**Hinterland**

In this edition of Hinterland – Flu in the wings, the housebuilding itch, scary challenges in the world of hospital discharge, community transport as a key rural theme and we finish with a seasonal pumpkin flavoured and finally….

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-63341574>

**Flu comes early in England, with hospital cases rising**

I fear that rural England will be reaping a difficult harvest arising from this burgeoning flu risk in the upcoming winter.

Cases of flu have climbed quickly in the past week in England, suggesting the season has begun earlier than normal, say officials.

People may have little immunity to flu after a break from the disease during Covid pandemic restrictions.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) says hospital and ICU admissions for the respiratory disease are rising the fastest in children under five.

Hospital rates are going up among the elderly too.

It's not clear how big a wave the UK might be in for - levels are still relatively low overall.

But health experts are urging anyone who is eligible for a flu shot to get one.

Many southern hemisphere nations have just had their most rampant influenza season for years and officials have been warning that the UK must prepare for a big, early wave of flu too.

More than 40 million people, including young children, in the UK are being offered a flu vaccine.

The over-50s and younger adults with health conditions are also being offered a Covid booster jab this autumn and winter.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/21/build-homes-england-affordable-housing>

**We can build enough homes for everyone in England. So why don’t we?**

If you read this article in full you will get some fascinating insights as to why we don’t have enough houses in rural England. It tells us:

Whichever new prime minister emerges, current Conservative politics makes it unlikely we’ll see a significant new expansion of social rented housing any time soon. But not so long ago another Conservative prime minister, Theresa May, talked of the need for “a new generation of council homes to help fix our broken housing market”. Opposition parties and the UK’s devolved governments remain committed to a large increase in public housing. Meanwhile, there are still an estimated 1.6m households in England with unmet housing needs best provided by social renting. As we plan for the future, now is a good time to ask what we can learn from past social housing schemes.

The most important lesson is simply that we can build social housing at scale when the political will exists. Between 1945 and 1979, the country built an average of 126,000 council homes annually. The largest number built in a single year, 219,000, was achieved by a Conservative government in 1953. At times, that pace and scale could be problematic. Financial constraints frequently limited the best of what might have been achieved. There were perhaps too many poorly constructed high-rise dwellings, too many large and anonymous suburbs, but the overriding goal – when, even in 1948, 54% of British households lacked their own bathroom – was to house all our people decently and clear the slums.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/oct/23/most-pressing-issues-next-tory-pm-rishi-sunak-penny-mordaunt-boris-johnson-conservative>

**From the economy to NHS waiting lists: the most pressing issues facing the next PM**

A very succinct exposition of the challenges facing not only the next prime minister but Rural England the NHS crisis and the energy challenges are both big issues to worry about from a specifically rural perspective.

Whoever becomes prime minister this week – most likely Rishi Sunak or Boris Johnson – will face the most daunting in-tray of anyone in No 10 for decades. These are the pressing issues they will have to make decisions on in the coming months ahead.

Fiscal plan

Sunak has declared that fixing the economy is his priority. The Treasury is facing a £40bn black hole and the interim chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, is working on a plan to make the sums add up by 31 October but this will mean swingeing cuts. A new prime minister will have to make a call on how big the cuts will be – or whether to opt for tax rises instead.

Benefits

One of the biggest decisions on this front is whether to uprate benefits in line with inflation. Most of the centrists within the party believe this is essential and that any attempt to swerve this would not get through parliament.

Public sector pay and strikes

Public sector pay is similarly problematic when it comes to inflation. Nurses, healthcare staff, ambulance drivers, teachers, train drivers, civil servants, university lecturers and many others are considering strikes this winter in the face of real-terms pay cuts. The government may have to reconsider their settlements if it wants to avoid large-scale disruption to society.

NHS winter crisis and waiting lists

The NHS is in a dire situation heading into winter with the threat of a “twin” Covid and flu season, demoralised staff and long waits for operations, GP appointments, A&E services and ambulances. A new prime minister will have to take a decision on whether NHS spending should be ringfenced from cuts, as well as how to deal with the existing pressure on services.

Energy

The government has provided energy bill support until April but now will not say how much if any subsidy it will give people after that point. There is also the threat of winter blackouts if gas supply remains tight across Europe as a result of Russia’s war in Ukraine. One of the first actions of a prime minister could be to announce a major energy-saving campaign – a move resisted by Liz Truss previously.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-humber-63365271>

**East Yorkshire driver shortage leads to reduced bus services**

I’ve been working with East Riding Community Transport looking at the opportunities to address gaps in community service provision and so when I saw this article it reinforced the value of community transport particularly but not exclusively in rural areas. This story tells us:

A shortage of drivers has led to a reduced timetable being brought in on bus services in Hull.

East Yorkshire buses will be operating temporary daily service reductions planned for services 54, 56, 57, 66, 104, 105 and 154.

The company said it would create more reliable services following a number of last-minute cancellations.

Passengers are already facing disruption with a strike on Stagecoach buses.

Ben Gilligan, East Yorkshire's managing director, said the bus industry as a whole had been impacted by driver shortages.

He said it was a result of various factors including the lifting of coronavirus pandemic restrictions, issues with the DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency) and a "small labour market and a lot of competition".

He added: "There's been a lot of issues with licences not being issued promptly by the DVSA as well as general challenges in the labour market... so we're not alone and it's not just buses facing the problem."

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/hospitals-ambulance-delays-threat-b2207931.html>

**Hospitals ‘desperate’ to discharge patients admit ambulance delays are a ‘threat to life’**

Scary stuff…..

Hospitals “desperate” to free up beds could be putting patients in danger, The Independent has been told.

NHS trusts are being forced into “risky behaviours” in the push to free up hospital beds and A&E departments, experts have warned.

It comes as new data reveals that waits for ambulance crews outside hospitals hit 26 hours in September, with more than 4,000 patients likely to have experienced severe harm due to delays.

In documents leaked to The Independent, hospital leaders in Cornwall warned staff that current pressures in its emergency care system combined with ambulance delays have “tragically resulted in deaths”.

Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust and the Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust said in the document that ambulance delays and waits in A&E were causing a “risk to life”, and that as a result they were planning to begin discharging patients into the care of the voluntary sector.

**And Finally**

[**https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-63366997**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-63366997)

**Hoo flood: Burst water main forces pumpkin farm closure**

**I felt for this pick your own initiative, pumpkins had recently been giving soft fruits an autumn run for their money but I suspect this will pour cold water on their progress….!** On a more serious note I do appreciate how tough things are for the land based industries at the moment and I hope this doesn’t have a lasting negative impact on this farm.

An annual pick-your-own pumpkin event at a farm had to be abandoned after water from a burst main caused a flood.

PYO Pumpkins in Hoo, near Rochester, in Kent, announced the closure on Sunday and promised refunds "in due course".

The business at Berluncle Farm - which specialises in pumpkins, squashes and globe artichokes - opens every October for its pick-your-own event.

Southern Water said supplies in the area should be back to normal by Sunday night.

PYO Pumpkins said on its website: "You will get your refunds but please bear with us. This many may take 48 hours as we want to speak to our ticketing partners to find the best option for a mass refund."

A spokeswoman for Southern Water said repairs were under way.