

Sometimes a new bit of language kit can make things better

Lynne Mortimer



As you know, I am not fond of changes to the English language. The incursion of unnecessary words such as "so" and "innit", if indeed the latter qualifies as a word, is mystifying because they do not make meanings clearer. Like aeroplanes circling airports and waiting to land, they are holding patterns. Verbal devices that may promise a contribution to the conversation but may equally be used when someone is making a point unrelated to any part of what has gone before... usually because they haven't been properly listening.

My personal bête-noire, as you will know if you have endured me banging on about it on previous occasions, is "yeah no." An all-purpose answer to all yes/no questions, it may mean "yes", it may mean "no". The questioner has to wait to find which outcome will be preferred.

But there is one addition to English that I have come to like and that is: "You're welcome."

I notice it is often employed by people from other nations whose own language includes this response to a "thank you".

In Germany, the response to danke schön, if I recall my disgraceful grade 9 German O-level correctly, is bitte schön. In New York City even the smallest, quietest thanks prompts a sincere "you're welcome". Here, I find it is most prevalent in restaurants where, as a polite diner, you thank the person serving you. We used to get nothing but then, suddenly: "You're welcome."

Purists may find it a bit too transatlantic, but silent restaurant service can be intimidating. I don't want the waiting staff to join us at the table, taste the wine or nick a chip but I do like an exchange of pleasantries – apart from that deeply embarrassing moment when the maitre d' comes over to ask if everything is all right with your meal and you splutter an answer through the dish of the day.

I have long suspected they lurk nearby and wait until you have just pushed a massive forkful of food into your mouth before popping the question.

"Hummm mmff frmm, frunk you."

"You're welcome."

opinion

Revive planning system and make a better England for all

Fiona Cairns, director of Suffolk Preservation Society, makes a plea to the new Government

So the results are in and we have a new Government. The Suffolk Preservation Society believes that one of the administration's priorities must be to reboot our broken planning system, which has systematically failed everyone apart from a small handful of developers.

To delay or downgrade this much-needed reform will only exacerbate the symptoms of planning failure that affect us all and blight many communities: environmental and heritage destruction, soulless new developments dependent upon inadequate infrastructure and increasing housing unaffordability.

These in turn could well contribute to the further growth in social ills, including declines in wellbeing, social cohesion and homelessness.

We will be writing to both the new Secretary of State and our local MPs to lobby for the following planning reform:

- Reinvest in expertise. All seven Suffolk planning departments are overwhelmed by the demands placed on them. Most have reduced the size of their planning and heritage functions and so have lost a great deal of capacity, expert knowledge and experience. It is time to boost the size and skills of these vital gatekeepers

- Encourage co-operation between local authorities so that land for development is made available on the right scale and in the right locations – close to jobs, services, public transport and amenities

- Promote truly affordable housing and call for the required infrastructure for communities, accommodating growth

- Empower our communities by promoting Neighbourhood Planning so that local people have the tools to influence decisions close to where they live and improve the transparency of those decisions

- Ensure our built heritage at



Suffolk Preservation Society is urging a fresh look at our planning system to get the right development in the right places.

Picture: CHRIS RADBURN/WPA

- risk is better conserved through planning authorities using their statutory powers to take action against owners of neglected listed buildings.

- Deliver positive fiscal change for heritage through a simpler tax regime for repair, maintenance and conservation. Work on historic buildings is subject to 20% VAT, yet no VAT at all is charged on new buildings. This creates a perverse incentive to demolish old buildings rather than repairing or altering them. VAT should be permanently reduced to 5% on the repairs, maintenance and improvement of dwellings.

- Promote Heritage Lottery Funding for our churches. The new Government should commit to the future of the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme so that VAT incurred on eligible costs can continue to be recovered for these important buildings, and look to extend this scheme to other historic assets.

- Launch a renewed focus on

- regenerating our towns, especially vacant, derelict or underused "brownfield" sites. This provides much-needed homes and jobs close to existing services and infrastructure, improving the attractiveness and competitiveness of those places. Moreover it relieves pressure for development on greenfield land, and in rural areas that are vital for agriculture, nature, and well-being.

- Plan for "beauty". The overwhelming response to the Suffolk Preservation Society's #SuffolkBeauty campaign shows the widespread support there is among our communities for planning decisions which seek to deliver beautiful developments and not those which blight the lives of those who live and work there or who visit them.

- So, Suffolk Preservation Society is convinced that now is the perfect opportunity to press for reform of the planning system – for all our sakes. Will you join us? We certainly hope so.