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Fog yet to clear, but the devolution juggernaut goes on

Since its beginnings, the path to East Anglian devolution has been a muddled and chaotic one.

As we reach the end of the consultation period, the fog is yet to clear.

Rather the revelation that people living in Norwich, Great Yarmouth, North Norfolk and Breckland will be unable to vote for the planned elected mayor seemingly adds strands of confusion.

Aside from questions about the balance of power between the two counties – not least whether we are destined to endure a Suffolk-based mayor and bias for generations to come; we also question how major cross-border infrastructure projects, which this new settlement is supposed to promote, will ever come to fruition.

Will schemes such as the upgrade of the Acle Straight be a priority without Norwich and Great Yarmouth at the table? Conversely, what mandate would an elected mayor and combined authority have if people living in those two places have not voted for them?

Most like the idea of devolution in theory, but this plan has been light on practicalities and detail from the start.

The Department for Communities and Local Government either couldn't, or wouldn't, individually answer a raft of questions we put to them.

And it is still not clear how much heed the government will take of the local enterprise partnership-administered consultation. If the mood is clearly against an elected mayor, will there be a shift, or will they stick to the guns of the former chancellor who was so adamant the elected mayor was a red line? These issues remain unresolved, yet it seems the devolution juggernaut still marches on.

School funding woes

For some time, education leaders have warned that school budgets were about to come under real pressure. Now, an analysis of the accounts of 50 local academies and academy trusts has shown this is starting to have an effect.

Although the government has said schools will receive the same amount of cash per pupil, this is a real terms cut, as funding fails to keep up with inflation. Increased pension and National Insurance costs have further reduced spending power.

These are national issues. In Norfolk and Suffolk, many high schools are being hit by another blow: falling pupil numbers, driven by demographics. And because their budgets are largely determined by the number of students, schools are already recording deficits, or raiding reserves to avoid this, and heads are having to make painful savings to meet their more straitened circumstances.

This makes the government's decision to further delay the introduction of a national fair funding system for schools, which should address the historic underfunding of our region, all the more disappointing. We cannot let recent education improvements in our region be jeopardised by money troubles.

A wonderful Games

In the early hours of this morning, the Rio Olympics drew to a close.

Although events off the playing field have not always gone smoothly, the sporting action has been enchanting – nothing more so than Team GB's phenomenal set of performances, from Laura Trott in the velodrome to Mo Farah on the track.

Local sports figures have met success too, from those in competition, such as Nick Dempsey in windsurfing, to those behind the scenes, such as Iain Dyer and Danny Kerry, head coaches of British cycling and women's hockey. Now, it is the turn of our Paralympians. We cannot wait to start cheering them on.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ Water voles have declined by 90pc in recent years. This lovely encounter at Cley Marshes indicates they are doing well there. Picture by John Assheton. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

Why Norfolk folk can be confused for Australians

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Have you ever been taken for an Australian? It's not an uncommon experience for people with Norfolk accents.

We ourselves don't think we sound anything like Australians. We would never consider for a moment that Shane Warne might be from Swaffham. And we're not inclined to confuse the accents of Brisbane and Briston, or Melbourne and Melton.

So what is the reason for other people sometimes thinking we're Aussies? I reckon it's got to do with other English people's unfamiliarity with East Anglian accents.

The way it works must be something like this – English people hear us speaking and they think to themselves: this person is obviously not from Ireland or Scotland or Wales, so they must be from England. But which part of England?

Well, they don't pronounce luck with the same vowel as look – they don't say butter and up as bootter and oopp. Also, they don't pronounce grass and pass to rhyme with lass and mass – they have a long a sound in grass, laugh, path. They can't be from the North of England, then.

So whereabouts in the south of England



■ Australia: The Sydney Harbour Bridge is a symbol of Australia... but a Norfolk accent isn't.

Picture: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

are they from? They don't sound like Cockneys – we all know what Londoners sound like. So if they're not from the southeast of England, where does that leave? Well, the West Country – there isn't anywhere else.

But the West Country can't be right because this person doesn't pronounce their r's in words like car, girl, warm, beard. So, OK, I was wrong: not English all. What's more, the accent is obviously not American or Canadian. Therefore, by a process of elimination, this person can only be Australian.

The flaw in this reasoning is obviously the "there isn't anywhere else" part. Geographical notions like Norfolk or East Anglia don't seem to figure in some people's mental maps of our country. This may be why actors usually do such a bad

job of reproducing our speech, often simply substituting a West Country accent instead. We are the forgotten corner of England.

There are genuine similarities between the accents of East Anglia and the Southern Hemisphere. Like them, we pronounce roses and Rosa's the same, and Lenin and Lennon. Like them, we don't pronounce wanted as wantidd or horses as horsizz like Londoners do.

But only people who think so little of Norfolk that they don't even remember we exist could possibly think we really sound like Australians.

■ Prof Trudgill's latest book is **Dialect Matters: Respecting Vernacular Language, a collection of his EDP columns, published by Cambridge University Press.**