



# Cues for Change

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February 2021

# Economy

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## **Emergency funding support for four councils**

Four English councils - Eastbourne, Bexley, Luton, and Peterborough - are being given emergency funding by the Government because they are unable to balance their books. Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick told the Commons there is "quite a broad range" of reasons why additional taxpayer support is required - some due to management failings and others due to "the exceptional events of the past year."

**BBC News**

# Environment

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## **Make service stations put in chargers**

Oil companies should have to install rapid chargers for electric cars in their bigger petrol stations by 2023, according to thinktank Bright Blue. It is also calling for a reversal in cuts to government grants for battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and a new grant to help low-income households buy second hand BEVs. Patrick Hall at Bright Blue said rapid chargers away from motorways were still rare. The government has announced funding for up to 4,000 more on-street charge points but Policy Exchange says installations need to increase from 7,000 to 35,000 points a year to meet the 2030 deadline to stop selling combustion engine cars.

**Guardian**

## **Powering up: UK hills could be used as energy 'batteries'.**

Hundreds of hills across the UK could be transformed into renewable energy “batteries” through a pioneering hydropower system embedded underground. A team of engineers have developed a system that adapts one of the oldest forms of energy storage, hydropower, to store and release electricity from gentle slopes rather than requiring steep dam walls and mountains.

**Guardian**

## **First UK homes with hydrogen boilers and hobs to be built by April**

The UK’s first homes to be fitted with boilers and hobs that run on hydrogen rather than fossil fuel gas will be built in Gateshead by April. Government says two properties in Gateshead will offer public a glimpse of the ‘potential home of the future.’

The semi-detached houses in the north-east will use 100% hydrogen for heating and cooking in appliances including boilers, hobs, cookers, and fires under a new government scheme intended to offer the public a glimpse into “the potential home of the future”.

The government hopes to create entire “hydrogen neighborhoods” and even a “hydrogen town” by the end of the decade as part of its plan to cut the carbon emissions from UK homes and become a net-zero carbon nation by 2050.

**The Guardian**

## **Power beams**

Staying with electricity – not least because it is going to dominate our lives long-term if net zero comes to anything – a New Zealand firm is experimenting with transmitting power via microwave beams, without cables or pylons. So far Emrod hasn't beaten Nasa's record for sending power through the air, which stands at a modest 1.6 km, but the Economist (£) says the company plans to start by sending a few kilowatts 1.8 km and to build from there. Apparently if you walk through a microwave beam of this sort it does not kill you, if you keep walking. Possible applications are said to include getting power wirelessly to factory machinery and remote military bases. Surely the real prize, though, is recharging electric cars on the go.

**Tortoise Media**

## **MPs consider community energy company plans**

MPs are considering proposals for local areas to set up their own energy companies by sharing electricity generated by solar panels or wind turbines. Currently, those who create their own electricity must sell it to utility companies, but a Local Energy Bill backed by the Campaign to Protect Rural England would allow local businesses and housing estates to install renewables technology and sell electricity at low prices to the local community. The Environment Audit Committee is currently launching an inquiry into the function of Community Energy Projects to see how they could be simplified and improved.

**The Daily Telegraph**

## **'A role model': how Seville is turning leftover oranges into electricity**

In Spring, the air in Seville is sweet with the scent of azahar, orange blossom, but the 5.7m kilos of bitter fruit the city's 48,000 trees deposit on the streets in winter are a hazard for pedestrians and a headache for the city's cleaning department.

Now a scheme has been launched to produce an entirely different kind of juice from the unwanted oranges: electricity. The southern Spanish city has begun a pilot scheme to use the methane produced as the fruit ferments to generate clean electricity.

The initial scheme launched by Emasesa, the municipal water company, will use 35 tonnes of fruit to generate clean energy to run one of the city's water purification plants. The oranges will go into an existing

facility that already generates electricity from organic matter. As the oranges ferment, the methane captured will be used to drive the generator.

**The Guardian**

## **Thames Water hopes to harness human 'poo power' to heat homes.**

Company says sewage plan would avoid 105,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions over 30 years. Thousands of homes in south-west London could soon be warmed by the waste from their local sewage works as part of England's first poo-powered district heating scheme. Thames Water hopes to harness the heat of human waste from its treatment plant in Kingston upon Thames to warm more than 2,000 new homes that form part of a regeneration plan for the borough's Cambridge Road estate.

Typically, the water company flushes the clean warm water that remains after it has treated its customers' sewage back into a local river system as effluent. But under the new plan it will funnel the warm water to an energy centre where the effluent will help heat the water destined to warm local homes.

The new Thames Water energy centre will use heat pumps to boost the temperature of the water higher, and heat exchangers to transfer the heat of the waste water to a separate system of water pipes which will carry hot water to the district heating scheme.

**The Guardian**

# Health

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## **Thinktank proposes door-to-door vaccinations**

The Runnymede Trust has recommended that the COVID-19 vaccination drive should be taken door-to-door in hard-to-reach, deprived and minority ethnic communities, in recognition of a disparity in vaccine uptake in pockets of the country. Dr Halima Begum, CEO of the thinktank, said: “Unless we can level up the huge inequalities in health access, including access to the vaccine, we stand the risk that our BAME communities will be blamed for not playing their part in the national COVID-19 recovery.”

**The Guardian**



# Technology

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## **LitterCams' used to fine motorists discarding rubbish**

With its litter pickers reporting a surge in roadside rubbish under lockdown, Maidstone BC in Kent is turning to technology to help. In early April, using LitterCam cameras, it will launch the first pilot scheme in the country to fine motorists throwing litter out of their cars. Last year the council's wardens issued more than 200 fixed penalty notices, but now communities, housing and environment committee chair Cllr Derek Mortimer expects this to rise to "thousands" during the year-long trial. Andrew Kemp, the entrepreneur who created LitterCam, hopes to start similar trials in Wigan, Lancashire, in April, with Sheffield to follow.

**The Sunday Times**

# Transport

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## Hydrogen flight

A six-engine hydrogen-powered propeller plane with a 1,000-mile range is gaining a following at Airbus. It does not exist yet – it is one of three zero-emission aircraft concepts Airbus unveiled (or in at least one case re-unveiled) last year to show it was making a real effort to lower aviation's carbon footprint. Bloomberg says (£) the plane could carry 100 people from Dublin to Rome and might use fuel cell pods under its wings to produce electric power to drive the props, rather than burning the hydrogen. This story should be read at least partly as Airbus getting a leg up on Boeing in the clean flight hype business, but at least it is optimistic. Note: hydrogen storage remains a huge hurdle. There is a Carnegie-scale fortune for whoever cracks H2 storage in lightweight carbon nanostructures.

**Tortoise Media**

## New Coventry trial to get polluting cars off the road

The Times reports that a new scheme, run by Coventry City Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority, could see drivers of the most polluting cars paid up to £3,000 in "credits" for green forms of transport to give up their vehicle. A trial to launch in the spring will see the drivers of diesel cars built before 2016, and petrol cars built before 2006, offered between £1,500 and £3,000 to give up their car for the duration of a two-year trial. The money will be uploaded to a payment card that can be used to pay for public transport, taxis, hire cars, bike hire schemes and other forms of transport. Xavier Brice, chief executive of walking and cycling charity Sustrans, said it is "great to see local authorities considering new ways to reduce car dependency, including mobility credit. Better, more affordable, public transport is critical to combating air pollution and climate change."

**The Times**





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