

Eastern Daily Press

SERVING THE COMMUNITY
SINCE 1870

Our cash-strapped hospital and burden of interest charges

That the region needed a new hospital when the Norfolk and Norwich opened in 2001 is clear. Its construction was seen as a success – built on time, in budget and winning an architecture award.

What we take issue with today is the system which allows a group of people to continue to hugely benefit from the hospital's construction at the expense of our NHS – and will continue to do so in the coming decades from the taxes of our children and grandchildren.

Concerns about the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) through which the hospital was built are not new.

What we reveal today is the extent to which millions of taxpayers' pounds are flowing from the hospital's budget, to a handful of shareholders in the shape of soaring dividends.

The consortium which built the hospital, Octagon, has already recouped the cost of constructing the hospital from the taxpayer.

What it is now earning from the N&N – £57m this year according to the hospital – enables it to make record multi-million profits out of the NHS and pass on some of that profit to three shareholders in the form of almost £7m in dividends last year.

The N&N can't afford this. Like much of the NHS, it has seen its finances deteriorate rapidly.

The almost £26m Octagon paid in dividends to its three shareholders over the last six years is cash desperately needed to expand our hospital's A&E and meet waiting time targets for patients which it consistently misses.

We agree with our MPs who argue that the firms should show willing and hand some of the money back which would make such a difference.

Tribute to campaigner

Had it not been for Tracey Swann's campaigning last year, more people could have been affected by the fire which tragically claimed her life on Saturday evening.

And that is why today we pay tribute to her life and her successful efforts to save Heacham Fire Station from closure earlier this year.

It was thanks to her determination and drive that the building was kept open following concerns it would be closed as part of cuts by Norfolk County Council, an issue highlighted by the EDP's Save Our Stations campaign.

By having a station within the town meant that crews were able to swiftly respond to the emergency and prevent the blaze from spreading to any other properties along the terraced street. Sadly, despite the best efforts from all of those involved in putting out the fire that evening, they were unable to save her life.

We also say thank you to all of those who joined Tracey Swann's cause last year to protect the station, as well as the countless others who have tried to do the same in their towns across the county.

Praise for Nelson pub

There are many pubs dotted across England that take the name of our county's greatest seafarer.

But few towns or villages where these pubs are located can boast of having a direct connection to Lord Nelson.

And so it is good to hear that the Heart of Norfolk in Bradenham has now changed its name in recognition of the village's strong links to his family.

Regulars at what is now called 'The Lord Nelson' should also be praised for clubbing together to buy artwork for the pub's sign.

We wish the owners the best of luck and hope they manage to stay afloat in these difficult times.

Nelson, along with his father Edmund, who was born in the village in 1722, would be proud.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ West Runton beach, photographed by Louise O'Shea. If you have a photograph you would like considered for publication, you can send it to us via the website www.iwitness24.co.uk

Different spellings and questions of house style...

Peter
Trudgill



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The columns you see in this space on Monday mornings don't always appear word-for-word as I've written them. That's a fact of newspaper life. The EDP, like other newspapers, has a 'house style' with the aim of ensuring consistency of spelling and usage across its pages, and they sometimes amend what journalists and contributors write to fit in with this style.

This is a very interesting process from a linguistic point of view. For example, I always write "mediaeval". This was how I learnt to spell the word at school. The EDP prefers the more typically American spelling "medieval" and often, though not always, changes my spelling to fit in with their style. That's up to my sub-editors, and I have no strong objection, though I really can't see why they bother.

But sometimes changes due to house style affect not just the spelling of a word but its pronunciation. Changing the name of the well-known eastern European language Rumanian to Romanian – the spelling introduced by the dictator Ceaucescu to stress his nation's supposed Roman heritage – implies a different pronunciation of the word.

So does changing my spelling "learnt" to



■ Ponies in the New Forest: The distinction between 'learned' and 'learnt' in English dates back almost as far back as the forest's creation. Picture: PA

"learned". This happened recently, ironically enough in a column I wrote about the Americanisation of British English. I say "ironically" because learned is much more strongly associated with American English, learnt with British.

Verbs like learn, dream, burn, lean, spell have two different past-tense forms. You can either say learnt, dreamt, burnt, leant, spelt; or you can use the more regular and more typically American forms learned, dreamed, burned, leaned, spelled. I normally use the forms with -t myself, but I explain to my Norwegian students that the forms with -ed are perfectly correct, and generally favoured by Americans.

When you get variability like this in a

language, it's often a sign that a change has taken place, with the alternation being between older and newer forms. In this case that's certainly true. Learned is the older version – Anglo-Saxon used past-tense endings with -d in these verbs – and learnt is new. But when I say "new", this is a rather special use of the concept of innovation. The new past-tense forms ending in -t started appearing in verbs like these in the 11th century! Like the New Forest, the new verb forms are a thousand years old. The alternation between learnt and learned has been going on for a millennium.

I must ask why Americans – and the EDP – favour the older form, while most British people favour the newer.