £26.7m following several funding rounds.

UK bond chief voices doubts over green gilts

ANNA MENIN
@annamenin

THE HEAD of the UK’s debt management office (DMO) has questioned the case for issuing so-called green government bonds, calling it a “symbolic” step unless investors were willing to pay more for the gilts.

Sir Robert Stheeman told the Financial Times the issuing of “green gilts” – government debt where proceeds are spent on environmentally-sustainable projects – could end up costing taxpayers more than normal bonds.

Stheeman, who has run the DMO since 2003, is in charge of raising billions of pounds per year in the bond market on behalf of the government, and has a mandate to keep costs down for taxpayers.

He told the paper he is sceptical that the issuing of green bonds would be cost effective, because it would be difficult to create a large and liquid market for the gilts.

“One of the natural ways you minimise cost is you try and ensure all your bonds are as liquid as possible,” he said. “Smaller one-off bonds tend to fragment that process”.

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Capital is at risk
Kevin Ellis, chair at PwC, says the UK is in a strong position to lead global business

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The UK just days away from leaving the EU, one might think it would be a major talking point at the World Economic Forum in Davos. However — and perhaps refreshingly — conversations are largely focused on other geopolitical issues, those fundamental to our future global society, like inequality, societal divisions, and the climate crisis.

While there are differing views on what the next 12 months might hold, chief executive officers (CEOs) around the world are fairly united in their concerns and priorities. Their insight is more relevant than ever as the UK determines its future path, making our latest CEO survey one of the most important in its 23-year history.

What’s striking in this year’s survey — especially given the current political environment — is that the UK has become more attractive to some of our nearest European CEOs, including France and Germany. We’re also the fourth most important territory in the world for growth. These upbeat results are a helpful reminder that the UK is a relatively stable place in a world facing big challenges, and gives a timely sense of perspective.

The UK has other great credentials. These obviously include natural advantages such as an unbeatible location between the US, Asia and the rest of Europe and other strengths that have evolved overtime such as our fair and trusted legal system and business credentials.

While our research shows CEOs worldwide predict slower global economic growth over the next year, the UK is in a strong position for the longer term if we can capitalise on our key characteristics.

Maintaining an open and globalised economy is crucial, as is an effective tax system. For example, it’s quicker and easier to file taxes here than in most parts of the world, but there’s clear scope for improvement through further digitisation.

Digitisation can also make our transport system more reliable, improve our productivity, make our cities greener, and so on.

But only if people have the right skills to innovate and reap the benefits.

CEOs globally say the availability of skills is the number one threat to their business and it’s a top three concern for UK CEOs. Despite this, only about half of UK businesses at present are focused on improving the skills of their existing workers.

The UK is well-placed to take a lead, building on our eminence in education strengths and reputation.

It requires more collaboration between businesses and educators, to map out and nurture the skills needed for a more automated world.

Moreover, policies and incentives are needed for regions most affected by automation — to help new types of business to grow, workers to transition, and small and medium sized businesses to support them.

Far more than just helping the UK become more attractive for investment, this is a societal obligation so that swaths of people don’t get left behind. But in addressing the challenge, we’ll boost the nation’s reputation as a fair society where people want to work and do business.

This gets us back to the agenda at Davos — and how we can all help solve the bigger societal problems of the day such as climate change. This soared up the agenda for UK CEOs we interviewed this year, polling higher than concerns over populism, terrorism and access to capital. Having committed to achieving net zero by 2050 the UK has a powerful incentive to help lead the charge and share its know-how.

So while it would be naive to suggest the coming years won’t be challenging, if we can focus forwards and outwards the UK has every reason to be confident in its long-term future — our survey results suggest CEOs across many parts of the world would agree.

Kevin Ellis is chairman and senior partner of PwC UK

Climate change is major concern for UK business

The events surrounding Flybe last year have shown the need for more connectivity right at the top of the agenda. While Flybe’s situation is the last thing anyone wants to see, the resulting examination of how best to support connectivity is a good thing.

Championing and investing in the regions is a priority for the government. Channel 4 is already relocating to Leeds and Conservative MPs have even floated the idea of moving a department to Darlington. However, this rebalancing shouldn’t be detrimental for London.

As Sadiq Khan said in a speech last week, “clipping London’s wings is not the answer if you want to help other cities and regions to soar.” Without strong connections to London’s financial, political, legal and cultural centres, efforts to boost the rest of the UK won’t get off the ground.

It’s important that people can quickly and easily move in and around the UK. But it is vital that people from across the country can quickly and easily get to and from central London. In the absence of high-speed rail, which has a limited reach and an uncertain future, aviation will remain the best way of achieving this for a long time to come.

London City Airport has always served this purpose. In 2019, for the first time ever, we saw over five million passengers travel to and from the airport. This success is due to the importance of London and our unique ability to provide people with a fast and convenient way of getting to where they want to go.

Today, 22 percent of our passengers are on flights to domestic destinations like Glasgow, Exeter, Jersey and the Isle of Man — more than double what other London airports manage.

Last year over 511,000 people flew between Edinburgh and London City Airport, making it our second most popular route. Since 2012 this link between two great capital cities has grown by about 60 percent, driven by a renewed financial sector and a burgeoning cultural exchange. It’s a similar story for Belfast, which has been revitalised in recent years. Of our top ten routes, Belfast grew the most in 2019 with approximately 211,000 people travelling between Northern Ireland and the UK.

But it’s essential that they consider connectivity from the passenger’s perspective. The numbers show that they want fast, frequent and convenient ways of getting to and from central London. London City Airport is ready and willing to provide exactly that, as a vital cog in the machine that creates shared prosperity for the whole of the UK.

To find out more, please visit www.londoncityairport.com or @LondonCityAir on social media.
The start of 2020 has certainly been a rude awakening for traders returning to work after the Christmas break. Oil prices spiked after the US assassination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani ignited tensions in the Middle East. Equities were shaken, and investors flocked to safe haven assets in a bid to shelter from the storm.

Although tensions between the US and Iran appear to have receded for now, global geopolitical uncertainty remains high.

One asset class above all looks set to benefit from this turbulence: gold. The precious metal has climbed steadily over the past few months even as traders flitted between risk and retreat, with prices spiking in the aftermath of the US-Iran spat.

Gold surged over two per cent following the crisis to a seven-year high, breaking through the $1,600 (£1,228) per ounce barrier as investors rushed to the asset.

But can the yellow stuff retain this level of appeal — or gain even more — in the coming years?

Bridgewater, the world’s largest hedge fund, certainly thinks so. Co-chief investment officer Greg Jensen last week backed gold for a record climb above $2,000 as geopolitical uncertainties mount.

While the precious metal tends to benefit from periods of global stress, the poor performance of another safe haven — government bonds — is also helping gold rise.

With debt-hungry investors saturating the market, bonds have become less appealing thanks to low, and sometimes even negative, yields.

Bond yields move inversely: as demand (and therefore prices) increase, yields fall. Because of this, it generally no longer pays to hold bonds — instead, investors must be willing to stump up for the security they offer.

“I see gold doing well because bond yields are so low and because the opportunity cost of holding gold is relatively low,” says JP Morgan Asset Management strategist Thushka Maharaj.

Low starting yields also dent bonds’ ability to act as a store of value, insulating investors against rising inflation, while gold generally performs well during both high and low inflation, she explains.

Last August, trade tensions between the US and China, coupled with mounting concerns over the rising risk of recession around the world, sparked a global bond rally. Investors rushed en masse to the safety of government bonds, sending the yield on the benchmark 10-year US Treasury note diving to a three-year low.

Ole Hansen, Saxo Bank’s head of commodity strategy, says this dramatic drop “really helped bring the focus back to gold, which had been kind of left alone for the previous four years”.

Hansen is confident this “renewed demand is going to stick”, because gold acts as an “insurance policy for rainy days” during a time of high valuations, low earnings expectations, and low yields.

Maharaj agrees that the gold rally “will continue as long as bond yields remain low” — as is expected in the coming years.

But, of course, no asset can perfectly protect investors. All safe haven assets have their own opportunity costs — for gold, this is a relatively low expected return compared to many other assets. “You have to think about diversifying the safety in your portfolio just as much as you think about diversifying the return-seeking aspect,” says Maharaj.

As well as balancing gold alongside other prominent safe havens such as bonds or sovereign currency, there are also many different ways to invest in the precious metal.

“I would definitely not go against the potential for gold making a new high,” he adds. "Gold is undoubtedly reasserting its status as an archetypal safe haven asset at the moment, and while he doesn’t name a figure, Hansen agrees with Jensen’s prediction that it could soon hit another record. “I would definitely not go against the potential for gold making a new high,” he says. “Whether it’s going to be this year or next really depends on how other markets develop.”

With global tensions rumbling on — in some cases, very close to the surface — gold doesn’t seem set to lose its shine anytime soon.
Podcast firm Audioboom boosts its revenue amid an advertising frenzy

JAME WARRINGTON

@j_a_warrington

PODCAST company Audioboom yesterday posted a sharp rise in revenue for the year after ramping up its share of advertising spend in the rapidly growing audio market. The Aim-listed firm reported a 91 per cent increase in revenue to £22.3m (£16.9m) in the year to the end of December, while its loss before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation was £3m, down from £4.7m in 2018.

Audioboom, which hosts podcasts including the Totally Football Show and Sue Perkins: An Hour Or So With... hailed an “incredible” year and said it had exceeded market expectations for the first time in its history.

It boosted its brand advertisers count and increased global revenue per 1,000 downloads in the final month of the year. Audioboom has also benefited from its focus on premium content, where advertising impressions rose 60 per cent to 1.6bn.

“Once again we outpaced the industry and enhanced our position as a global leader in podcasting,” said chief executive Stuart Last. While Audioboom is still yet to turn a profit, it has pared down its loss significantly over the last year through a cost-cutting plan.

Earlier this year the podcast platform opened two new studios in New York as it seeks to expand its slate of original shows.

Online retailer Sosandar beats sales forecasts

JESS CLARK

@jclarkjourno

ONLINE fashion brand Sosandar said it expects full-year sales to beat market expectations following soaring growth at the end of last year, avoiding the gloom affecting many high street retailers.

The Aim-listed retailer said investment in customer acquisition drove revenue up 136 per cent to £3.8m in the three months to 31 December, exceeding the £2.8m reported in the first half of the year.

The sales growth was driven by product rate expansion and investment in TV advertising to attract new shoppers. The firm’s customer database jumped 109 per cent to 207,674 during the period.

The mid-range fashion brand was set up by former Look magazine founders Ali Hall and Julie Lavinving in 2016. Its strong performance in the fourth quarter comes against a background of tough trading conditions for bricks-and-mortar retailers. Meanwhile online fashion brands, such as industry giant Boohoo which hiked guidance on the period of stressful negotiations.

In a statement yesterday Hall and Lavinving said: “The opportunity we identified appears to be bigger than we first through, with the success of new product areas helping to drive repeat purchases increasing the potential for future ranges.

“This has been enhanced by the successful trial in TV advertising which... expands our ability to attract more new customers than originally anticipated.”

They added that repeat customers figures were up in January – a traditionally difficult trading period.

Investors failed to heed the positive announcements, with Sosandar shares falling almost eight per cent to 26.01p yesterday.

Shopping firm Rezolve signs Huawei tie-up

JAMES WARRINGTON

@j_a_warrington

MOBILE shopping firm Rezolve has bagged a bumper deal with Huawei to embed its technology into the controversial Chinese tech giant’s phones.

The new capability will be available from March, when Rezolve sees more tie-ups with retailers, restaurants and media partners. The technology allows consumers to make purchases by using their phone’s camera and microphone to interact with physical surroundings such as product labels and posters.

The London-based startup did not disclose financial details of the deal, but said it expected more than 200m people in Europe to have access to the software by the end of the year, rising to 500m when it is launched elsewhere.

Huawei is currently under fierce scrutiny over its role in the UK’s 5G infrastructure amid fears its kit could be used for spying by authorities in Beijing – an allegedly the company has always denied.

However, Rezolve chief executive Dan Wagner told City A.M. he was not concerned about security issues and played down accusations of espionage. “I think it’s more of a tactical negotiating thing, it’s not entirely down to Huawei,” he said.

BBC pays Sarah Montague £400,000 following years of unequal salaries

JAMES WARRINGTON

@j_a_warrington

Radio presenter Sarah Montague yesterday revealed that she won £400,000 and an apology from the BBC for being paid “unequally” over many years.

Montague, who hosts Radio 4’s World at One, said she secured the settlement last year after a “long period of stressful negotiations”.

In a series of tweets yesterday morning, the veteran journalist said she did not want to discuss her pay, but felt she had to respond to “erroneous” newspaper reports.

“When I discovered the disparity in my pay and conditions, I was advised that rectifying it all could run into the millions”, she said. “I chose not to seek such sums from the BBC but I did want some recognition that they had underpaid me.”

It followed incorrect reports yesterday that the BBC had paid her up to £1m. In 2018 Montague said she was “incandescent with rage” after discovering she was being paid less than her colleagues on the Today programme, where she was a presenter.

Montague was paid £133,000 a year for Today or more, while former co-host John Humphrys earned more than £600,000.
ECURRING fears of a hard Brexit and bets that the Bank of England (BoE) will cut interest rates hit London’s FTSE 100 yesterday, while premium tonic water maker Fever-Tree endured its worst day ever.

The main index, which hit a near-six-month high in the previous session, gave up 0.3 per cent. British American Tobacco weakened despite a jump in crude prices. US markets closed for the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

Though sharp moves were scant, Fever-Tree sank 27 per cent on its worst day ever after warning that annual revenue growth would be below its expectations following subdued trading over Christmas. Intu Properties, which shed more than 70 per cent in value last year amid a string of bankruptcies on Britain’s beleaguered high street, ended one cent per pound lower after saying it was targeting an equity raise.

Its shares had earlier tumbled as much as 10 per cent to a record low, while those of peer Hammerson gave up 3.7 per cent.

Defence company BAE Systems outperformed the bluechips with a 3.7 per cent gain after saying it would buy two units being offloaded.

TOP RISERS
1. BAE Systems Up 3.68 per cent
2. Barratt Up 2.13 per cent
3. Berkeley Up 2.02 per cent

TOP FALLERS
1. MNC Health Down 3.69 per cent
2. Burberry Down 2.23 per cent
3. Intu Down 1.73 per cent

Analysts at Liberum may have put the Gym Group through its paces, but the company needn’t have broken a sweat. Its latest trading statement showed trading is on track to meet expectations with revenue growth of more than 23 per cent to £153.1m. This was driven by a rise in average members to 796,000, while average revenue per member per month rose to £16.02. For Liberum, the Gym Group’s hard work is starting to pay off, and they reckon the outlook is “encouraging”. The analysts gave the fitness chain a “buy” rating with a target price of 3.8bp.

Europe shares inch lower as data looms

E UROPEAN shares retreated from recent peaks yesterday, as investors bites the Bank of England’s rate cut hopes and prepared for key data.

The pan-European Stoxx 600 index was down about 0.1 per cent, after ending the week with a 0.8 per cent gain. The bank is expected to keep interest rates on hold for another couple of weeks, at least, as markets await the US Federal Reserve’s meeting next week.

The pan-European Stoxx 600 index was the worst performing sector, with Switzerland’s Swisslog leading losses with a 4.5 per cent drop.

Air France dropped 0.3 per cent, following a drop of more than 1 per cent in December but alas, it wasn’t to be. Its latest trading update revealed a writedown of $1.5bn (£1.15bn) after lowering its long-term price outlook. Air France-KLM, which has already shed about 50 per cent of its value this year, is now facing a hostile takeover from the Air France shareholder group. The French government has said it will not intervene to block the deal, leading to a drop in the stock price.

For the day, the retail subindex was the worst performing, with Switzerland’s Dufry leading losses, as investors bet on a recovery in the travel industry. The US Federal Reserve is expected to keep interest rates on hold for another couple of weeks, at least, as markets await the US Federal Reserve’s meeting next week.

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<table>
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<th>Stock Name</th>
<th>Current Price</th>
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ET’s play a game. Imagine that the very last business leader had delivered her company’s worst financial results for more than three decades. Let’s further imagine that the company had then, because of significant overspending, had to fire dozens of ordinary workers – while rewarding said senior executive with a bumper new contract and significant additional responsibilities.

Let’s suppose that, while this was going on, this firm had been accused of being institutionally racist and was under formal investigation — and that this woman had been accused of interfering in the investigations in order to ensure that grievance cases were hushed up. Further imagine that she was an extremely close ally, personally and professionally, of the single Labour peer defending her from the Conservative party.

And now let’s imagine that Boris Johnson had chosen this woman in the House of Lords.

What do you think Jeremy Corbyn would have said? Would he be aggrieved? Outraged? Would he shout from the rooftops about a corrupt system, the abuse of power, and the need for the stables to be cleansed? You bet he would.

There’s still one problem: the woman in question is Karie Murphy, Corbyn’s chief of staff. And the person who wants to put her in the Lords is him.

For those who aren’t familiar with the story, here are the brief highlights. Murphy, one of Corbyn’s key supporters and a close friend of Unite boss Len McCluskey, was at the heart of Labour’s disastrous response to accusations of institutional antisemitism. Last year, her opponents within the high command — including John McDonnell — managed to get her removed from the leader’s office, after a series of vituperative disagreements over strategy and management. But instead of being fired, Murphey was shifted sideways to oversee campaigning in her new job, she insisted on a General Election strategy which shunned defending vulnerable former seats (and following polling data) in favour of keeping seats on Tony-hold constituencies.

After the ensuing disaster, she has been reported to be winding up on the contract and responsibility for overseeing party membership — and now appears on Corbyn’s proposed honours list. Talk about falling upwards. The truth is that nothing illustrates the hypocrisy of the Corbyn project as neatly as its approach to the House of Lords.

Hoping that promised he would not nominate peers, because he disagreed with the existence of the upper chamber on principle, Corbyn changed his mind in order to nominate Shami Chakrabarti shortly after she published her notoriously lenient report on Labour antisemitism.

In appointing an individual who is under active investigation for institutional discrimination, rather than just someone who cleared his party of it, Corbyn has gone from the cynical to the farcical.

Consider too that the Labour leader has also nominated incoming House of Commons speaker John Bercow, who was found to have over-seen a parliamentary regime riddled with bullying and harassment, and has been accused of mistreating his own staff.

Labour MPs were previously open about the fact that Bercow only remained in post because he was on their side over Brexit, to an extent which drove a coach and horses through the idea of the speaker as a neutral arbiter.

Yet is it not just in Corbyn’s own office where the smell of hypocrisy is in the air. Consider his activist Momentum, whose governing premise is that the “Labour party must be transformed into a more open, democratic, member-led party”.

Momentum recently offered its own members a choice for party leader between Rebecca Long-Bailey and Rebecca Long Bailey (add or remove hyphen according to your preference). As a result of this yes-no ballot, the group will campaign full bore for the Notorious R.L.B. on the basis of an endorsement by just 12.5 per cent of its members.

Or consider the wider Labour leadership contest, in which so many candidates insist on zero tolerance for antisemitism, despite having served in many cases in extremely senior positions — under a leader who dragged their party into the moral sewer with his refusal to confront the problem or even fully acknowledge that there is one.

The reason all this matters is that one of the foundations of Labour through and through is the Corbyn strain of it — moral superiority. Labour are the good guys, the poverty fighters, the anti-racists. To be a Tory is to be not just wrong, but actively wicked.

There is no other legacy of Corbyn’s disastrous tenure as Labour leader, let it be the final shattering of that misguided myth. There is a cavernous gap between the people we labour leaders tell us they are, and how they actually behave.

Robert Colville is a political commentator.
Without visa reform, there can be no UK-Africa partnership

On Monday, the UK government hosted one of the largest African trade and investment conferences it has ever been involved with. Even so, in comparison to most African trade and investment conferences, it was relatively small – which is in keeping with Britain’s low starting point relative to our global competitors. There is no greater example of this than the evidence given to the Foreign Affairs Committee last year. The former African minister indicated that, although the long-promised “Africa Strategy” had been formulated (and indeed launched by the now former Prime Minister Theresa May on her three-day visit to the continent), it hadn’t been written down in a manner that could be presented to the Committee for scrutiny.

As any citizen of an African nation who has tried to obtain a UK visa knows, if it isn’t written down, the British government won’t believe it or act upon it. And up until now, the UK has spectacularly failed to put its money where its mouth is. Africa has learned to be wary of overtures from the UK. There is a new scramble for Africa underway, and since Britain didn’t cover herself in glory in the last one, our promises of a “partnership” with the continent are rightly viewed with scepticism. The UK runs a real risk of missing out on a world of potential.

Yet there is a glimmer of hope – that perhaps this Prime Minister is willing to go where so few have dared to tread, and to begin to treat Africans as equals within the UK’s visa system. Two years ago, a woman called Linda Bonyo applied for a visa to come to the UK. She supplied all her relevant documents, which ludicrously included her property lease agreement and bank statements, to the UK’s High Commission in Nairobi. Her visa was rejected on the grounds that the UK was “not satisfied” that she was “genuinely seeking entry permitted by the visitor routes” — nor, further, that she had “sufficient funds” in relation to her visit “without working or accessing public funds”. So far, so standard for a refusal to enter.

But Linda Bonyo is not just any woman. She was not applying to come to the UK as a tourist, or for an unspecified amount of time, or for an unspecified purpose. She is a lawyer, and a leader in her field. She specialises in tech and immigration law. Her reputation is at the very forefront of the legal sector in Kenya, where she is the founder of Lawhub. Hub Kenya and a curator of the Africa Law Tech conference. And she’s been iron proof of the lack of “partnership” between the UK and Africa? She had been invited to be here, for a legal tech conference. I wish I could say that this was the only example of our Kafka-esque visa system that I’ve seen, but it is not. Nor is it even the most egregious.

That dishonourable award is won by the farcical experience faced by three Ugandan technology entrepreneurs, who were denied a visa to attend a tech conference in the UK despite being backed by the International Trade Centre in Geneva, a joint UN-WTO agency. There can be no “partnership” between our nation and Africa without reform of the visa system. Until Linda Bonyo is able to sit in the UK African Investment Summit as easily as her head of state is, we aren’t treating the continent as a partner — we’re patronising it as a supplicant.

The Prime Minister has been keen to portray himself as ambitious in his efforts to improve the UK’s trading relationship with the African continent. After years of stagnation and a lack of ambition in the UK government’s approach, this is to be welcomed. But if he’s serious, the change not only in tone but in action needs to start now. The Prime Minister must go further and abolish the visa regime entirely, and move to the European model where entry is determined by ePassports and trusted-traveller schemes. The Borders Agency should go further and abolish the visa regime entirely, and move to the European model where entry is determined by ePassports and trusted-traveller schemes.

Debate

Should the government move the House of Lords to York?

The British state is now more centralised than it has been for many decades. In large part, we owe that to Margaret Thatcher, who tended to treat the UK’s constituent parts as regions, rather than as distinct polities with their own political traditions, and flattened out networks of local patronage. Moving the House of Lords from London would be a welcome correction to that. London-centric development, and follows logically from the introduction of metro mayors across England and Wales under the coalition government.

But if Boris Johnson is serious about rebalancing the UK and moving the centre of gravity away from London, he should go further and abolish the House of Lords in its current form, reshaping it into a second chamber. The UK’s High Commission in Nairobi. The New Zealand parliament system is based on this model, with representatives of all the regions and constituent nations of the UK. Westminster would then become the seat of a newly-bogged English parliament.

A federalist option would diffuse the notion that Brexit is a Westminster power grab, and portray it rather as the beginning of a fruitful reimagining of how the UK can fit together in harmony.

Alastair Benn is news editor of Reaction.

No

God’s Own Country came up with everything from stainless steel to sparkling water without a parliamentary chamber in its boundaries. Unselected ermine wearers won’t make it better, and could instead draw resources away from the local private sector.

Encourage businesses to move to York instead, and keep Yorkshire peerless.

John Oxley is a Conservative commentator.

YES

Alastair Benn is news editor of Reaction.
Crypto A.M. shines its Spotlight on Aeroband

David Galea Sammut and Brendan McKittrick are experts in the aviation industry. Their portfolio of experience has seen them work with over 300 airlines to help them improve their revenues, reduce their costs, and transform their customer experience – 3 years they incubated into the Aeroband brand that they co-founded in 2018 and winner of the Blockchain Tech of the Year at Malta AIBC Summit 2019.

They have been long enough in the aviation industry to see the low demise in airlines’ profits due to rising costs and heightened competition. As margins tighten, airlines on the periphery of the comfort spectrum face imminent demise. Twenty-three airlines stopped flying in 2019 alone, including Iceland’s WOW and the UK’s FlyBMI. Although the industry has collectively enjoyed ten years in the black and annual revenues are creeping upwards towards $90 billion, the average profit margin has slid to 3.1% in 2019 with a modest increase forecasted for 2020.

“The investment in aviation is enormous, with a single Airbus A350 costing in excess of $300 million and yet the average profit per passenger is oft quoted as ‘not enough to buy a Big Mac in Munich’ says David.

Brendan agrees. “I was the CTO of one of the world’s most successful and largest airline ticket processors. We had over 20 products servicing 150 airlines. We had the largest customer base worldwide for airline revenue accounting and supported a global ticket settlement process handling over $200 billion in ticket value annually,” recalls Brendan.

“In Aeroband we know there’s a big gap in aviation, and we both had the same idea how to fill it,” explains David.

Crypto A.M. shines its Spotlight on Aeroband

Our series on AI, Blockchain, Cryptoassets, DLT and Tokenisation

WIRELESS MESH NETWORKS: CONNECTING THE UNCONNECTED

Wireless Mesh Networks (WMNs) are a type of local area network that uses multiple nodes to forward information, acting as a decentralized network. WMNs are often used in residential and small-town areas or for temporary networks. These networks are constructed from nodes that can communicate with each other, forming a mesh topology where each node acts as a router for other nodes. This allows for robust connectivity and redundancy, which is particularly useful in disaster recovery scenarios or areas with poor or no existing connectivity.

One of the most significant benefits of WMNs is their ability to provide reliable connectivity in areas where traditional wired solutions are either unavailable or impractical. For instance, deploying WMNs in rural communities can significantly improve internet access, which is crucial for education, healthcare, and economic development.

In recent years, WMNs have been gaining popularity due to advancements in technology, particularly in the areas of Wi-Fi 6 (802.11ax) and 5G. These technologies enable higher data rates, lower latency, and improved coverage, making WMNs an attractive option for expanding internet access in underserved areas.

However, WMNs also face several challenges, including the need for infrastructure development, regulatory barriers, and the cost of deploying and maintaining a network. These challenges require a collaborative approach involving stakeholders such as governments, telecommunications operators, and technology providers to ensure the successful implementation of WMNs.

In conclusion, Wireless Mesh Networks represent a promising solution for bridging the digital divide and providing reliable connectivity in areas with limited or no existing infrastructure. As technology continues to evolve, WMNs are expected to play an increasingly important role in the delivery of internet services, particularly in remote and underserved regions.

Further reading:
- “Wireless Mesh Networks and Their Impact on the Internet of Things” by A. K. Gangopadhyay, S. Chatterjee, and A. Bhattacharyya
- “Towards a Future of Wi-Fi: The Role of 802.11ax and 5G in Wireless Mesh Networks” by J. K. R. Liu, C. G. Pecora, and A. D. K. Das

Contact Aeroband at info@aeroband.com and to read more about Aeroband and AEROBLOC see Katy Micallef’s article in BLOCK Magazine (Issue 3).

https://maltablockchainsummit.com/magazine/block/ or go to their website at https://www.aeroband.ltd
BLOCKCHAIN FOR IDENTITY

Troy Norcross, Co-Founder Blockchain Rookies

The UK Government has been working hard to provide a central identity platform. They started in 2016, and as of October 2019, they decided to enlist the support of private companies to assist them. These companies include Barclays, Experian, Post Office, SecureIdentity, and many others. And let me say that it’s nothing short of a trainwreck. It’s not necessarily because the private sector companies are incapable. It’s far more the case that the government has so many different versions of identity that even with a single source, there is no alignment. HMRC can’t align their data with DLA who can’t align their data with the passport office, the benefits system or the Electoral Roll. Every system has its own database for identity. The data is dirty, not rationalised and unusable outside the point of data collection. As an example, I am a customer of Experian. Even with all of my details on file, they were unable to link my address from the identity service to 15 years of my credit file – to a satisfactory level to meet the standard requirement of the government. I’m still trying to get this sorted out after 4 weeks!

Self Sovereign Identity (SSI) is the next major frontier for Blockchain. SSI provides an identity which is independent of any single company or government and can be recognised for a multitude of purposes ranging from government identity, to KYC (Know Your Customer) for banking, to uses for consumer education, benefits even access to bars and clubs. The identity is owned, managed and controlled by the individual. Data is stored safely and securely, and blockchain provides proof within storing any personal information. Having a public blockchain for identity (like Bitcoin) and public blockchain for money is one of the most exciting prospects for this emerging technology.

Get in touch with us info@blockchainrookies.com @TroyNorcross

CRYPTO A.M. INDUSTRY VOICES

The breaking dawn of multi-jurisdictional regulatory regimes

Participation in digital assets continues to grow, prompting policy makers to take regulatory actions to address the burgeoning nature of digital assets. The European High Anti Money Laundering Directive (AMLD5) came into effect last week, requiring digital asset companies to register with their national regulator and comply with new KYC and AML requiremets. The directive includes increased re-reporting obligations, deepening the pool of information available to financial conglomerate units and law enforcement. In the UK, the FCA will supervise AMLDS registration, and it has recently published requirements for digital asset exchanges, ATMs, peer-to-peer services providers, token issuers, and custodial wallet providers. The response from the digital asset industry has been mixed. Companies welcoming regulation anticipate it will catalyse trust and stimulate growth. Traditional finance and regulatory clarity. Implementation of AMLDS may be the genesis of the regulatory scrutiny sought by traditional entities, potentially increasing liquidity inflow and access to banking facilities. However, a delicate balance exists between protecting against illicit activities whilst incentivising innovation and stimulating economic growth. Increased compliance costs may adversely impact smaller digital asset issuers, possibly pushing them into loans from cryptocurrency lenders outside the jurisdiction, or into more opaque markets.

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Car sales are turning away from learning to drive, let alone car ownership. The bellwether status of new car registrations has long been eroded by falling sales are bad for business. But what about its implications for the wider economy? Car registration figures have traditionally been seen as a bellwether for the country’s economic health. Other than a property, a vehicle is likely to be the biggest purchase a family will make in a given year. Being able to afford to buy a car outright or commit to a financing plan is seen as a sign of consumers’ confidence in their earnings or financial security. Declining car registrations have therefore historically signalled a lack of confidence.

Does this analysis hold up today? Not necessarily. If falling car sales are supposed to indicate a lack of consumers’ financial clout, that doesn’t marry up with the fact that UK wages have been growing steadily in recent years. “Since the end of 2014, wage growth has been mainly positive. With a good run in 2018 and 2019 — just as new car registrations have been falling,” notes Alastair Winter, economic advisor at Global Alliance Partners. “This points to other forces at work.”

These forces include changes in the last few years, away from the way they used to work, and this may also have impacted new car sales. “The bellwether status of new car registrations has long been eroded by the tax treatment of company cars,” adds Winter. “Meanwhile, measures that favoured diesel vehicles have been reversed, which will have deterred purchases, as will the spread of traffic restrictions in cities.”

Then there’s the looming issue of climate change. Many consumers will likely have been swayed by public campaigns to convinces them to switch to cycling or public transport to commute to work, and this may also have impacted new car sales. Climate concerns can have a major impact on consumers’ purchasing decisions, especially among younger generations, who are driving less and less.

“The surge in publicity over climate change is undoubtedly influencing the attitudes of younger people,” says Winter. “Generation Z and even millennials, especially those living in cities, are turning away from learning to drive, let alone car ownership — whether they can afford it or not.”

Concerns over climate change might also help to explain one of the bright spots in the SMMT figures: demand for electric cars is accelerating, with the number of battery electric vehicles registered rising 144 per cent last year. Of course, electric vehicles make up just 1.6 per cent of the market share at the moment. The car industry has a long way to go before sales of electric cars will offset falling demand in other categories.

But should we view falling car registration figures as a hazard light, warning that the UK economy is heading for a crash? Other signals are turning green.

Climate is the headline issue at Davos this year

It’s THAT time of the year again: policymakers, politicians, bankers, activists, journalists, and a swathe of cameras are descending upon the snowy peaks of Davos for the World Economic Forum (WEF). Once branded the playground for the elite, epitomised by the typical champagne swashing “Davos Man”, this year the gathering ostensibly seems to be moving that into one epitomised by a “Davos Everyone”. This year’s theme is much more inclusive: “Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World.” Headliners include President Donald Trump and Chancellor Angela Merkel, plus one new addition: Greta Thunberg, the teenage activist who travelled around the world in 2019, warning about the perils of climate change.

A global risks report published by WEF last week concurred with her warnings. For the first time in the survey’s 20-year history, the top five global risks in terms of likelihood were environmental. But are policymakers listening? In August last year, the US Business Roundtable published a new statement on the purpose of a corporation. The letter was signed by 181 chief executives of some of the largest American companies, including JP Morgan, Johnson & Johnson, and Ford, which committed to delivering value for all stakeholders (such as communities, employers, and suppliers), not just to company shareholders.

More recently, Microsoft, the tech giant boasting a valuation north of a trillion of private and public debt, announced a $1 trillion in sustainability initiatives. As of 2021, the Bank of England will be producing a climate stress test into its financial stability report. Meanwhile, Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, has also been discussing climate change in its upcoming strategic review.

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The Japanese have a flair for combining flavours that shouldn’t work together, but somehow do. Visiting the Tokyo Motor Show a few years ago, my culinary adventures included popcorn with soy sauce, coal-infused ice cream and cola with eel extract.

Honda assembled an equally unlikely mix of ingredients back in 1998. Front-wheel drive, a peaky naturally-aspirated engine, a manual gearbox, no luxuries, oddball looks and a non-premium badge. It was called the Integra Type R, and it was the antithesis of the most modern coupes. Yet rarely has a humble 15-inch alloys contrast with the fabled red ‘H’, following the NSX R and the Type R trademark – hint at something special.

As does a rev counter redlined at 8,400rpm. The 1.8-litre four was hand-built, modified with new pistons, fitted threadbare carpets and a thin-windscreen. Air conditioning and a CD player were relegated to the options list. It feels brutally basic, but the sound deadening to cut kilos, also richly rewarding driver’s car, even outside the VTEC zone.

The Integra’s handling was also a high watermark. Many front-wheel-drive cars scrabble for traction and lose composure at the limit. This one holds its line like a whipped politician on Newsnight. A stiffer, spot-welded chassis expunges any sense of inertia and tenacious grip. From the lucid steering to the slick gearbox, every control feels carefully calibrated and brimful of tactility. The result is a richly rewarding driver’s car, even outside the VTEC zone.

A legend in its own lifetime, the Honda has since become a veritable modern classic. The best examples already cost well into five figures and are likely to appreciate further. You can tell UK and Japanese (JDM) cars apart by their headlights – twin round lamps for the former, oblong-shaped for the latter – but don’t get hung up on detail differences. Focus simply on finding the most rust-free car you can. It’s swallowed a spoonful of wasabi: intensity is shredded. The Integra reacts like a whipped politician on Newsnight. A stiffer, spot-welded chassis expunges any sense of inertia and tenacious grip. From the lucid steering to the slick gearbox, every control feels carefully calibrated and brimful of tactility.

Honda has since become a veritable modern classic. The best examples already cost well into five figures and are likely to appreciate further. The Type R leaves a lasting impression, rightly hailed as one of the greats: a car greater than the sum of its ingredients. I’ve been scouring the classifieds ever since.

Many thanks to Nick Bailey and Elan PR.

Tim Pitt works for motoringresearch.com

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The Honda Integra Type R may be the greatest front-driven car ever. Tim Pitt takes a retro road-trip

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The Honda Integra Type R

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRICE: FROM £8,000</th>
<th>PERFORMANCE</th>
<th>DESIGN</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-62MPH: 6.7 SECS</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOP SPEED: 145MPH</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEIGHT: 1,125KG</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPG COMBINED: 32.1MPG</td>
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<td>★★★★</td>
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THE VERDICT:

Not convinced? Check out these alternatives...

AUDI TT QUATTRO SPORT

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<tr>
<th>PRICE: FROM £8,000</th>
<th>PERFORMANCE</th>
<th>DESIGN</th>
<th>PRACTICALITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-62MPH: 5.9 SECS</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOP SPEED: 155MPH</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPG COMBINED: 30.4MPG</td>
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FORD RACING PUMA

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<th>PRACTICALITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-62MPH: 7.9 SECS</td>
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<td>★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOP SPEED: 126MPH</td>
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<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEIGHT: 1,039KG</td>
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<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPG COMBINED: 34.0MPG</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
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SUBARU IMPREZA TURBO 2000

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<th>PRICE: FROM £6,000</th>
<th>PERFORMANCE</th>
<th>DESIGN</th>
<th>PRACTICALITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-62MPH: 5.8 SECS</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOP SPEED: 144MPH</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEIGHT: 1,235KG</td>
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<td>★★★★</td>
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<tr>
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THE VERDICT:

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For more information, please visit the Honda website.
The drama taking place in the Royal House of Windsor is not only gripping material for a future episode of The Crown, but also a wake-up call to all businesses to have a plan for when important personnel step down or leadership responsibilities change.

From the mom-and-pop store to publicly-listed giants, succession planning needs to be built in almost at a company’s birth. History is littered with the wreckage of organisations that suffered from over-reliance on a single person and had no effective plan for succession.

For instance, Reliance used to be one of India’s largest family-owned businesses, operating across sectors ranging from energy to telecoms. Its founder, Dhirubhai Ambani, died suddenly of a stroke in 2002, leaving no will or succession plan. Management fell to his two sons, Mukesh and Anil. But tensions between them led to the whole business being split in two and a feud evolving that was not finally resolved until 2010.

Dropping dead is perhaps not what is usually meant by stepping down from a role. But however a key organisational player leaves, having someone who can smoothly step into their shoes is essential for good management.

Firms have a choice of either recruiting internally or externally. There are pros and cons to both approaches.

If internal, through a programme of training, mentoring and delegating, talented people can be developed to fulfil the role. A major advantage of this more organic approach is that they immediately understand how the business operates, and will already have developed the key relationships that underpin their role.

Through their career development and a planned programme of introductions, they will have already formed sound relationships with clients, customers, investors, and other stakeholders.

In this light — and going back to the Royals — the increasing role of Prince Charles in official functions of state makes perfect sense. Conversely, external candidates might be sought if a business feels that there is a benefit to bringing in fresh blood who can implement a significant and much-needed change in company culture.

However, getting an external chief executive requires time, and it also takes a while for them to get their feet under the desk and become effective.

Countrywide’s recent change at the top has seen a newcomer in the form of Tesco’s ex-finance director Bruce Marsh joining as chief operating officer. But while the move was announced in October 2019, his start date wasn’t confirmed for another month afterwards — and with the General Election and Christmas to contend with, any evidence of his input will likely only be surfacing now.

Flexibility is key, and businesses will need to be agile to match people to roles that are likely to undergo dramatic change.

Clearly, it is prudent to have an effective contingency plan should a succession be needed, whether pre-planned through retirement or suddenly due to ill health. Technology can help soften the blow. Properly implemented systems intrinsic to a firm’s culture can ensure a smooth transition and consistent communications — whether in the boardroom or at the grass roots.

Succession plans also mean having a communication strategy in place. This is illustrated in an early episode of the HBO series Succession, where media magnate Logan Roy becomes incapacitated, and his dysfunctional family has to rush to inform the media about leadership contingencies before the stock market opens.

To avoid a family firm farce or corporate coronary, get those succession plans up and running. After all, no one should be irreplaceable.

Guy Windsor-Lewis is founder and chief executive of Locale.
Fitness is the key to evergreen Westwood’s longevity

EE Westwood’s 25th career European Tour title at the Abu Dhabi Championship on Sunday shows that, like the wine he drinks, the Englishman just gets better with age.

They threw a lot of good scores at him – Tommy Fleetwood and Victor Perez shot 62s and Matthew Fitzpatrick 67 – but Westwood, 46, seems to handle the pressure so well, just one ahead playing the last. He made a birdie to close out a two-shot victory over that trio.

He has been one of the best drivers around for his whole career and it was no different last week. His 70 per cent of fairways hit was the best in

GOLF COMMENT

Sam Torrance

ENGLAND TRUST IN SOUTH

Bess and Pope crush South Africa and offer hope for the future. By Felix Keith

T

HE back-slapping may have been delayed, and the win-
ning moment may have come in an oddly subdued
fashion against a worn-out side on their last legs, but England’s crushing victory over South Africa in the third Test yesterday was no less

momentous.

When Sam Curran threw down the stamps at the non-strikers’ end to run out Keshav Maharaj the first thought was perhaps relief, as victory – and an unassailable series lead – was secured by an innings and 53 runs.

Maharaj and Dane Paterson’s 99-run stand for the final wicket had frustrat-
ingly delayed the inevitable, provided the home fans with some light enter-
tainment and sparked the Port Eliz-
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As convenient as their 18.4-over fling was, it also served to show just how flat the St George’s Park pitch was – and therefore how well England had done to take 20 wickets for the third consecutive time in the series.

For the Root’s four wickets were the surprise highlight of day four, it was Dom Bess’s figures of 5-51 which

DOM Bess: Off-spinner, 22, claimed 5-51 in his fourth Test on Saturday.

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ENGLAND MARCH ON

Visitors thrash sorry South Africa to close in on Test series win

ENGLAND completed a crushing win over South Africa in the third Test at Port Elizabeth yesterday to take a 2-1 lead in the series. The visitors claimed the last four wickets in the morning session of day five, bowling the Proteas out for 237 to win by an innings and 53 runs - their biggest margin of victory in an overseas Test since beating Australia at Sydney in 2011. The hosts began the day on 102-6, needing rain or a miracle to achieve a draw. Keshav Maharaj smashed 71 in a 99-run 10th-wicket stand with Dane Paterson (39 not out) to delay the inevitable but Sam Curran ran out Maharaj to send England to Johannesburg in a position where they cannot lose the series. Jofra Archer is expected to be fit for the final Test following an elbow injury, but South Africa will be without fast bowler Kagiso Rabada, who will serve a one-match ban for picking up four demerit points.

SPORT

BEWARE ‘INTRUDER’ FIFA

European football is at risk of being torn apart, says Spanish league chief Tebas.

JAVIER Tebas, the man who accused Paris Saint-Germain of “peeing in the pool” and flouting football’s financial rules, is now for shooting from the hip and now it is Fifa in the outspoken Spanish league chief’s crosshairs.

Specifically, LaLiga president Tebas is disturbed by his Fifa counterpart Gianni Infantino’s apparent determination to transform the Club World Cup from mid-season sideshow to a major money-spinning, 24-team summer blockbuster.

Amid moated overturns to the Champions League and talk of other breakaway competitions being led by the game’s biggest teams, it is one of several threats to the stability and future prosperity of European football that Tebas is determined to fight.

“I think this whole process has gone mad,” he said of Fifa’s plans, adding that the world governing body was trying to go from regulator to direct competitor of national leagues.

“This is something that worries me because I think we had a balanced ecosystem between the different leagues and competitions in Europe and the different continents. Now we have a sort of intruder who might disrupt that balance.”

Real Madrid’s president Florentino Perez is said to have pitched to Fifa a potential season-long breakaway competition for the world’s richest teams, effectively replacing domestic leagues and European tournaments such as the Champions League. “The game should be levelling the playing field. If we generate wealth and it goes straight back to the big clubs,” he said. “They[re] share out the large part of their income on behalf of their players and instead of having 12 Ferraris they have 12. So our aim is to redistribute that wealth.”

Tebas remains dissatisfied with Uefa’s leadership but continues to refer to it as financial “doping”. “That’s not the solution, but part of the problem is the inflation,” he said.

Tebas’s other key concern is football’s adoption of over-the-top broadcasting, which he believes is a matter of time. “If we’re not ready, it could lead us to a drop in value,” he said. “It is going to happen in football. We need to be prepared for that transition.”

While the Premier League has sold rights for some games to Amazon, Tebas insists he will only follow suit if streaming platforms agree to share consumer behaviour data on LaLiga’s audience. “I think this is the key for our future, to add value to our broadcasting rights,” he said.

A deal with OTT provider Eleven Sports, axed last year after less than a season, “didn’t work well”, conceded Tebas, so Spanish football is back on UK screens this campaign via a dedicated channel, LaLigaTV, which launched last week and is available on Sky and Virgin as well as online via Premier Sports.

That’s not the solution, but part of the problem is the inflation,” he said.

European governing body Uefa’s own radical proposals for the Champions League, which also threatened to benefit only a handful of megacubs, look to have been seen off. Instead, Tebas argues, the game should be levelling the playing field.

“All this talk can wait – Westwood should be prepared for that transition.”

continues on page 27