

GO FIGURE



The number of trafficked yellow-spotted river turtles that have been released into the Peruvian Amazon. The turtles, which are vulnerable to endangerment, were rehabilitated after being seized from traders selling them as pets.

£9.17bn

The cost of prescriptions to the NHS last year, according to new analysis. The NHS dispensed 1.11 billion prescriptions in 2017, a 0.15 per cent increase on the previous year, but saved £30m. Further savings are predicted as the costs for patients are set to increase by 20p to £8.80 in April.

97

The percentage of UK postcodes represented by visitors to Hull in its City of Culture year. Hull Truck Theatre said 45 per cent of its audiences were first time bookers.

70

The percentage of seafood in the UK supply chain that's coming from overseas. The Marine Conservation Society has released a new post-Brexit Good Fish Guide, which suggests dab, hake, herring, mussels and mackerel are more sustainable than the traditional cod, haddock, salmon, prawns and tuna.

76

Stephen Hawking's age when he died peacefully at his home in Cambridge last week. The visionary physicist did groundbreaking work with black holes and relativity but was also socially and politically engaged – a champion of the NHS who voiced his concerns over Brexit, his dislike of Donald Trump and his fears about AI being the demise of the human race, despite it enabling him to communicate.

Why don't we just... increase council tax on second homes in the Yorkshire Dales?

MARK CORNER

The amazing and inspiring Yorkshire Dales faces a serious challenge – the sustainability of its communities. The fundamental issue is that, in general, jobs in the Dales, many in agriculture and tourism, do not pay enough for families to be able to afford to live in the area. Residents, many of them young, are leaving and new families are not arriving.

Our landscape is a cultural one, shaped by its communities, and if our communities diminish then the special qualities that attract potential residents and visitors here in the first place will, over time, diminish too. Halting this downward spiral is a significant challenge and political initiative is needed to stimulate economic regeneration and job creation, provide improved broadband and mobile coverage, attract working age people to the area, and improve public transport. And critically, a response is needed to address the lack of affordable housing in the Dales.

Although employment in the Dales is higher than the national average, the average annual income is lower, at under £20,000. But in common with other national parks in England and Wales house prices are at a significant premium to those in the county outside the park. In the Dales the average house price is around £304,000, 43 per cent higher than the £213,000 average for North Yorkshire.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority has plans to see affordable housing built but it is unlikely to be sufficient. As part of a wider initiative to reverse the decline in the number of younger people in the national park, the authority, together with the district councils in the area, is planning to hold discussions with government on the options available for increasing council tax for second homes within the boundary of the park. The size of the increase is not being proposed at this stage but the example of five times the current rate has been mentioned.

The number of second homes and holiday lets in the Yorkshire Dales is increasing and accounts now for 22 per cent of the housing stock. There are parishes within the national park where the proportion of second homes is over 25 per cent. The average for second homes in all of England is 1.1 per cent.

These under-occupied properties are not available to buyers wishing to be permanent residents and they contribute to higher house prices. Over the last 10 years an average of 60 new dwellings were built each year but an average of



90 houses a year were being turned into second homes or holiday flats. These occasionally occupied properties leave dark gaps in communities, especially outside the main tourism season, leaving a rump population of year-round residents with a reduced contribution to the local economy and a lower call on local services, including schools and shops, which can subsequently end up closing. Hollowed out villages are home to less vibrant communities and are less attractive to all, including second-home owners.

Increasing council tax on second homes would encourage some existing homes back into full-time occupancy, discourage the purchase of further second homes, and result in second-home owners contributing economically more like permanent residents, who typically spend more locally because they use services locally throughout the year.

I'm supportive of this proposal, although I believe it would be better if the funds raised were used specifically to help build affordable homes in the Dales. This will probably be difficult to administer but could, we believe, sweeten the pill for those second-home owners who would be paying more. I would hope those who can afford a second home wouldn't begrudge paying something more if they knew it was to directly help people who can't afford their first and only home. ■

Mark Corner is chair of Friends of the Dales (friendsofthedales.org.uk), a membership charity dedicated to protecting the Dales and its communities, and encouraging people to value and enjoy the area

Do you have an idea for our fortnightly Why Don't We Just... column?
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