City watchdogs look into Jes Staley’s relationship with sex offender Epstein

ANNA MENIN

JES STALEY, the boss of Barclays, is under investigation by two City watchdogs over his links to the sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Barclays announced yesterday that the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Bank of England’s Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) were investigating Staley’s characterisation of his relationship with Epstein “and the subsequent description of that relationship”.

The pair met when Staley worked at JP Morgan’s private banking division, which counted the disgraced financier as a client. In 2000, Staley said his relationship with Epstein began to “taper off” and became “much less frequent” after he left JP Morgan in 2013, before ending “totally” in late 2015 — seven years after Epstein’s first conviction. Epstein, who took his own life whilst in jail awaiting the outcome of sex-trafficking charges last year, was first convicted in 2008 for soliciting an underage prostitute.

Staley said he had been “very transparent and open” with the bank about his relationship with Epstein. “I thought I knew him very well and for sure, with hindsight, I deeply regret having had any relationship with Jeffrey Epstein,” he said.

The regulators’ probe began in December after the FCA made an enquiry to Barclays over its boss’ links to Epstein.

© CONTINUES ON P3
© THE CITY VIEW: P2
Sajid Javid chooses to go down with the ship

Just under three months ago, Boris Johnson promised a room full of business leaders that Sajid Javid was guaranteed to remain in office as chancellor. He praised Javid and gave a “categorical” commitment to the CBI conference that he will remain in post. Yesterday, Javid was told that if he wanted to keep his job he would have to submit to Number 10, fire his aides and do as he was told. To his immense credit, he quit. On the face of it, a former Deutsche Bank man has been replaced by a former Goldman Sachs man, and the City won’t be panicking about the switcheroo. Rishi Sunak takes the reins, and in normal circumstances this would be good news for fans of free-market liberalism. Sunak, a minister under Javid at the Treasury, was a regular on the think-tank circuit, extolling the virtues of free-trade, fiscal discipline and low taxes. The problem is, so was Javid — and look where it got him. We are prepared to give Sunak the benefit of the doubt, but it does look as if he’s taken a job that only became vacant because the previous holder wasn’t prepared to see its authority eroded by a power-hungry Number 10. As things stand, there is some confusion over the ideological direction of this government. Mooted wealth taxes, property taxes and hikes to inheritance and capital gains tax have raised eyebrows and, in some quarters, blood pressure. It isn’t clear whether these ideas came from Team Javid or Number 10. If the former, then they could now be buried. If the latter, will Sunak nod them through? Friends of Javid last night insisted that the reality was more complicated, with rows over tax and capital expenditure having reached the point where ideas are leaked and briefed. Beyond the Kremlinology, another issue is unavoidable. Losing your chancellor one month before he was due to deliver the first Budget of a new majority government doesn’t just look careless, it looks reckless. As one asset manager put it yesterday, what happened to the promised stability after so much political uncertainty? Finally, there’s the issue of funding. Sunak, a former Goldman Sachs man, and the City won’t be panicking about the switcheroo. As one asset manager said that while the first phase of a trade deal between the United States and China helped to reduce risks to some extent, the spread of the Wuhan coronavirus was now the main threat to the growth forecast. Germany’s economy is particularly at risk from the coronavirus outbreak, it added. GDP growth in Germany slumped to 0.6 per cent in 2019 and is expected to rebound to 1.1 per cent this year. However, the commission warned that the country was “particularly exposed” to the effect of the coronavirus outbreak. Meanwhile, Belgium’s economic growth is expected to ease to 1.2 per cent this year, from 1.4 per cent in 2019, and fall to one per cent in 2021. The commission also forecast that France’s economic growth will slump to 1.1 per cent this year, from 1.2 per cent in 2019. Italy’s growth is forecast to pick up slightly to 0.3 per cent this year. The commission said inflation across the euro area is expected to accelerate slightly, because of the likelihood of higher oil prices and the effect of higher wages. Consumer price growth forecasts for the Eurozone were raised to 1.3 per cent this year and 1.4 per cent in 2021.

Royal treatment

Prince Charles and Camilla visit the Tower of London to mark 535 years since the creation of the Beefeaters

PRINCE Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall yesterday paid a visit to the Tower of London to mark 535 years since the creation of Yeoman Warders, commonly known as Beefeaters. The royals were given a special tour of the Tower, which was used as a prison for more than 800 years, including a visit to Thomas More’s prison cell, who was executed on treason charges in 1532.

EU holds growth forecast steady

JESS CLARK
@jclarkjourno

THE EUROPEAN Commission left its economic forecast unchanged for this year and 2021, as it warned that several Eurozone member states may see more sluggish growth.

The commission yesterday said GDP growth and consumer inflation for the 19 Eurozone countries would remain at 1.2 this year, continuing into 2021.

The EU’s executive arm said that while the first phase of a trade deal between the United States and China helped to reduce risks to some extent, the spread of the Wuhan coronavirus was now the main threat to the growth forecast.

Germany’s economy is particularly at risk from the coronavirus outbreak.

It added. GDP growth in Germany slumped to 0.6 per cent in 2019 and is expected to rebound to 1.1 per cent this year. However, the commission warned that the country was “particularly exposed” to the effect of the coronavirus outbreak.

Meanwhile, Belgium’s economic growth is expected to ease to 1.2 per cent this year, from 1.4 per cent in 2019, and fall to one per cent in 2021.

The commission also forecast that France’s economic growth will slump to 1.1 per cent this year, from 1.2 per cent in 2019.

Italy’s growth is forecast to pick up slightly to 0.3 per cent this year.

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Cisco rules out plans for Nokia or Ericsson

The chief executive of Cisco Systems has ruled out the idea of taking control of telecoms equipment maker Nokia or Ericsson, dealing a blow to the Trump administration’s latest bid to counter the rise of Chinese equipment maker Huawei. Chuck Robbins, head of the US networking equipment maker, said that building the infrastructure for 5G mobile networks — a big part of the European groups’ operations — did not fit Cisco’s financial strategy, saying: “It’s not how we run our business.”

UBER to let customers call to book taxi rides

Uber is going back to the future in
Centrica shares slump on £1.1bn losses last year

EDWARD THICKNESSE
@edthicknesse

SHARES in British Gas owner Centrica sank 16.3 per cent to 71.8p yesterday as the firm posted a £1.1bn gross loss for the last financial year.

A combination of lower commodities pricing and the impact of the new energy price cap saw the company swing into the red from a £585m profit the year before.

The plunge means that shares have fallen from 300p to 70p over the course of outgoing chief executive Iain Conn’s five-year tenure.

The FTSE firm was also hit by exceptional charges worth £1.1bn due to a combination of falling commodity price forecasts, writedowns from its nuclear power assets, and a £356m restructuring charge.

Revenues were nearly three per cent lower at £22.7bn, while earnings per share fell 35 per cent to 7.3p.

The utilities company lost 286,000 customers from British Gas’ energy supply business last year, far fewer than the 742,000 lost the year before.

Centrica confirmed that it was still seeking to offload its offshore business Spirit Energy, which was hit with a £476m charge, as well as its 20 per cent stake in the UK’s nuclear power station fleet.

Conn said the year had been a “challenging” one but said a much improved second half would give the utilities giant “momentum” for 2020.

Judge blocks Microsoft’s $10bn Pentagon cloud computing deal

JESS CLARK
@jclarkjourno

A US JUDGE has temporarily blocked Microsoft’s $10bn (£7.66bn) Pentagon cloud computing contract, in response to a lawsuit that was filed by Amazon.

Amazon Web Services has been told to earmark $42m to pay for costs and damages in the event that yesterday’s injunction was “issued wrongfully”.

The tech giant launched the legal battle in January, alleging that US President Donald Trump exerted “undue influence” on the decision to hand the 10-year Joint Enterprise Defence Infrastructure (Jedi) cloud contract to Microsoft.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Barclays board backs Staley in spite of probes

BARCLAYS said that its board had carried out its own review and “believes Staley has been sufficiently transparent with the company as regards the nature and extent of his relationship with Epstein”.

The lender added that the chief executive “retains the full confidence of the board” and would be unanimously recommended for re-election at Barclays’ annual general meeting.

The regulators’ investigation comes less than two years after Barclays became embroiled in a whistleblowing scandal that almost cost Staley his job. He was fined £642,000 in 2018 for attempting to identify a whistleblower who sent letters criticising a Barclays employee. US regulators issued Barclays with a $15m (£11.5m) fine related to the same incident.

The admission overshadowed the UK banking giant’s financial results yesterday, which were largely positive. It posted a better-than-expected profit before tax of £6.2bn for 2019, as its investment bank posted bumper returns from fixed-income trading.
Half price, only with Clubcard. Sweet.

Regular Price
£6

Clubcard Price
£3

Dairy Milk Tray 360g, 80p/64g, £6, £3 for Clubcard members, ends 14/02. Available in the majority of larger stores. While stocks last. To qualify for the Clubcard price, you must present your Clubcard or Clubcard app at the time of purchase. Delivery charges may apply.
Questions over Treasury independence

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

The move signals less independence for the Treasury during a critical time for the country’s finances, as Number 10 appears likely to embark on a series of expensive infrastructure projects while also dealing with the potential fallout of Brexit over the transition period ends in December. But the landgrab was not totally unexpected. Javid, who was at loggerheads with Johnson’s chief of staff Dominic Cummings, had faced calls to sack the Treasury adviser who he later described as “Chino” — chancellor in name only.

Javid’s deputy, ex-Barclays banker and accountant Oliver Dowden, who took over as business secretary, will be looking to keep a lid on spending and improve gender balance.

Conservative MPs backed the City’s reaction to Javid’s departure, saying: “2020 promised to be a year of consistency and clarity.”

Although she was not universally acclaimed by those in the City, CBI director general Josh Hardie thanked Leadsom for her “open, collaborative and pragmatic approach.”

An accountant before he became the MP for Reading West in 2010, Sharma will also be responsible for overseeing November’s climate change summit COP26 in Glasgow. He tweeted: “Looking forward to an exciting year ahead.”

Leadsom was one of a number of women to lose their jobs yesterday, despite Number 10’s commitment to improving gender balance.

Environment secretary Theresa Villiers and housing minister Esther McVey were among those to be forced out early on in the day, which also saw culture secretary Baroness Nicky Morgan leave government. All three were replaced by men — George Eustice, Christopher Pincher and Oliver Dowden respectively.

Other cabinet roles were filled by women: attorney general Geoffrey Cox, who was replaced by Brexit minister Suella Braverman, and productivity minister Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

Questions over Treasury independence

“The forthcoming Budget will probably be more of the Prime Minister’s making than would otherwise have been the case; this increases the likelihood of a bold Budget with populist spending announcements,” he added.

Paul Howells, chief of Accumulate Capital, said: “2020 promised to be a period of relative calm… but instead of a year of relative calm, we have to deal with the Northern Ireland Assembly being suspended and the Northern Ireland Assembly being held in Belfast,” he said.

Penny Mordaunt was made paymaster general while Amanda Milling was named Conservative party chairman. But outside of the Treasury shake-up, the biggest upset was Johnson’s sacking of Julian Smith as Northern Ireland secretary. Smith, who was instrumental in getting the Northern Ireland Assembly back on track earlier this year, had been praised by politicians of all political stripes including outgoing Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and DUP leader Arlene Foster.

It is thought his time as chief whip and recent comments about Brexit — suggesting a no-deal would be bad for Northern Ireland — had cost him his job, which went to Brandon Lewis. One MP told City AM: “Deal aside, he wasn’t well regarded as chief whip under [Theresa] May and clashed with Boris Johnson as foreign secretary.”

Another added: “Number 10 has never liked him.”

There was no movement among several of Johnson’s most senior cabinet ministers, including home secretary Priti Patel, foreign secretary Dominic Raab and chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove.

Jacob Rees-Mogg retained his role as leader of the house, despite having made misjudged comments on Grenfell last year.

International trade secretary Liz Truss, who was rumoured to be at risk if her department was folded into one of the bigger beasts, also clung on. However party chairman James Cleverly’s promotion to joint minister at the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development is a sign that a merger between the two, floated during the General Election, could be coming further down the line.

Other promotions of note include Greg Hands, who returns to the trade department as a minister.

PRESERVE THE PINT

Conservative MPs make push for ministers to slash beer duty

MIKE Wood, chair of the All-Parliamentary Beer Group, and south-east Cornwall MP Sheri Y Murray delivered a letter signed by 85 Conservative MPs yesterday which called on the Treasury to raise duty. Claiming UK prices are too high compared to Europe.

Catherine Neilan

FRIDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2020 | NEWS | 05

The Cabinet reshuffle: Who’s in and who’s out.

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW...

Fired

ANDREA LEADSOM

Ardent Brexiter and twice a contender for the leadership of the party, the ex-Barclays banker is out as business secretary.

JULIAN SMITH

The Northern Ireland secretary received the heave-ho despite leading efforts to rebuild the Northern Irish assembly.

GEOFFREY COX

Cox’s barrister will now be heard on the backbenches rather than as attorney general. He introduced Johnson at the now-PM’s leadership launch.

HIRED

ALOK SHARMA

Alok Sharma will step up to the business secretary role following Leadsom’s sacking. The MP for Reading West is a former banker and accountant.

OLIVER DOWDEN

The former Cameron adviser takes on the culture secretary role, with Baroness Nicky Morgan stepping down.

SUELLA BRAVERMAN

The former barrister steps into Cox’s shoes as the senior lawyer in the land.

Questions over Treasury independence

Catherine Neilan

THE BUSINESS community will today start building ties with its fifth secretary of state in a decade, after yesterday’s bruising reshuffle saw Andrea Leadsom one of the first to be sacked.

Leadsom, who was widely expected to leave Boris Johnson’s cabinet ahead of yesterday’s announcement, is to be replaced by former international development secretary Alok Sharma.

Although she was not universally acclaimed by those in the City, CBI director general Josh Hardie thanked Leadsom for her “open, collaborative and pragmatic approach.”

An accountant before he became the MP for Reading West in 2010, Sharma will also be responsible for overseeing November’s climate change summit COP26 in Glasgow. He tweeted: “Looking forward to an exciting year ahead.”

Leadsom was one of a number of women to lose their jobs yesterday, despite Number 10’s commitment to improving gender balance.

Environment secretary Theresa Villiers and housing minister Esther McVey were among those to be forced out early on in the day, which also saw culture secretary Baroness Nicky Morgan leave government. All three were replaced by men — George Eustice, Christopher Pincher and Oliver Dowden respectively.

Other cabinet roles were filled by women: attorney general Geoffrey Cox, who was replaced by Brexit minister Suella Braverman, and productivity minister Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

Penny Mordaunt was made paymaster general while Amanda Milling was named Conservative party chairman. But outside of the Treasury shake-up, the biggest upset was Johnson’s sacking of Julian Smith as Northern Ireland secretary. Smith, who was instrumental in getting the Northern Ireland Assembly back on track earlier this year, had been praised by politicians of all political stripes including outgoing Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and DUP leader Arlene Foster.

It is thought his time as chief whip and recent comments about Brexit — suggesting a no-deal would be bad for Northern Ireland — had cost him his job, which went to Brandon Lewis. One MP told City AM: “Deal aside, he wasn’t well regarded as chief whip under [Theresa] May and clashed with Boris Johnson as foreign secretary.”

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Other promotions of note include Greg Hands, who returns to the trade department as a minister.
Commerzbank to continue cost cuts after smaller-than-expected losses

ANNA MENIN
@annafmenin

COMMERZBANK said yesterday it was seeking to make further cuts to costs after reporting a smaller-than-expected loss for the fourth quarter.

The German lender, which is in the process of restructuring following a loss for the fourth quarter, posted a €34m (£29m) quarterly loss. Chief executive Martin Zielke said he was growing optimistic about the bank’s prospects despite the loss, which compared to a net profit of €113m a year earlier, but was not as bad as analysts’ forecasts of €90m.

The state-backed bank posted a net profit of €644m for the entire year, down from €862m in 2018. Annual revenues rose from €8.57bn to €8.64bn. Commerzbank said it would announce further measures to trim its expenses in the coming days.

“We have already made tangible progress with our strategy,” Zielke said of the overhaul, which includes staff cuts, absorbing its Comdirect online brokerage and closing branches.

Commerzbank also confirmed that the sale of its Polish arm Mbank had begun. Some prospective bidders have been shying away from bidding on the division, Reuters reported, amid concerns over possible interference from the Polish government.

Thiam to resign as Credit Suisse posts profit rise

ANNA MENIN
AND EDWARD THICKNESSE
@annafmenin, @edthicknesse

CREDIT Suisse has reported its highest annual profit in almost a decade, just days after chief executive Tidjane Thiam was ousted in the wake of a lurid spying scandal that erupted last year.

The Swiss lender’s pre-tax profit rose 40 per cent to SFr4.7bn (£3.7bn) for 2019, the highest figure since 2010. Net income attributable to share-holders exceeded expectations to rise 69 per cent to SFr1.4bn over the year, above analyst forecasts of SFr1.2bn.

The results represent a bittersweet farewell for Thiam, who was ousted last week after a bitter boardroom battle with chairman Urs Rohner amid fallout from a scandal over the bank spying on former executives. For the final quarter of the year, the Swiss domestic giant posted net income of SFr852m, ahead of predictions of SFr838m.

Net revenues reached SFr22.4bn, up from SFr20.9bn a year earlier, but was not as bad as analysts’ forecasts of SFr21.4bn.

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Net revenues reached SFr22.4bn, up from SFr20.9bn a year before. Return on tangible equity hit nine per cent in 2019, a rise from five per cent in 2018 but below previous targets of 10 to 11 per cent.

“I am proud of what Credit Suisse has achieved during my tenure,” said Thiam. “We have turned Credit Suisse around, and our 2019 results show we can be sustainably profitable.”

“Our performance in 2019, the first full year post restructuring, illustrates how much the bank has changed since 2015,” he added.

During his four years in charge, Thiam tried to put the Swiss lender on a more even keel by cutting costs and exiting more risk intensive banking activities. However Credit Suisse has been mired in scandal since the lender hired a spying firm last summer to tail an executive who defected to arch-rival UBS.

Although Credit Suisse insisted that the use of private detectives was a one-off incident, it emerged in December that the bank had also spied on its former head of human resources.

Rohner said last week that the emergence of the second case had “made the situation worse”.

BRIEF

ZURICH INSURANCE BUOYED BY UK’S PERFORMANCE

Zurich Insurance’s stellar performance last year was boosted by a strong showing by its British business Zurich UK. The firm’s UK earnings were up 59 per cent to £431m from £260m in 2018. General insurance gross written premium increased four per cent to £2.3bn from £2.2bn in 2018. Zurich UK’s chief executive Tulsi Naidu said: “This result is a product of the improvements we have made across every aspect of our general insurance business over the last few years — combining a real emphasis on technical excellence with improvements in customer service, simplified processes and digital capabilities.” Zurich UK’s life and savings profit grew 15 per cent, which it attributed to its retail proposition.

GAMBLING STOCKS FALL ON ONLINE SLOTS CAP PLANS

Shares in gambling firms fell yesterday after the industry watchdog told MPs that it was considering capping the amount punters can bet online. FTSE 250 betting firm William Hill dropped 7.68 per cent yesterday, and GVC Holdings fell seven per cent. 888 Holdings also fell 3.44 per cent, but Rank Group bucked the trend, closing up 4.62 per cent. On Tuesday, Gambling Commission boss Neil McArthur told the all parliamentary group on gambling-related harm that a decision on a limit would be announced within six months. In November MPs called for gambling firms to commit to a £2 limit per bet for online slot machines, which would align them with the machines found in high street shops.

IN BRIEF

FRENCH drinks firm Pernod Ricard, which owns brands such as Malibu and Bacardi, cut its annual operating profit goal yesterday blaming the coronavirus outbreak in China. The firm’s main market is China, where the global health crisis originated.

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Airbus swings to €1.36bn loss as settlement bites

JACK RICHARDSON @JackRich93

AEROSPACE giant Airbus yesterday announced it swung to a €1.36bn (€1.13bn) loss in 2019, down from a profit of just over €3bn the year before, after it was hit by an international bribery case settlement.

The loss reflected a provision for last month’s €4bn (€3.06bn) settlement with prosecutors over past corrupt practices, as well as a €1.2bn charge against its A400M military transport aircraft.

The group said it met other targets, while sales of commercial planes were strong, with net orders increasing to 768 aircraft – up from 747 in 2018.

Chief executive Guillaume Faury said: “We achieved a great deal in 2019. We delivered a strong, with net orders increasing to 768 aircraft – up from 747 in 2018.

Chief executive Guillaume Faury said: “We achieved a great deal in 2019. We delivered a strong performance, driven mainly by our commercial aircraft deliveries.”

The plane maker’s consolidated order book was valued at €471bn, up from €460bn at the close of 2018.

Consolidated revenues increased to €70.5bn, up from the €63.7bn recorded in 2018 and consolidated adjusted earnings rose €6.9bn from the 2018 amount of €5.8bn.

Airbus is planning to deliver 880 commercial aircraft this year, forecasting adjusted earnings of around €7.9bn.

It expects flight numbers to continue to rise, but said it has not yet accounted for any potential disruption caused by the coronavirus.

On Wednesday, Airbus took the remaining shares in the A220 single aisle programme from Bombardier. Meanwhile, rival plane maker Boeing continues to face difficulties with the continued grounding of the 737 Max airliner.

Airbus had its own difficulties in 2019, such as the decision in February to stop making the A380 super jumbo in 2021.

However, the regulator yesterday said it had cleared the deal, ruling it would not increase prices or drive competitors out of the market.

The acquisition — one of Google’s largest — will help the search firm build its Big Query tool, which is used for managing large datasets.

Looker uses a visualisation tool that helps clients spot patterns in data, competing alongside the likes of Tableau and Microsoft’s Power BI. The watchdog approval comes after the merger was also investigated and cleared by the US Department of Justice and the European Federal Competition Authority.

The CMA said that while Google could make it difficult for rivals to access Google-generated data from online advertising and web analytics services, there was “no strong evidence” the company would do so.

The green light will be a welcome boost for Google amid a series of competition probes in the US and EU.

The airline’s full-year loss widened 11 per cent to €1.61bn, which it blamed on the 737 Max crisis and issues with its 787 Dreamliner fleet.

Tesla plots $2bn stock issue as it plugs into recent surge in shares

JAMES WARRINGTON @j_warrington

TESLA yesterday unveiled plans to raise roughly $2bn (£1.5bn) by issuing new stock, just weeks after boss Elon Musk said his firm would not seek to raise more capital.

Musk will personally purchase up to $1m of shares in the offering, while Oracle founder Larry Ellison, who sits on Tesla’s board of directors, will also buy up to $1m of stock.

Tesla said it would also grant the underwriters a 30-day option to buy up to $300m in additional shares. It follows a bullish period for Tesla shares that has pushed its market capitalisation towards $150bn, making it the world’s second most valuable car maker behind Toyota.

Shares rose 4.78 per cent yesterday.

Google secures watchdog approval for $2.6bn takeover of data firm Looker

JAMES WARRINGTON @j_warrington

GOOGLE has completed its $2.6bn (£2bn) acquisition of analytics firm Looker after the deal was approved by the competition watchdog.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) opened an investigation into the merger in December amid concerns it could damage competition in the UK’s cloud computing market.

However, the regulator yesterday said it had cleared the deal, ruling it would not increase prices or drive competitors out of the market.

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Gem diamonds revenue jumps 41 per cent

Gem Diamonds saw its revenue increase 41 per cent yesterday after a hike in the price of the precious stones had producers optimistic of a better 2020 for the troubled market.

The miner, which has operations in Lesotho, said revenue hit $10m (£3.95m) up from $36.3m in the previous quarter. A 21 per cent rise in prices to $3,713 per carat was the prime driver of the growth, but the firm also sold 29,463 carats worth of the gems, 17 per cent more than the previous quarter.

737 MAX CRISIS HEAVENS ON NORWEGIAN AIR

Norwegian Air yesterday posted a loss of 1.87bn Norwegian krone (£155m) in the fourth quarter. This narrowed from the 3bn krone loss posted over the same period in 2018, but trailed analysts’ forecasts.

The airline’s full-year loss widened 11 per cent to 1.61bn krone, which it blamed on the 737 Max crisis and issues with its 787 Dreamliner fleet.

EDF BUYS ELECTRIC CAR CHARGE FIRM POD POINT

EDF yesterday bought a majority stake in electric vehicle charging point manufacturer Pod Point as part of a deal worth more than £100m, City A.M. understands.

The tie-up also forms part of a new joint venture with Legal & General Capital, in which the latter will also take a 23 per cent stake in Pod Point. Talks about the state-owned French state-backed energy giant had been ongoing for some time.

Nissan hits losses in light of Carlos Ghosn scandal

JACK RICHARDSON @JackRich93

NISSAN yesterday posted a net loss of ¥26.6bn (£183.3m) in the third quarter of 2019.

The firm has cut its annual operating profit forecast by 43 per cent after global vehicle sales fell 11 per cent from October to December.

“We are making progress, but sales volumes have been weak so we need to do more restructuring than initially planned,” Nissan’s boss Makoto Uchida said yesterday.

Shares in the company fell 1.54 per cent to ¥568 yesterday.

Reports said that to turn the situation around, Nissan will reduce the number of car models produced, shut two manufacturing sites and shed at least 4,300 white collar jobs.

The firm has been damaged by changes in the car industry and the crisis caused by the escape from Japan of ex-boss Carlos Ghosn.

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The green light will be a welcome boost for Google amid a series of competition probes in the US and EU.
Model shown is a Mustang Mach-E First Edition Extended Range AWD. Fuel economy mpg (l/100km) (Combined): Not applicable. CO₂ emissions: 0g/km. Electric Range: 335 Miles. These figures were obtained after the battery had been fully charged. The Mustang Mach-E is a battery electric vehicle requiring mains electricity for charging. There is a new test for fuel consumption, CO₂ and electric range figures. The electric range shown was achieved using the new test procedure. Figures shown are for comparability purposes. Only compare fuel consumption, CO₂ and electric range figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures.

EXPERIENCE ELECTRIC ACCELERATION IN OUR MUSTANG MACH-E LAUNCH SIMULATOR

FREE ENTRY

MARBLE ARCH
14-21 FEBRUARY

#GoElectric
Alibaba forecast under pressure from virus fears

ANGHARAD CARRICK

Alibaba beat analyst estimates in its fourth-quarter results yesterday, driven by record sales during Singles’ Day in November.

Despite this the company sounded a warning about the start of 2020 because of the coronavirus outbreak, and said that it was doing all it can to help Chinese consumers.

“In response to the coronavirus, we mobilised the Alibaba ecosystem’s powerful forces of commerce and technology to fully support the fight against the outbreak,” Alibaba chairman and chief executive Daniel Zhang said in a statement.

He added that the firm had made efforts to “ensure supply of daily necessities for our communities and introduce practical relief measures for our merchants”.

The company reported record sales of 268bn yuan (€29.5bn) in November’s 24-hour shopping event, while sales in the company’s core commerce business jumped 38 per cent to 141.48bn yuan. Revenue rose 38 per cent to 161.46bn yuan, beating estimates of 159.28bn yuan.

During a call with analysts Zhang said that the coronavirus outbreak is a “black swan event”, warning that it has global implications.

Chinese companies like Alibaba and tech giant Tencent have suffered from challenges they face.

“Although we are optimistic, we recognise the legal uncertainties we face in 2020.”

Deliveroo issues a warning over chef shortage in UK restaurants

JESS CLARK

FOOD delivery platform Deliveroo has launched a new chef apprenticeship fund to tackle a skills shortage in the restaurant sector.

The takeaway app said today that a shortage of trained chefs could stunt growth in the UK’s restaurant sector and harm British high streets.

The company added that eight out of 10 of its restaurant partners are struggling to hire new chefs.

More than half of Deliveroo’s partners said not finding enough suitably qualified applicants is the biggest barrier to hiring chefs.

Deliveroo’s new scheme will invest £100,000 a year to train up to 20 chefs, in partnership with apprenticeship provider HIT Training.

The partnership has called on the government to lift the restriction on apprenticeship levy transfers.

Deliveroo’s chief operating officer Rohan Pradhan said: “We speak to restaurants across the country every day and want to help them tackle the challenges they face.”

Indivior swings to $42m loss as its flagship drug loses its market share

EDWARD THICKNESSE

SHARES in drug maker Indivior slumped more than 20 per cent to 39.6p yesterday after the firm booked a $42m (£32.4m) loss for the fourth quarter, on the back of falling prices for its flagship opioid addiction treatment.

The firm, which is battling a potentially crushing $3bn fine for illegally marketing Suboxone, also forecast a net loss of $20m to $50m for the coming year.

Indivior has seen its market share for Suboxone fall from 53 per cent to 24 per cent over the course of the year as rivals undercut prices with copycat treatments.

Chief executive Shaun Thaxter said: “Although we are optimistic, we recognise the legal uncertainties we face in 2020.”

Government warns CBD products to come down from shelves

ALL UK food products containing cannabis extract cannabidiol (CBD) will be taken off the shelves from 31 March next year if they have not been submitted for approval to the Food Standards Agency (FSA), the fast-growing sector was warned yesterday.

CBD products to come down from shelves

TIME TO BE BLUNT

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How to make space for cosmic investing

We should look up to the stars for a few tips on investment, says Will Hobbs

Valentine’s Day 2020 will be about more than roses and chocolate. It marks the 30th anniversary of one of the most iconic images of all time: a parting photograph of Earth taken by the Voyager 1 space probe. This image became notorious as the Pale Blue Dot, a seemingly insignificant pixel against a vast black canvas. For investors, what can we learn from the staggering science of astronomy?

Firstly, taking a step back and looking at the big picture matters. When investing for the long term (on a human scale), daily headlines are little more than meteors, skimming the sky and burning up.

Likewise, geographically, portfolios built across continents are less influenced by issues affecting a single country. We feel the gravity of local conditions — and leave it well alone. Of course, you should always be aware that you might get back less than you originally invested.

Secondly, a single event is more than meteors, scorching the sky individually. The breadcrumbs have been gobbled up by hungry trading algorithms, poised on a server milliseconds from the stock exchange. For investors, what can we learn from the fabric of the universe? One thing is clear: big swings in value are possible.

In the time since its launch, the S&P 500 has increased in value by over 10,000 per cent, including reinvested dividends. A superb investment and a remarkable return.

However investors were less than pleased, as shares of the merged firm fell 3.5 per cent to $7.65 per share yesterday. Neil Wilson, chief markets analyst at Markets.com, said: “Just Eat Takeaway.com is not providing guidance because of the material impact of the merger. Go figure that one out.”

He added: “Shareholders would expect the company to know what it’s letting itself in for. You’d think they understand the impact of the merger on revenues. On that basis, reporting the past numbers are kind of irrelevant. How do shareholders figure out value?”

Chief executive Jitse Groen said: “For the first time since our [listing], the company ended the year with a positive adjusted earnings. Achieving this by the end of the third quarter was one of the medium-term targets in our [listing] prospects.”

EU RAISED CARTEL FINES 74 PER CENT LAST YEAR

The European Union increased fines for cartels 74 per cent last year to $1.6bn (€1.2bn). Analysis released yesterday showed that the EU was the top of the global table for cartel fines, with the amount levied increasing nearly 40 per cent from the previous year. In May, the EU Commission hit five banks — Barclays, RBS, Citigroup, JP Morgan and MUFG — with a cumulative €1.07bn (£900m) fine for operating two cartels in the foreign exchange markets. The banks involved are now the subject of a £1bn class action lawsuit being brought in London by entities affected by the rigging such as pension funds and asset managers. The force decision brings total fines imposed by the Commission on the financial services sector to over $5bn, and two further cases which could incur more fees.

DOMINO’S PIZZA SELLS ITS NORWEGIAN OPERATIONS

Domino’s Pizza said yesterday it has sold its Norwegian business to its existing minority shareholder as it moves to extricate itself from its loss-making European operations. The pizza chain said it will sell its 71 per cent stake in the Norwegian business in the company’s German operations in April.

The deal will give Domino’s full ownership of its Norwegian business which will then look to offload. “Now we have agreed the transaction for Norway, we will focus on progressing transactions for our businesses in Sweden, Switzerland and Iceland,” said chief David Wild. The firm has been trying to exit from its loss-making international markets as it struggles to control costs. London-listed shares in the firm rose 1.3 per cent.

Often, the hardest step with investing is taking the initial plunge. Whilst the orbits of planets are very predictable, the same cannot be said of investing. Risk is the tricky part, and it can be hard to make head or tail of. Nevertheless, a good way to visualise the range of possible investment returns over time is to think about the Big Bang. In the first nanosecond of existence, the fabric of the universe ballooned out at an astonishing rate, before settling down to a more genteel period of expansion. The same kind of thing happens to the breadth of probable returns for a portfolio. Early on, big swings in value are possible. Although past performance doesn’t guarantee future equivalent, you are unlikely to see crisis after crisis, or jackpot after jackpot.

Voyager 1 is still going, and is now around 22bn kilometres from Earth. In the time since its launch, the S&P 500 has increased in value by over 10,000 per cent, including reinvested dividends. A superb investment and a remarkable return.
Labour looks destined to sit out the next 10 years in a cold political wilderness

On Monday, Lord Michael Ashcroft published a detailed and searingly honest critique of the Labour party’s failed 2019 election. Based on polling and focus groups of former Labour voters, he painted a picture of a party that had drifted so far away from the values and aspirations of ordinary people that its drubbing was inevitable. In the focus group of long Labour voters who abandoned the party in December last year spoke almost with one voice. They said the manifesto was a joke, that the party was hostile to business owners and that the give-aways and tax rises were just not credible. On Tuesday, I asked one of the contenders for the Labour leadership, Emily Thornberry, whether she had read this new analysis. “Haven’t had time,” she said. We were guests on the BBC’s Politics Live, and took the opportunity to give Thornberry an on-air run-down of Ashcroft’s findings. She looked at me as if I’d just explained my weekend plans. On the matter of her party being too left-wing, she told me “it isn’t an issue of left or right”, which I am to say “it isn’t an issue of winning or losing.”

Thornberry won’t win so perhaps her refusal to confront reality doesn’t matter, but front-runner Sir Keir Starmer should certainly be prepared to learn the lessons of defeat. Plenty of former Labour voters are crying out for a return to centre-left pragmatism. One such voter was in the audience for a Labour leadership debate on the Victoria Derbyshire Show yesterday. To large applause in the studio he lambasted Labour’s 2019 manifesto and the party’s self-indulgent slide into student politics. He then declared that he backed Starmer for the leadership on the grounds that he’d drag the party back towards the centre. Starmer’s face was a picture. He looked just like a man who knew the chap in the audience made perfect sense but who had, hours earlier, publicly committed himself to Corbyn’s failed agenda of tax rises and sneering nationalisations. His main challenger Rebecca Long-Bailey is the true heir to Corbyn but in order to win the leadership race Starmer knows he has to win over the Labour membership which, according to polling, is the only demographic group in the country that thinks Corbyn did a good job. The other explanation is that Starmer actually believes this stuff. Either way, it’s a pretty depressing state of affairs and anyone who thinks Starmer is going to emerge as a centrist Blairite is due a rude awakening. As I suggested after the election, Corbyn may shuffle off to his allotment but his influence and hold over the Labour party is set to endure, whether through accident or design. While it may be premature to say so, the job of the next leader is not to become Prime Minister (it would require an even bigger shock than last year’s election to achieve) but to return the Labour party to political respectability. The only candidate who could do that, Lisa Nandy, is unlikely to win and so all of us, whether we support the traditional aims of the Labour party or not, are faced with the prospect of a once proud and successful institution remaining stubbornly outside the arena in which elections are won. Truly, Corbyn has inflicted more damage on this party than even I thought possible.

Finally, the City knows what it’s fighting about in Brexit talks

One of the downsides to Sajid Javid’s departure from the Treasury is that he appeared to be the first minister since the Brexit referendum who was prepared to consider seriously the future of the City’s relationship with EU markets. His article for this newspaper earlier this week, prompted a direct response (riposte, even) from the EU’s chief negotiator Michel Barnier. “Don’t kid yourselves,” was Barnier’s message. Despite the apparent finality of his statement, the exchange of views is actually a positive development. Under Theresa May and then declared that he backed Starmer for the leadership, Emily Thornberry, whether she

There are 1.9bn people in the world who are just too heavy

Jaguar Land Rover chief executive Ralf Speth, frustrated by calls to make lighter vehicles, says that “obesity is responsible for 700 megatonnes of CO2 emissions a year but that nobody ever asks fat people to slim down.”

Editor’s Notes

Labour looks destined to sit out the next 10 years in a cold political wilderness

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N MONDAY, Lord Michael Ashcroft published a detailed and searingly honest critique of the Labour party’s failed 2019 election. Based on polling and focus groups of former Labour voters, he painted a picture of a party that had drifted so far away from the values and aspirations of ordinary people that its drubbing was inevitable. In the focus group of long Labour voters who abandoned the party in December last year spoke almost with one voice. They said the manifesto was a joke, that the party was hostile to business owners and that the give-aways and tax rises were just not credible. On Tuesday, I asked one of the contenders for the Labour leadership, Emily Thornberry, whether she had read this new analysis. “Haven’t had time,” she said. We were guests on the BBC’s Politics Live, and took the opportunity to give Thornberry an on-air run-down of Ashcroft’s findings. She looked at me as if I’d just explained my weekend plans. On the matter of her party being too left-wing, she told me “it isn’t an issue of left or right”, which I am to say “it isn’t an issue of winning or losing.”

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LONDON REPORT

FTSE ends winning streak as concerns over virus persist

LONDON’s blue-chip index fell yesterday after two successive days of gains, dragged down by exporters which were hurt by a stronger pound as investors positioned for a high-spending Budget next month under a new chancellor.

The FTSE 100 ended the session 1.1 per cent lower, dented by steep falls in heavyweight Barclays and Centrica, while a rise in new coronavirus cases in China jolted broader risk sentiment. British utility Centrica skidded 15.3 per cent after its 2019 profit slumped by more than a third.

Barclays slumped 1.7 per cent as news Britain’s financial regulators were probing historical links between the bank’s chief executive officer and US financier Jeffrey Epstein overshadowed the lender’s financial results. Nor should we rush to judge that shares have swung sharply in recent sessions amid takeover chatter, tumbled 4.2 per cent after analysts at Socgen slapped a double rating downgrade on the stock.

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POLITICS may be show busi- ness but cabinet reshuffles have more of a feel of football’s transfers than the best deals in the market. Ambitious and hopeful MPs keep their phones close by, hoping to see a withheld number and hear the words “Downing Street for you”. Hacks and politicians watch on the sidelines, tracking who is in and who is out, propagating tentative and tenuous rumours. “Shall I call ‘Business’ is the ugly, uncool person’s “Onana to Chelsea”. Yet for all the attention paid to the ups and downs of the UK’s top table, little thought is given to how minis- ters run our country – whether our political elite prevents ministers from openly challenging the government little else matters. Ministers are free to surround them- selves with allies and enemies, knowing that few care more trouble than MPs who think they should be more important than they are.

For a Prime Minister, the exercise of patronage in a new term and over- ruling their party. Even the most re- belious of MPs can be cowed by the high drama of reshuffle day. There is little chance to develop once inside the Commons, until suddenly one is in put in charge of a vast department, dealing with something they have never considered before.

This is further compounded by the turnover of ministers which some departments face. There is an implicit hierarchy to po- sitions, meaning room for promo- tion and demotion within cabinet. Ministers who do well are rapidly moved up the ladder, while others may get booted down to less glamorous positions. Often, they fall because of press or low status departments – most nota- bly Housing – can have a new minister every year.

Government departments find themselves with inexperienced and unsuitable people at the helm. In re- cent years this has become striking. Think of Karen Bradley, the former Northern Ireland secretary, who ad- mitted that until taking up her role she did not realise that Ulster voters split along sectarian lines.

Ministers who are out of their depth can become part of the civil service, unable to interrogate properly the departments they are meant to run. Knowing they are un- likely to be judged on results makes them more concerned with political reputations than improving their areas. And even those that do commit may not be given the chance to suc- ceed or fail. Rory Stewart promised to resign as prisoners minister if violence was reduced within a year, yet he had already been promoted when the year came around.

Equally the political nature of ap- pointments means that failure may not stymie a ministerial career. Priti Patel was said for holding unauthorised meetings with a for- eign power, but she returned as Boris Johnson’s home secretary.

“Compelling evidence” that Gavin Williamson leaked top secret information from the national se- curity council led to him getting the sack, only to return to cabinet 10 weeks later.

John Oxley is a Conservative commentator.

Taking charge of multi-billion pound departments is a daunting task, and one many MPs may not be up to

Don’t frame it as a front in the culture war, BBC reform can be in everyone’s interests

Emma Revell

Thus moves to fully privatisate the service and suggestions of content supported by adverts are met with horror. A clear majority of the public want to watch other live TV chan- nels but don’t use BBC services would be free from the obligation to pay for them, while the legions of Strictly and Doctor Who fans could continue to subscribe.

Freed from the restrictions cur- rently placed upon it as a public service broadcaster, the BBC could create tiers of service, includ- ing those who only watch on mobile devices and those watching over- seas. The new BBC could decide to offer cheaper rates for over-75s or under-25s, for example, and one-off fees for temporary or partial access.

The BBC could also seek to provide services to the millions of Brits abroad, and the global English- speaking world, who would love to access its content but are locked out or forced to wait for months for shows to be screened on regional platforms like BBC America. A more independent BBC would be better able to adapt to the needs of the 21st century. The current corporation chases demographics that are mov- ing away at lightning speeds – whether that’s younger viewers only watching programmes online, or couples settling down for a Net- flix binge rather than switching on the traditional soap.

This model could be made to work for both the BBC and viewers of all ages by replacing their tax with a subscription. The secretariat of the committee has been named as the BBC board, which would be better able to adapt to the needs of the 21st century. The current corporation chases demographics that are mov- ing away at lightning speeds – whether that’s younger viewers only watching programmes online, or couples settling down for a Net-flix binge rather than switching on the traditional soap.

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The high drama of reshuffle day should matter less than who is ca- pable of changing departments – and lives – for the better.

Emma Revell is head of communications at the Institute of Economic Affairs.
Free ports can revitalise the UK’s coastal communities

BRITAIN has always been a maritime nation. But for decades, our coastal communities have been ignored. Now, in the wake of Brexit, it’s high time we invested in these areas — and the government’s announcement that it is beginning a consultation on 10 free ports is a major step towards realising the potential of these communities.

Seafaring is a part of our national identity. But for much of the twentieth century, our maritime sector has suffered. We’ve seen shipyards close and rising competition from the far east, while the coastal towns and cities that once flourished have been damaged as the new industries they were promised failed to materialise.

The rest of the country moved forward, but these areas were left behind. Nor is the trend improving. The “coastal community wage gap” widened in 2018: average employee annual pay was £4,700 lower than in the rest of Britain, up from £3,200 in 2017.

The financial crisis also hit coastal communities hard: Britain’s coastal economy grew by 7.5 per cent between 2010 and 2017, compared to the rest of the country’s economic growth of 17.1 per cent. The gap between the coast and other parts of the UK is greater now than it was before the crisis.

It’s small wonder, then, that so many people in these communities voted Leave in the EU Referendum. Many followed this with their first ever vote for a Conservative government in December. In doing so, they gave the Prime Minister a historic mandate to “level up” the parts of the country that have fallen behind, and this has put renewed focus on our maritime sector.

Just as the sector was responsible for our past successes, so too can it navigate our island nation to a bright new future today.

Maritime has a unique capacity to drive economic growth across all parts of the country, and this consultation on free ports is the first step. These special economic zones will drive investment to left-behind communities, while new tax incentives and pro-business rules will allow our ports to invest more of their own money quicker. The measures that drove growth in the Docklands and on Merseyside can do the same elsewhere.

Now, the government must plan ahead. This starts with investing in infrastructure to support the increased development around existing ports. To realise the benefits of free ports, these growing hubs of economic activity must be connected to population and distribution centres across the UK.

But free ports are just the beginning. The government could recognise the UK’s expertise in shipbuilding and commit to building the Royal Navy’s new support ships here, rather than running an international competition. Other countries, including France and Germany, do this and enjoy the benefits.

And with the so-called “blue economy” set to double in size to $3 trillion by 2030, investing in our ocean industries can help develop the whole country, rather than simply shift economic activity from one part to another.

Maritime is economically effective, but it’s environmentally sound, too — it’s already the lowest-carbon way of transporting goods. So let’s move goods off road and rail to coastal and inland waterways, and put green technology at the heart of our coastal regeneration. We can make major progress towards the zero-emission future that the Prime Minister wants.

It’s time to exploit our coastline and our rich maritime tradition to chart a course into a bright new future. By restoring our coastal communities, the government can show the nation its refusal to leave anyone behind. And it can show the world and all the doubters our continued commitment to free trade and internationalism.

Harry Theochari is chair of Maritime UK and global head of transport for Norton Rose Fullbright.

“Maritime has a unique capacity to drive economic growth across the country.”

DEBATE

Happy Valentine’s Day — but is the holiday just a marketing gimmick?

Love is a commodity in much demand, and there is little enough of it to go around.

The decline in the amount of sex men in the US are having has been linked to the rise of populism and the election of Donald Trump. Loneliness in the UK is growing, while the use of dating apps is swiftly becoming the most popular way for people to meet.

Love, it seems, really is all we need — if only we can find it.

But Valentine’s Day and the commercial engine behind it is not the solution we need. The industrial-holiday complex loves Valentine’s Day, a way to spew out endless amounts of tat, cheap chocolate, crappy wine and tacky cards which we think we need to buy to prove our love for another (or others, if you’re so lucky). It isn’t true. The meaning of Valentine’s Day is to share love. Do it with a phone call, a text, a whisper into your darling’s ear. Go tell someone you fancy that you, well, fancy them.

It will make their day and won’t cost you a penny.

Nicholas Maze is a corporate social responsibility adviser.

NO

MARK DAVIS

chance to spread some love and happiness (and make Sunida in accounts feel special). If you take a constructive approach and give things a bit of a twist, Valentine’s Day doesn’t have to be a “commercial con”. It can put a smile on people’s faces.

Mark Davis is co-founder and creative director of property branding agency meldove.
The Great British High Street has lost a bit of its lustre in recent years. Handfuls of household-name retailers have hit the rocks, thanks to customers gravitating away from big chains in favour of local independents, as well as being seduced by the ease of online shopping.

But while shops are floundering, the market for homes is going strong. High street flats are becoming more desirable than ever, as people prioritise proximity to the local coffee shop and tube station over living on a secluded street with a double garage.

Fintech company Proportunity, which provides ‘Help to Buy-style’ equity loans to home buyers, has identified the London high streets where the average price of a flat has risen most since 2009.

“Living on the high street comes with many benefits, from increased mobility to the range of amenities and services on your doorstep,” says Vadim Toader, its founder and CEO. “The lack of available land in urban areas pushes house prices up too, especially in more central areas.”

So which neighbourhood’s high street homeowners should be feeling the most smug? Leytonstone High Road in east London topped the table, as flats there have experienced an astronomical price rise of 80.2 per cent per sq m between 2009 and 2019.

The area is popular because of its good transport connections, and buyers are taking advantage of the fact that house prices remain lower than its inner London neighbours such as Hackney and London Fields, as well as family favourites like Wanstead and Woodford further out.

Lordship Lane in Dulwich came second, with growth of 78.3 per cent per sq m – and the two table toppers couldn’t be more different. Leytonstone’s high street is dominated by value chains such as Primark and IceLand, while middle-class haven Lordship Lane is brimming with cafes, gastropubs and hipster hotspots like Franco Manca.

“While picture-perfect roads like Lordship Lane naturally attract younger and wealthier crowds, helping house prices along the way, discount retailers like Primark have also proven no barrier to growth in less well-off areas such as Leytonstone,” says Toader.

The Great British High Street is in demand. Is yours one of these nine where prices have rocketed?

By Helen Crane

Biggest house price rises 09-19 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Price Rise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leytonstone High Road, Leytonstone</td>
<td>80.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lordship Lane, Dulwich</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tottenham Court Road, Soho/Fitzrovia/Bloomsbury</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Street, Hammersmith</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Road, Bethnal Green/Bow</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clapham High Street, Clapham</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northcote Road, Battersea</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Street, Highbury/Islington</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulham Road, Fulham</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another top scorer was Tottenham Court Road, which is going up in the world thanks to the new (albeit still non-operational) Crossrail station. Flats there have grown in value by 71 per cent since 2009. Hammersmith’s King Street saw a 70.4 per cent spike in flat prices, while Roman Road in ascendant Bethnal Green witnessed growth of 68.1 per cent. Clapham High Street was close behind with flats increasing in value by 68 per cent, followed by Northcote Road in nearby Battersea and Upper Street in Islington, which both saw growth of 64.5 per cent.

Trailing behind slightly with the ninth-highest price growth was Fulham Road, where flats saw a still respectable 49.2 per cent hike in value. We might not all be heading there for our weekly shop any more – but if it’s a home you’re in the market for, a trip to your local high street might be worth considering.
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not unlike a cabinet reshuffle, Jane Austen’s 1815 novel Emma follows a group of largely unlikeable people being shunted around in different permutations, at the whim of an aristocratic blonde who’s used to getting their own way.

In this case it’s in the pursuit of matchmaking, something in which the titular character, 21-year-old provincial heiress Emma Woodhouse, considers herself an expert. She spends her days engineering romances between her acquaintances to pass the time, until – and this shouldn’t be a spoiler, it’s Austen – she gets into some romantic shenanigans of her own. Swooning ensues.

The latest adaptation is music and fashion photographer Autumn de Wilde’s first project as a director, and it looks every bit the part. Everything is relentlessly pastel-hued and sugary, from the fabulously fussy lace-covered dresses, to the lavish gilded drawing rooms, to the piles of intricate jellies, cakes and macarons that seem to appear every time anyone sits down for a chat.

Unfortunately, though, this spectacular style isn’t backed up by a lot of substance.

Austen wrote Emma as a comedy, but unless you’re moved to fits of hysteria by Miranda Hart and Bill Nighy doing their usual shitters, only in ruffs and petticoats, it’s not especially funny. The film is never wasting not a single word. It tells, trimming every ounce of fat, straight through.

There’s a point about halfway through the Sonic the Hedgehog movie in which Sonic farts unexpectedly, forcing the viewer to reckon with the notion that he has a functioning anus. I’m no prude – prudes are one of the most sophisticated forms of humour there is – but being made to conceptualise the sphincter of an animated hedgehog is a form of psychic assault that, along with almost everything else that happens in the movie, torpedoes any chances of truly enjoying it.

It could have been so much worse. When the first Sonic trailer arrived, audiences were so viscerally repulsed by the mere sight of fewer horrible grey teeth. The first few minutes are killing babies in China,” ventures one. “Mallards are on the side of evil, I think. They want to sweep her off her feet.

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It could have been so much worse. When the first Sonic trailer arrived, audiences were so viscerally repulsed by the mere sight of fewer horrible grey teeth. The first few minutes were so much blood?” asks the child, who dragged a woman into the shed. “He was having a party,” explains the aunt. “If it was a party, then why was there a pair of hat-makers preparing for a ‘parade’, the particulars of which are equal parts horrific and absurd. They dream of ways to make the tiniest of incremental improvements to society – better pay for milliners, for instance – while ignoring atrocities being committed in plain sight.

It finishes with a conversation between two activists struggling to stay abreast of the political situation. “Cats are killing babies in China,” ventures one. “Mallards are on the side of elephants and the Koreans,” says the other. It’s George Orwell by way of René Magritte, a desperate examination of how misinformation and willful blindness can lead us into the jaws of disaster.
RAFE SPALL PUTS IN AN INCREDIBLE PERFORMANCE IN THIS PERCUSSIVE, OFTEN HILARIOUS ONE-MAN PLAY ABOUT WORKING CLASS RACISM.

He plays Michael, an Essex flower-seller whose oily patter masks a vast well of toxic emotion. He’s the guy in the pub who’s all smiles until he kicks the life out of some poor sod who spilled his beer.

Michael’s inability to deal with his feelings is brilliantly captured by Spall. After his dad dies during an England match, for instance, Michael plays out his coke- and gin-fuelled inner monologue as it screams “Don’t you dare cry”. You can almost smell all that raw, unprocessed grief.

Despite being a lost boy and chronic underachiever Michael is one hell of a story-teller, charismatic and likeable despite your better judgement. He acts out scenes from his life, jumping from time to time, character to character, with his casual racism only gradually dripped to the audience.

Spall doesn’t just read his lines – he interacts with the audience with the easy grace of a stand-up comedian, getting the crowd on-side before gut-punching them with his bigotry.

This bigotry, we learn, has been passed down from his father, the family patriarch who wanted nothing more than to “take our country back from the blacks”. Michael, a weak man, is racist through omission as much as choice. He wants to impress his old man, but he also wants to hang out with his black school-mates, and these conflicting ideas are simply popped into separate pigeon holes in his chaotic mind.

Glint Dyer becomes the first black man to write, direct and perform at the National (Death of England is co-written with Roy Williams), and the fact his play is an examination of working class identity feels mildly revolutionary, despite authors from Harper Lee to David Simon doing the inverse without anyone batting an eyelid.

In fact, perhaps the biggest criticism of Death of England is that Williams and Dyer are too sympathetic to their racist characters. While most of the play is an unflinching portrait of violence and bigotry, the final act veers into such contrasting territory that it feels almost magical realist, like a strange spell has been cast over the play, giving its characters redemption they don’t deserve. “Racism’s complicated” it seems to say, which, while no doubt true, is a little unsatisfying. Still, it never threatens to overshadow the explosive power of their plays by timely pushing the resurgent far-right that’s elevated to dizzying heights by one of the finest stage performances in years.

THEATRE

DEATH OF ENGLAND
NATIONAL THEATRE (DORFMAN)
BY STEVE DINNEEN

I’m not sure anybody has perfected the art of translating video installations into blockbuster gallery retrospectives, but the Tate Modern comes pretty darned close.

Having Steve McQueen as your subject helps, of course. He’s the man with the Midas touch, a Turner-prize winning artist turned Oscar-winning director. The Tate collects pieces from after his 1999 Turner win (apart from one that was shot in 1992) to the present day, displaying a wildly disparate body of work that nonetheless presents a just-about coherent view of the anthropocene.

The curation is suitably dramatic. Rooms are bisected by hanging screens – on one a helicopter buzzes incessantly around the Statue of Liberty, on another a man wastefully white-washes a grave to the serene soundtrack of seabirds and wind through grass. Retro projectors take pride of place in the middle of rooms, their heat and hum and smell supplementing the images they beam onto the walls. One shows a crimson film in which a finger comes dangerously close to poking an eye, its drama and colour reminiscent of a scene from a Dario Argento movie. Another shows an extreme close-up of a black woman’s nipple, the lined and dimpled skin no longer sexualised when seen in such biological detail.

One of the more striking pieces is a interview with a former prisoner, who candidly recounts tragic events from his life, from the accidental death of his brother in an incident involving a gun to his mother’s suicide. The screen shows only the huge, pleasingly symmetrical scar that runs across the top of his head as he lies flat on his back. Another piece shows McQueen’s own body, lit by the grainy light of a hotel TV as he reclines – naked, perhaps – on a bed, listening to news coverage about Pablo Escobar and the drug war.

Individually, it’s all fascinating, but taken as a whole, it paints a picture of a man with an insatiable desire to capture the things that make us human, be it the intricacies of our bodies or the details of our lives. As with his Hollywood filmography (entirely absent from this show), there’s a focus on race, on what it means to be black today.

Perhaps most indicative is Carib’s Leap, a piece projected onto two facing screens that memorialises the 3631 suicide of Grenadian islanders who refused to be enslaved. One screen shows the slow-motion fall of a man through a pure-white sky, legs flailing, pulled towards the ground by forces beyond his control. It’s at once peaceful and violent, beautiful and harrowing. It’s a shot of a single person that encompasses more pain and politics than we can possibly comprehend. What could be more human than that?

ART

RECOMMENDED
STEVE MCQUEEN
TATE MODERN
BY STEVE DINNEEN

The works of Ibsen are perennial candidates for a thorough reimagining, his quietly devastating studies of class struggle and women’s rights depressingly relevant for each subsequent generation since he started writing in the mid-19th century. The Wild Duck was stripped down to its bare essentials at the Almeida in 2018, while last year a production of A Doll’s House at the National Theatre, doesn’t just read his lines – he interacts with the audience with the easy grace of a stand-up comedian, getting the crowd on-side before gut-punching them with his bigotry.

NORA: A DOLL’S HOUSE
YOUNG VIC
BY STEVE DINNEEN

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The acting is also patchy, with only a handful of scenes showing only the huge, pleasingly symmetrical scar that runs across the top of his head as he lies flat on his back. Another piece shows McQueen’s own body, lit by the grainy light of a hotel TV as he reclines – naked, perhaps – on a bed, listening to news coverage about Pablo Escobar and the drug war.

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love is in the air, everywhere you look around. From office DJs to doughnut days, workplaces today are increasingly turning to kooky perks to show employees love and affection.

But like any good date, employee appreciation should be carefully thought out. It requires a proper strategy, and consistency. No one-off show of love will make up for being ignored for the rest of the year, and too often perks are now thought of as a quick fix to a more serious engagement problem. The real key to keeping that spark alive in the workforce is ensuring people feel valued and appreciated. Like any good relationship, this starts with open communication. So make quality time for one another. Arrange that one-to-one meeting. Gather feedback and act upon it to build mutual trust.

To really understand what makes employees tick, find out what they hope to achieve from each stage of their career and support that accordingly. What motivates them? What sort of rewards will support their current and future growth? Unless you ask and take action, you can’t help them get there. But don’t come on too strong. Give space when needed and be accommodating of pressures outside of work.

Don’t shy away from public displays of affection. Peer-to-peer recognition can be a very powerful tool when it comes to boosting employee engagement. Deliver praise at a company-wide level, via meetings, or perhaps even through the company’s Instagram account. Don’t be afraid to show your appreciation.

Like in any relationship, there are rules around gifting. While there’s no substitute for recognition, tangible rewards can help reinforce psychological ones — as long as companies get it right. We’ve all been on the receiving end of that slightly odd present because the giver had no idea what we wanted. Meaningful gifts require thought, and when done properly, can lead to excellent results.

But above all, understand that money can’t buy you love. An end-of-year bonus or pay rise may seem like an easy way to boost motivation, but it could have the opposite effect. Receiving fair compensation for work is essential. However, the impact of rewards on motivation relies much more on context and interpretation than how much you are actually paying people.

One of the quickest ways to make sure people feel like they are being fairly rewarded is to have open conversations about pay. This should involve explaining the factors that are considered when calculating it, and how this process happens.

Our own research shows that not being able to discuss pay is a bigger reason for employees leaving than simply feeling underpaid.

So what can companies do differently in 2020? Understand that a quick sugar hit, one-off surprise, or new perk will not make your employees swoon in the long run. Acknowledge that like, love, recognition requires a strategy and is a year-round endeavour.

A passionate, dedicated, and engaged workforce is vital to a healthy bottom line in business. Without love, staff will be far more inclined to simply walk away and find someone who values them more.

Kelly Barnett is people director at employee retention firm Peakon

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Copperhead set to strike in soft ground Reynoldstown

Bill Esdaile previews tomorrow's action at Ascot and Haydock

What better way to prepare for Cheltenham than with a slog over three miles on soft ground at Ascot? While most Festival hopefuls have had their final run before March, tomorrow’s Sodexo Reynoldstown Novices’ Chase (1.50pm) is a valuable race that’s attracted a handful of high-class horses.

Pym’s latest run, a decisive eight-length win over the useful Imperial Aura at Cheltenham, put him right in the frame for this contest.

However, he was pulled out of a race at Cheltenham in October due to conditions becoming too testing and the ground has to be a concern.

On the contrary, Sam Brown only lines up if the mud is flying. He has five wins from six starts, with the only blemish on that record coming on good ground.

After 750 days off, he registered two bloodless wins on heavy ground at Lingfield and Haydock.

Everything points towards another big run but it will have to be considering he has to give 5lbs to COPPERHEAD.

In winter ground at Newbury over Christmas, Colin Tizzard’s charge won with plenty up his sleeve and hasn’t been seen since:

This is his biggest test to date but conditions are perfect for him to prove he’s up to it, so take the 5/2, while the 16/1 on him following up in the RSA Chase next month is a decent price.

Another stamina test this weekend comes in the shape of the Haydock Grand National Trial (3.15pm). Vintage Clouds and Lord Du Mesnil line up and look set to take things along at an honest gallop up front.

That could set the race up nicely for YALA ENKI, an out-and-out stayer who relishes soft ground.

He was a decisive winner over 3m4f at Taunton on heavy ground last month and looks the play at 6/1 with Ladbrokes.

Ramses De Teillee

One horse who won’t mind it like this is RAMSES DE TEILLEE and we have made the decision to stay over hurdles with him for the time being.

He will run in the Albert Bartlett Prestige Novices’ Hurdle (4.25pm) at Haydock tomorrow which will suit him far better at this time of the season than a 3m4f slog in the Grand National Trial.

Ramses really pleased us at Doncaster last time and the ground will be in his favour again.

David Noonan will take the ride and the obvious plan will be to head to the Albert Bartlett at the Cheltenham Festival if all goes to plan.

I’m still finalising a few plans for the weekend but intend to send EDEN DU HOUX to Ascot tomorrow for the handicap hurdle (3.00pm).

He won nicely at Chepstow last time and the step up in trip should help him too, so I’m looking forward to a bold showing.

Looking at today’s action, RATHLIN ROSE heads to Sandown for the Royal Artillery Gold Cup (3.00pm).

Guy [Disney] came down to school him earlier in the week and he worked nicely.

The pair should be bang there again with conditions in their favour.

Finally, a word on the City.A.M. syndicate horse COLLINGWOOD COURT, who was really disappointing at Kempton last week.

You can put a line through that run as I know he is much better than that.

We will remove the tongue tie next time and I am hopeful of a much better showing.
Wolves have pulled off an elusive balancing act, writes Michael Searles

Wolves have pulled off an elusive balancing act, writes Michael Searles

When Euro qualification backfires

BURNLEY (2018-19)
Projects not only failed to take them past the qualifying rounds but also hit domestic form. They took just 12 points in the first half of the season and ended up 15th, eight places worse off than the previous campaign.

EVERTON (2017-18)
They were simultaneously embarrassed in the Europa League group stage and left trailing in the Premier League. In the relegation zone after 10 games, manager Ronald Koeman paid his job.

LEICESTER (2016-17)
The surprise title winners made the last eight on their maiden Champions League voyage, but domestic results dropped significantly and they went from finishing first to 12th.

SOUTHWARKHAM (2016-17)
Saints reached the Europa League group stage but finished the season with just 46 points, a double-digit drop from the previous three seasons.

Clear philosophy

The investment in the team was evident even before they ended their six-year absence from the top flight and links to super-agent Jorge Mendes, an adviser to the club’s Chinese owners Fosun, are well established.

The influx of Portuguese talent and the clear philosophy and system of Adama Traore has been fairly steadfast in his approach, with a deep understanding of the players and system for his team. Built on a solid foundation of three centre-backs and two wing-backs, the dynamic midfield duo of Neves and Joao Monteitho sit just in front, with the flair and goals coming from Jimenez, Diogo Jota and Traore up front. Helpfully, the majority of these players have been with the team since their Championship days, including Neves, Jota, captain Conor Coady and fellow centre-back Willy Boly, as well as Ryan Bennett and Matt Doherty.

Wolves have the quality to play possession-based football but prefer to catch teams on the break and are rarely caught in transition themselves. It has served them well against the bigger clubs. This season they have done the double over Manchester City and come closer than most teams to beating Liverpool.

Espirito Santo was forced into making some slight tweaks to the 5-3-2 formation he used last season, following a sluggish start.

It involved some experimentation, bringing the previously benched Traore in at right wing-back, before moving the Spaniard forward and settling on a 3-4-3 system. The flexibility of such a formation allows Wolves to get numbers forward when in possession but also sit back and look for a counter-attack.

Fixtures

**Wolves v Leicester**

**Saturday**
- Southamptom v Burnley 12.30pm
- Norwich v Liverpool 5.30pm

**Sunday**
- Aston Villa v Tottenham 2pm
- Arsenal v Newcastle 4.30pm

**Monday**
- Chelsea v Man Utd 8pm

Maximising potential

The shift has allowed Wolves to play with three up front and given extra support to Jimenez, if reducing numbers in central midfield. Leander Dendoncker is the player to have maximised the potential of the players at his disposal.

Not many could have foreseen Traore, who just 12 months ago appeared more likely to injure someone in the crowd than find the back of the net, finally catching the eye.

Traore 12 months ago looked more likely to injure someone in the crowd than find the back of the net, with the Arsenal job.

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**Tonight they will take on Leicester.**

Next week – and perhaps next season, too – they will take on Europe.
The Six Nations is in a rest week at the moment but there has been no shortage of things for fans to talk about after it emerged that South Africa could join the tournament. The potential introduction of the Springboks in 2024 is an emotive subject and I can certainly see both sides of the argument.

Looking at the idea through the eyes of fans, I can understand why the immediate response would be objection. The Six Nations has a great history, with so many of the fixtures proper international derbies.

The competition brings this time of year alive with excitement. Trips to international derbies would instantly raise the standard of the rugby and make winning matches more exciting. Trips to international derbies would raise valid concerns of things for fans to talk about. There has been no shortage of mentions in the media of countries looking to evolve and add value.

If rugby is to grow then these sorts of ideas need to be considered. For a game which needs to grow around player welfare. However, I think overall the benefits are strong enough in this situation and I’m sure over time people would eventually get over their initial reservations.

CVC Capital Partners’ ongoing interest in buying a stake in the Six Nations shows that the competition is looking to evolve and add value. When viewed from a development perspective the addition of South Africa makes a great deal of sense. It is supposed to be the pinnacle of the sport and I think the introduction of Georgia would bring down the overall quality. People already complain about the Six Nations having one dead rubber with Italy, so from a commercial perspective adding another doesn’t make sense.

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Adding the Springboks to the Six Nations makes sense in some ways, and those nations competing in the Rugby Europe Championship would certainly like to step up, but ultimately the Six Nations is not there for development.

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Yes, the potential introduction of South Africa is al ready aligned with European rugby. A lot of South African players already play in England and France and two South African sides, the Cheetahs and Southern Kings, are in the Pro14.

Meanwhile, many South Africans have emigrated to the host countries, so there is another potential audience to tap into. Being just two hours ahead means the time zones would not be an issue for broadcasting too.

Reports this week suggest that South Africa would join the current six sides, rather than replace one, such as Italy. With the calendar already bursting at the seams more games would raise valid concerns around player welfare.

However, I think overall the benefits are strong enough in this situation and I’m sure over time people would eventually get over their initial reservations.

Tony triangulated the view which people held dear. Adding South Africa into the mix would put a different spin on it. Would people buy into it?
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