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Wonderful coastline deserves the world heritage site status

The charms and delights of our north Norfolk coastline, and the treasures it has yielded, are well known to those of us lucky enough to live in this region.

It seems a little selfish not to share them with the wider world.

So the first tentative steps, as we report today, to secure Unesco World Heritage Site status for the area seem like an excellent idea.

Of course, we are likely to be biased, but the case for the coast seems a strong one.

It is based not on its undoubted beauty, but primarily on the rich bounty of prehistoric finds that have been unearthed here.

In little over 25 years, finds have included a skeleton of a 4m-high mammoth, at West Runton, a flint handaxe, at Happisburgh, dated to 700,000 years ago, and footprints of early humans, also in Happisburgh, from 100,000 years before that. These finds – and they keep on coming - are transforming our understanding of life on earth, and how it developed.

Although there are more than 20 locations in the UK with this status, only two others are listed for their "natural", rather than "cultural" significance.

So a Unesco listing for north Norfolk would doubtless bring great global attention to the wider area, and bring many tourists in its wake. This would clearly be of great benefit to the region.

But this listing is not, primarily, about economics, Rather, it is about recognising, and encouraging others to recognise, the quite exceptional heritage that the area boasts.

Like those ancient ones found at Happisburgh, these first footsteps towards Unesco status are only little ones. Much of the journey lies ahead. But the destination – Unesco listing – would be a wonderful one, and a deserved one, for a very special stretch of coast.

Lessons must be learned

The impact of the Push the Pedalways project on Norwich cannot have escaped anyone who has spent any time in the city in recent months.

And you do not have to be a cyclist to have an interest in this. Indeed, we rather suspect motorists will have as much to say about the project as anyone.

It has seen roads dug-up, roundabouts removed, traffic re-routed – all causing significant disruption, which has been borne patiently by the people of Norwich.

The first phase – the eight-mile "pink pedalway" from Heartsease to Colney –- has not come cheap, at £5.7m, and has not come without controversy.

And with much more of this project still to come – next up, a "yellow" route from the airport to Lakenham, and a "blue" one from Sprowston and Wymondham – we need to be sure that those behind it have learned the lessons of the scheme thus far. There is still much to be said for this scheme. No one would argue that we should not be securing safe routes for cyclists, to get more on their bikes. So let's all make sure it is done well.

A matter of flat

Two men travel to the Fens to settle a wager as to whether the earth is flat. It might sound like a joke, but it is actually a little-known chapter in the ever fascinating annals of this famously level landscape. Much of this marvellous Victorian tale, which we look back on today, has a healthy dollop of the absurd about it. As with many bets, the loser does not seem to have taken the result well. Bad blood ensued and the dispute even reached the courts. Of course, the wager was won by the man arguing the world was not flat – though he will have seen that the Fens most certainly – and gloriously – are.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24

■ The sun sets behind Baconsthorpe Castle in north Norfolk in this view from across the lake taken by Peter Jarvis. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

If you prefer to say Peking rather than Beijing – that's fine

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It's often said that China's capital "has changed its name" from Peking to Beijing. But that's not really what happened. The Chinese name of the city hasn't changed at all. Peking and Beijing are both transliterations into the Latin alphabet of the same Chinese name. (Beijing means "northern capital". Nanjing means "southern capital".)

Naturally, Peking/Beijing is written by Chinese-speaking people in their own non-alphabetic writing system. For us to be able to read it, it has to be converted into our alphabet. This conversion of Chinese sounds into the Latin alphabet is called romanisation.

The "change" of the city's name simply involved an older romanisation system which rendered the Chinese name as Peking being replaced by a newer system. This newer, Chinese-government favoured romanisation represents the same Chinese name by a different sequence of Latin letters.

But how could the same name end up being converted into the Latin alphabet in two different ways? The advocates of the new system believe their spelling is a more accurate reproduction of the Chinese pronunciation. But linguistic change has also played a role. In the centuries since the original romanisation as "Peking", a sound-change has taken place in Mandarin Chinese: the k-sound in the middle of the name has changed so that it now sounds to us more like a "ch" or a "j".

■ People wait in line with their luggage for ticket checks and security screenings outside the Beijing – or Peking – railway station in Beijing. Picture: AP

There's actually no need for English speakers to abandon the long-established English-language name Peking and start saying Beijing if they don't want to. The French language name for the city remains Pékin; in Polish it's still Pekin; and in German it's Peking. The official English-language name of the former Peking University is today … Peking University.

And what about the Indian city Bombay? This case is a little different. Bombay did not "change its name" to Mumbai either. Mumbai was already the name of the city in the local language, Marathi. But English is one of the official languages of India – it's the major language of regional intra-communication within the country – and the English-language name was officially changed by the Indian government in 1995.

The change of the English name to Mumbai resulted from pressure from Marathi nationalists. They thought "Bombay" was a legacy of British colonial oppression – even though the Hindi name was also Bambai. Plenty of local citizens today still say Bombay when they are speaking English, and so we can do that too if we want to.