

# Eastern Daily Press

SERVING THE COMMUNITY  
SINCE 1870

## We all have a part to play in making these tough choices

The saga of Norfolk County Council and how it will achieve its spending reduction target will today enter a new chapter.

After a series of alarming plot developments over recent weeks, which raised the prospect of the axing of half our libraries, mass fire station closures, hundreds of firefighting jobs lost and, as a consequence, additional deaths across the county, things have moved on significantly.

These were red herrings it seems, and are no longer under consideration. None of this means, of course, that the issue of what will be cut has been settled. Far from it. Indeed, these painful decisions – and their even more painful impact – still lie ahead.

What also looms, it now seems, is a possible rise in council taxes, to help minimise the impact of the axe.

A cynic might even say that the threat of such severe cuts was a tactic designed to frighten the horses - to soften up the public for the possibility of tax hikes and the still painful cuts to follow.

Such cynicism would be misplaced. The economic situation facing the council is a grave one.

The task of navigating a safe, stable course is an immense challenge. The public is shortly to play its part in this tough process, as the consultation phase begins, and it is vital that every option has, by then, been fully explored.

Only then can we be sure of the best course to plot.

## Winter wonderland

There are few things more magical than our region at Christmas time.

We hope that our announcement today, that we will be bringing an ice rink to the city for the festive period, will ensure that this year it will be even more so.

Our aim is to help make sure Norwich is as vibrant, welcoming and dynamic as possible this winter, to act as a true capital for its hinterland, bringing in visitors from across our region – and beyond.

We trust our readers will enjoy this treat and make the most of this wonderful opportunity.

As we report today, our region has a fine tradition for skating – but one which a succession of mild summers have made it hard to indulge.

Now, in the shadow of our enchanting medieval castle, people will once again be able to get their skates on.

## Licence to research

The worlds of East Anglian academia and that of global villainy, extortion, and terror may seem far apart. But Dr Matthew Woodcock has bridged them both.

The lecturer in medieval and Renaissance literature at the UEA has been on the trail of SPECTRE, the (thankfully fictional) organisation headed by Ernst Stavro Blofeld, James Bond's nemesis, writing a 2,000 word study on the subject. It might seem, at first glance, an odd area of research for the academic. But for one who has so closely studied Shakespeare, and villains like Iago and Richard III, Blofeld may suddenly seem a rather lightweight, guileless baddie.

I have told you these things, so  
that in me you may have peace. In  
this world you will have trouble.  
But take heart! (John 16:33)

www.tlcnorwich.com



## READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

# iwitness24



■ Daybreak between Gooderstone and Cockley Clew, as photographed by Jason Whichelow. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit [www.iwitness24.co.uk](http://www.iwitness24.co.uk)

## 'They' are plural - but 'they' are also singular: read on

Peter  
Trudgill



email: [newsdesk@archant.co.uk](mailto:newsdesk@archant.co.uk)

I don't have to sit on committees any more, but I sometimes do still have nightmares about a former English university colleague who insisted that all official references to students should use both the masculine and feminine pronouns: "any student who does not complete his or her work..."; "if a student fails, then he or she must...".

This was an improvement on the earlier situation where our students were referred to as he, him, his even though most of them were female. But I argued that his wordings were incredibly cumbersome and that we should use they, them, their instead: "if a student fails, then they must...". He hated this idea, pontificating that it would be wrong because "they" is plural, so it cannot refer to a single person.

Now the pronoun "they" is plural, of course, but it can also be singular. English speakers have been able to use it for hundreds of years as a highly convenient way of referring to a single person when that person could be either male or female. We have examples of this from written English going back to at least the 1300s. From 1526, we find "If a psalm escape any person, or a lesson, or else



■ Our columnist recalls a colleague who always referred to students as 'he or she' when talking generally... and never 'they'.  
Picture: PA

they omit one verse or twain...". Here the pronoun referring to "any person is "they", because obviously a "person" can be male or female, and writing "they" is a lot more sensible than writing "he or she".

Singular "they" is entirely normal, very common and utterly correct. Jane Austen and Shakespeare used it.

The Oxford English Dictionary states that "they" can be used in "reference to a singular noun or pronoun of undetermined gender: he or she; especially in relation to a noun phrase involving one of the indefinite determiners or pronouns 'any, each, every, no, some, anybody, anyone'". You can tell

it truly is singular by the way in which speakers sometimes say things like "anyone who hurts himself" rather than "...themselves".

In fact, singular "they" is so normal in grammatical constructions involving indefinites like "any" that we use it even when we do know the sex of the unknown person being referred to. Before the election of the current pope, BBC reporters were using expressions such as "whoever the next pope is, they will have to...".

So it was my colleague who was mistaken. If you have such a colleague, do tell them they are wrong.