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SERVING THE COMMUNITY
SINCE 1870

Will the proposals for Coltishall ever get off the ground?

For an authority making £140m of savings, Norfolk County Council's decision to spend £4m of taxpayers' money buying a former air base seemed a peculiar move.

Was this a decision based on sound business sense? Or was it motivated more by an emotional desire for the council, which proudly displays a Jaguar from RAF Coltishall outside County Hall, to own part of the county's history? Or, was it primarily designed to keep the base out of private hands?

The absence of a business plan certainly led many to answer the first of those suggestions with a resounding no. The council has published estimates of what it thinks the base will generate and insist it will reap rewards.

But it is hard to escape the feeling that the council is taking a gamble. When the mystery developer behind the solar farm first came forward it was welcomed almost with a sigh of relief at County Hall that the authority was going to get a decent amount of rent.

Having increased the potential space for solar panels, the goalposts have moved with regards subsidies. What effect that will have remains to be seen.

It would be nice to be able to ask the would-be developers themselves, but the cloak of commercial sensitivity hangs heavy over this deal – a source of frustration for the local community too.

Maybe, in 10 years' time, we will applaud the bold decision made to buy RAF Coltishall using the public purse.

But, at the moment, with progress so slow and what interest there has been seemingly up in the air, that's difficult to picture.

Time to move on park

Heacham can't wait forever to secure its last significant green space for posterity, now that other interested parties are waiting in the wings.

But pledges of financial support are not coming quickly enough to raise the £550,000 needed to buy leafy Heacham Park.

Getting the parish council to take out a public interest loan, which would be repaid by taxpayers is a big ask. While the average bill would go up by just 69p a week, the council would have to show widespread backing for the move to proceed.

It needs to ask that question now. And if the answer is that support in the village is on a par with the strength of feeling expressed at the public meeting, it should seriously consider taking the lead, and staking the community's claim to the park.

Share your love of city

For some, Norwich is made special because of its rich heritage. For others it stands out for its modern icons, such as the Forum.

Some would rate the variety of fantastic food outlets, others its buzzing live music scene.

Whatever your tastes, the City of Stories project gives you the chance to share your pride in Norwich with others. It's an opportunity not to be missed.

looking for GOD.com

The Lord is merciful,
compassionate, patient and always
ready to forgive.
Psalms 145:8

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READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ Stormy clouds over Loddon by Chris Davison. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

Set apart by their language as well as their religion



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A long time ago, I was a pupil at St William's Primary School, on St William's Way in Thorpe. Next door to the school was the place where I first became interested in languages, St William's Way Library, with its wonderfully helpful librarian Janet Smith. And opposite the library was the field where my friends and I loved playing football and cricket.

So it's rather sad for me that St William himself is something of an embarrassment. As far as we know, there was nothing particularly saintly about William. He was an unfortunate 12-year-old boy who was murdered in 1144 – his body was found on Mousehold Heath by a Henry de Sprowston.

A chapel dedicated to William was built on Mousehold – the ruined foundations are still visible.

In the old days they were hard to find, but my grandfather knew how to get there and took me to see them. Grandad explained that William had been turned into a revered martyr through anti-Jewish racism.

There was a belief that Jews carried out ritual murders of Christian children – “the blood libel” – and Norwich citizens falsely accused the local Jews of killing



■ The marker stone marking the edge of the site of St William's Chapel at Mousehold Heath.

Picture: DENISE BRADLEY

William. This was the same terrible bigotry which led to the slaughter of Jews in Norwich in 1190, and to the expulsion of the Jews from England by King Edward I in 1290.

William was an English boy who spoke English. The Jews, who had arrived in England with William the Conqueror in 1066, spoke French, like the brutal Norman overlords and King Edward himself.

So they were set apart from the English by their language as well as their religion, which no doubt added to the hostility directed towards them.

The Jews also used Hebrew as their language of religion and literature.

It should be a matter of pride for us that a famous mediaeval Hebrew poet lived in the city, probably in the area by the Haymarket – he is known as Meir ben Elijah of Norwich.

But he was never revered by the citizens, and was expelled with the rest of the Jews in 1290.

Now, though, we have made some atonement: his works have recently been translated and published in Norwich as “Into the Light: The Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry of Meir of Norwich”.

I can't help thinking that it would have been much less embarrassing if my school had been named after Meir rather than the unfortunate “Saint” William.