

Eastern Daily Press

SERVING THE COMMUNITY
SINCE 1870

A fresh chance for these strategic sites to benefit the region

It is a striking coincidence that today we report on not one, but two, entirely unrelated projects which seek to find a new use for former military airfields in Norfolk.

On the surface, the schemes have little in common.

At the former RAF Downham Market site there are exciting and ambitious plans for a new engineering centre which, it is hoped, will further plug a perceived skills shortage in that part of the region and provide another strong plank of its economy.

On the land which once housed RAF Coltishall, but which we are now encouraged to call Scottow Enterprises Park, is another eye-catching project, decidedly more low-tech and coming, it would seem, with a far lower price tag.

A not-for-profit social enterprise are in negotiations about creating a cycling centre at the site, which would involve the wonderfully simple idea of using the base's existing perimeter track to race bikes round, free from the threat from traffic, pedestrians and fighter planes.

Both projects sound excellent for our region and we wish both luck.

Anything that can be done to bring investment and skills to our region – as the Downham project aims to do – should be welcomed, while any schemes that can further encourage cycling, the country's fastest growing sport, with obvious health and social benefits, can only be good things.

So, it seems, the two projects do have much in common. Both offer the chance of taking previously important, strategic sites and of re-purposing them to ensure they continue to serve key roles for the region.

Time to be prepared

The region – and particularly those living along its coast – face an anxious wait over the coming days.

It seems that weather conditions far beyond our control are conspiring to, once again, menace our shores with a potentially-damaging tidal surge.

It says much for the dedication and vigilance of the various agencies and bodies concerned that we have plenty of warning of what may be heading our way, giving organisations time to prepare for what may come to pass.

We stand ready to help, in any way. Hopefully, this perilous moment will pass without incident. But in the days ahead, we will be closely monitoring the situation. Please keep following our newspaper, website and Twitter feed for information.

A not-so British tradition

Part of the charm of the pantomime is the familiarity. For those who have been before, there seldom seems much in the way of surprises.

And that is precisely what makes it such a wonderful experience, with much of the pleasure derived from knowing exactly what you are going to get.

But our article today, on the history of this fine theatrical tradition, provides plenty of surprises and suggests panto is far less constant than it might seem. It shows how this most British of genres has changed over the centuries and how – most shocking of all – it is not, in origin, British at all.

When you understand that life is a test, you realize that nothing is insignificant in your life.

Rick Warren

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READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ Five little birds, all in a row – these juvenile black-headed gulls were spotted and photographed on a power line at Great Ryburgh by Paul Reynolds. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

Language and national borders do not always coincide

Peter Trudgill



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In July 2014, the Norwich City football squad were involved in a slightly embarrassing situation during their pre-season tour in northern Italy.

One of the games they had arranged was called off by the Italian club involved, and a replacement fixture was rapidly arranged against another side.

NCFC reported that the rearranged match was to be played against an Italian Serie D side, Saint-Christophe Vallée d'Aoste. After Norwich had won 13-0, that Italian club complained that the match had not actually involved them at all but a scratch XI of local non-professionals: Norwich apologised for the misunderstanding. I wonder if there were some language difficulties in all this, because there is something linguistically rather interesting about that area of Italy.

You may have noticed that the name of that local football club is not Italian but French: vallée is the French word for valley. This is because French is the official language in the area.

The indigenous local language, however, is not French or Italian but Franco-Provençal, a now endangered language originally spoken all over western Switzerland, eastern France and north-



■ Tennis star Rafa Nadal speaks Catalan, which is the local language of his home, Majorca. Picture: PA

western Italy. Monolingual English speakers often assume when we are travelling that language and national boundaries coincide.

We travel to Majorca and, thinking that Majorca is in Spain, get ourselves a Spanish phrase book. That's OK – everyone can speak Spanish there. But the local language is not Spanish but Catalan, as spoken for example by Majorcan tennis star Rafa Nadal.

Tourists skiing in St Moritz or Davos may not realise that the local language there is Romansch, not German or Italian. People holidaying in the South Tyrol in northern Italy may not pick up on the fact that the locals are German-speaking, though they should because all the place-names are German. Most European coun-

tries have sizeable indigenous linguistic minorities. Hungarian is the native language of southern Slovakia as well as extensive areas of central Romania. There are large regions of Finland where people speak Swedish. France has citizens whose mother tongue is Dutch, German, Breton, Basque, Catalan or Provençal. In parts of southern Italy, Greek and Albanian are still spoken natively. And Greece has speakers of Albanian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Romany and Rumanian.

It is communities like these that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is intended to help and protect. Sadly, France and Italy have not ratified the Charter yet, and Greece hasn't even signed it. It's about time they did.