

Eastern Daily Press

SERVING THE COMMUNITY
SINCE 1870

Vote is about the role of the state, not just smoking in cars

Smoking is not illegal. But to light up in a confined space such as a car, in which children are travelling, is simply beyond the pale.

The health risks of inhaling smoke, both first and second hand, are proven. Youngsters have no control over whether or not they opt out of this environment, and there are few who would not urge drivers to refrain from lighting up in such a confined space.

Today our MPs have the power to ban drivers from smoking in a car with children.

But today's debate is about more than this.

It is about the role of the state and whether or not it should legislate to force people to stop doing something that is currently legal, but bad for their health and for the health of others.

A change of the law around seat belts changed the mindset of drivers, and the same applies to mobile phones laws. It would be naive to suggest that these laws are not flouted, but the threat of sanctions no doubt deters people from phoning while they drive.

But questions about whether it is a good use of police time or a distraction when they have so many other laws to enforce are valid.

The answer is not to create more legislation. The answer lies in a twofold approach – firstly in education, and secondly in a firm determination of society to let smokers know that their habit – if and when it harms others – is simply not acceptable.

It should not take the state to tell you that a smoke-filled car is bad for a child's health.

Repaying the favour

After our own suffering at the hands of Mother Nature, there's bound to be plenty of sympathy in East Anglia for our flood-hit friends on the other side of the country.

And, just as our stricken communities gladly welcomed help in the wake of the December storm surge, it's now our turn to return the favour for those in Devon and Somerset as they struggle to come to terms with their own watery miseries. Our firefighters have a wealth of recent expertise in this area, and it's great to see them pitching in to the national relief effort by offering pumping units, specialist rescue crews and 4x4 vehicles.

It proves that true community spirit should not be a parochial instinct. We are all neighbours on this island, and we must always be prepared to offer mutual support where it is needed. After all, we never know when we might need that help again ourselves.

A village full of energy

The youthful village at Elsing is certainly a long way from the stereotype of the sleepy rural retirement haven.

Far from it – this is place alive with energy through its growing population of families with young children.

It's great to see those youngsters swing, slide and climb on their well-deserved new play area – because giving a helping hand to vibrant communities like this one is exactly what the Big EDP Lottery fund is all about.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ A beautiful walk on a beautiful day in Sheringham, as pictured by Leanne Dancaster. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

Olympic venue has a link to a language of the past

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Just over 20 years ago, on October 7, 1992, something really rather tragic occurred. An elderly gentleman called Tecfik Esenc died in his sleep.

This was very sad for his friends and family, but it was a tragedy for all of us. Mr Esenc was the last ever mother-tongue speaker of an ancient European language called Ubykh.

This was yet another nail in the coffin of world-wide linguistic diversity, adding to the growing list of dead and dying languages around the world.

Experts predict that, of the 7,000 or so languages in the world today, 90pc will disappear during the next two centuries or so.

Each language that dies will take with it, for ever, a unique product of the human mind, and the unique product of a particular human society. A unique repository of a special human culture will have gone for all time.

Ubykh was no exception. All human languages are objects of wonder; but Ubykh was particularly amazing. If you look at the Guinness Book of Records, you



■ The Winter Olympics are currently being held in Sochi, which was once the main centre of the now-extinct Ubykh language.

will see that it is listed as the language, of all the languages in the world, which had the most consonant sounds.

English has quite a lot of consonants – like most Norfolk speakers, I have 24 – but Ubykh had 81!

It had many fascinating grammatical structures too.

Ubykh was not related to any of the Indo-European languages like German, or Russian, or Greek, or English. Rather, it was part of a family of languages which had been spoken for millennia in the northwestern part of the Caucasus Mountains, by the Black Sea.

The language died out because in the 19th century its homeland was attacked and invaded by the Russians under Tsar Alexander II. In 1864 the people finally

decided to leave, to avoid subjugation at the hands of the Russian army, and to escape massacres which were reported to have occurred elsewhere in the Caucasus as the Russians attempted to take these lands for themselves.

The Ubykhs made for the neighbouring Ottoman Empire, and settled in Turkey.

There, over a few generations, as a minority in a foreign land, they shifted to speaking the majority language, Turkish.

One of the main centres of Ubykh language and culture which these unfortunate people were forced to flee from, taking their language and culture with them, was a place they called Soatshe. You may have heard of it.

The Russians call it Sochi.

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Goodness and mercy will
stay close to me all the days
of my life.

Psalm 23:6

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