

Council Report

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Managing Director

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## Twining and International Relationships

### Executive Summary

We established a Town Twining Working Group under the chairmanship of the Deputy Leader of the Council in September 2016 to review our existing twining and other international links and to consider opportunities for potential new relationships.

Arising from the Group's work, we are recommending that we should be more proactive in supporting the objectives of our existing twining agreement with Freiburg. Whilst the report seeks the formal termination of a little known twining agreement with Bar-le-Duc in France, we are also seeking authority to progress new international relationships with the French city of Versailles and Dongying in China.

At its meeting held on 26 September 2017, the Executive considered this report and endorsed the recommendation below.

### Recommendation to Council

- (1) That proposed work to develop and strengthen our existing relationship with Freiburg, referred to in this report, be supported.
- (2) That the twining arrangement with Bar-le-Duc be formally ended.
- (3) That discussions to progress the establishment of a new formal twining agreement with Versailles be supported.
- (4) That the Leader and Managing Director be authorised to sign a proposed partnership agreement with Dongying, as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

### Reason for Recommendation:

To develop new international relationships and enhance existing twining arrangements to maximise the benefits for Guildford residents.

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report invites the Council to consider proposals to enhance and strengthen the existing twinning arrangement with Freiburg and to agree potential new international partnerships that would benefit Guildford.

## **2. Strategic Priorities**

- 2.1 The focus of this report is on how twinning and other international partnership agreements can contribute to the Economy theme of the Corporate Plan by stimulating trade and investment opportunities, business links and tourism.

## **3. Review of Town Twinning**

- 3.1 A twinning agreement represents a friendly link involving cooperation between two communities in different countries. These agreements are endorsed by the local authorities representing those communities. The two twinned communities may organise projects and activities around a range of issues and develop an understanding of historical, cultural and lifestyle similarities and differences.

- 3.2 Guildford has a small number of existing twinning and other international relationships:

- (a) we have been twinned with Freiburg in Germany since 1979;
- (b) less well known is that we were twinned with Bar-le-Duc<sup>1</sup> in France in 1958; and
- (c) we have had a link with Mukono in Uganda since 2003.

- 3.3 Despite some successes, we recognise that more can be done to nurture our existing international relationships for the mutual benefit of Guildford and our partner communities. There are also opportunities for new arrangements with other towns and cities to be explored.

- 3.4 For this purpose, the Deputy Leader of the Council established a cross-party Town Twinning Working Group in September 2016 comprising the following members:

Councillor Matt Furniss, Deputy Leader of the Council (Chairman)  
Councillor Paul Spooner, Leader of the Council  
Councillor Gordon Jackson  
Councillor Nikki Nelson-Smith  
Councillor Angela Gunning  
Councillor David Goodwin  
Councillor Pauline Searle

- 3.5 The Working Group defined its terms as reference as:

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<sup>1</sup> Bar-le-Duc is a town in north-eastern France located in the Meuse département, between Paris and Strasbourg

- (a) to demonstrate, develop and enhance the benefits of Guildford's twinning arrangements;
- (b) to consider opportunities to deliver economic, educational, cultural and sporting benefits to Guildford through twinning arrangements, including in terms of tourism and inward investment;
- (c) to consider, advise, coordinate and agree projects and initiatives with Guildford's twin town(s) to further the objectives of twinning;
- (d) to encourage local businesses, organisations, clubs and residents to develop relationships with Guildford's twin town(s), including by participation in exchanges and twinning activities;
- (e) to publicise and promote Guildford's twinning relationships to residents and businesses to secure greater interest and engagement;
- (f) to determine the desirable characteristics of potential future twin towns;
- (g) to make recommendations to the Council on any future formal twinning arrangement or similar link; and
- (h) to monitor Guildford's twinning arrangements to maintain their effectiveness and future flexibility.

3.6 As a starting point, the Working Group sought to define what we would wish to achieve through town twinning and established a number of broad objectives:

- (a) To provide a better understanding of people of other nationalities and their ways of life.
- (b) To create, develop and foster international friendship and goodwill.
- (c) To create opportunities for engagement and exchanges to deliver benefits in the following areas:
  - culture and the arts
  - economic development, technology, business and tourism
  - education, learning and skills
  - environmental sustainability
  - sport and physical activity
- (d) To develop initiatives and activities that contribute to the delivery of Guildford's corporate objectives.
- (e) To contribute to civic pride.
- (f) To stimulate interest and help in learning other languages and to provide opportunities for those who might not otherwise do so to travel abroad.

- 3.7 Thought was also given to the desirable characteristics of twin towns. Without being overly prescriptive, issues such as population, location and setting, history, culture and heritage, centres of education and learning and focusses for high-tech industry, research and innovation were highlighted as the type of characteristic that might form the basis for forming and developing strong relationships.
- 3.8 The Working Group has made early progress and produced a number of proposals to develop and grow our twinning and international relationships. This report seeks the Council's approval of a number of specific initiatives.

#### **4. Freiburg, Germany**

- 4.1 Guildford was formally twinned with Freiburg in Germany in 1979. A deed of partnership was entered into as a token and promise of lasting friendship between the two communities. The aims were to:
- encourage regular mutual liaison;
  - exchange experiences; and
  - encourage and support the coming together of our citizens in every sphere.
- 4.2 As with many European twinning arrangements, the origins of the relationship arose from the desire to build bridges between countries following the Second World War. Twinning was seen as a way to establish a far deeper understanding and dedication to the unity of Europe.
- 4.3 Alongside the formal twinning agreement, the Council also established the Guildford-Freiburg Association to develop links between the two communities. The intention was always that the Council would act as a facilitator and enabler, with the Association leading on any direct involvement. The Council awards a small grant (£450 per annum) to support the Association's costs.
- 4.4 The aims of the twinning agreement have been nurtured and developed over the decades by means of exchange visits by groups and individuals involved in sport and the arts and links between schools, churches and clubs of all kinds. The Guildford-Freiburg Association has also represented us at events in Freiburg, such as the biennial Sister Cities Partnership Market and organised events in Guildford such as the annual German Christmas Market at the Guildhall.
- 4.5 The various elements of twinning are perhaps reinforced by periodic civic visits between Guildford and Freiburg. Two such visits have taken place relatively recently with Freiburg visiting Guildford in September 2016 and a return trip being made by our own delegation in March 2017. These were particularly successful events and demonstrated both the strength of our existing relationship and the potential opportunities for further cooperation to address common issues and problems. Reassurances were also given that Brexit would not affect our future relationship and could, in fact, provide an impetus for forging stronger links.
- 4.6 The Town Twinning Working Group recognises the excellent work undertaken by the Guildford-Freiburg Association in sustaining cultural and other ties between our communities. However, both the Association and ourselves feel that the Council

could become more proactive in leading the relationship with Freiburg, particularly in terms of strengthening economic, tourism and business links.

- 4.7 We have identified a number of actions that the Council should lead on, such as:
- (a) securing greater involvement of the local business community in twinning activities;
  - (b) promoting the twinning arrangement and raising public awareness;
  - (c) supporting the design and production of improved literature to promote tourism (including in German);
  - (d) exploring areas for environmental collaboration, including through the University;
  - (e) reviewing opportunities for improved tourism and business promotion at Freiburg events, such as:
    - Freiburg Christmas Market
    - Wine Festival
    - Munstertreff (Craft Festival)
    - Oberlindhock (Street Festival)
    - International Music Festival
    - Sister Cities Partnership Market (biennial)
  - (f) engaging with Freiburg's International Sister Cities Conference for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals at a local level (linked to the biennial Local Renewables Conference).
- 4.8 We will be presenting a briefing paper to the Working Group shortly on options to develop and enhance economic, tourism and business links with Freiburg.

## **5. Bar-le-Duc, France**

- 5.1 Less well known than our relationship with Freiburg is that Guildford twinned with Bar-le-Duc in France in 1958. The initiative seems to have been led by a group of Bar-le-Duc residents in order to "renew its relations with the outside world" and "join the circle of the bilingual world". In April of that year, the Town Clerk of Guildford visited Bar-le-Duc and the Conseil Municipal voted to twin with Guildford.
- 5.2 There were two twinning ceremonies, one in Bar-le-Duc on 22 June 1958 and another in October 1958, when a French delegation came to Guildford. However, after this date, records abruptly halt and there is very little awareness that the relationship ever existed. It is not clear why the arrangement was allowed to lapse, but there does not ever seem to have been an equivalent of the Guildford-Freiburg Association to maintain a close relationship.

5.3 We wrote to the current Maire de Bar-le-Duc in September 2016 about the twinning arrangement and it was agreed by mutual consent that the relationship should not be re-established.

## **6. Versailles, France**

6.1 The British Embassy in Paris was approached by Versailles about identifying a suitable UK twin. The Embassy recommended Guildford and, in May 2017, asked us if we would be interested in establishing a twinning agreement.

6.2 Versailles needs little introduction and is renowned worldwide for its chateau (the Chateau de Versailles) and gardens of Versailles, designated as UNESCO World Heritage sites. The city is known historically for numerous treaties, including the Treaty of Paris, which ended the American Revolutionary War and the Treaty of Versailles. Versailles was the de facto capital of France for over 100 years (1682 to 1789), before becoming the cradle of the French Revolution.

6.3 With a population of nearly 86,000, Versailles is located in the western suburbs of the French capital, approximately 10 miles from the centre of Paris. The city has a largely service-based economy and, unsurprisingly, is a major tourist destination.

6.4 The Town Twinning Working Group is excited about the potential opportunity to develop a new twinning relationship with such a prestigious partner. Discussions have continued through the British Embassy and we have identified the following areas as priorities for cooperation:

- (a) developing business links between Guildford and Versailles;
- (b) sharing ideas about how the authorities work with their business communities;
- (c) tourism promotion;
- (d) arts and culture (exchanges and collaboration etc.); and
- (e) links between schools and universities.

6.5 Although at an early stage, we hope to hold direct discussions with Versailles in the near future about taking forward a formal twinning agreement.

## **7. Dongying, China**

7.1 With its extraordinary economic growth in recent decades, it is impossible to think about developing new international relationships without considering China. As China has emerged as a global power, there are new opportunities for partnerships between British and Chinese towns and cities to develop and flourish. There are many potential mutual benefits in terms of trade, investment and through the exchange of knowledge and ideas.

7.2 Building on existing links between the Universities of Surrey and Dongying, the opportunity has been taken to explore the establishment of a formal relationship

with Dongying City in China. The Town Twinning Working Group identified a number of potential benefits:

- (a) To develop deeper understanding between Chinese and British cultures, including through the development of cultural and educational links between Guildford and Dongying.
- (b) To exchange knowledge and expertise in a variety of fields ranging from medicine, science to planning.
- (c) To build on the established links between the University of Surrey and Dongying.
- (d) To promote access to Chinese markets by local businesses, including by connecting key decision-makers in Guildford and Dongying and through trade visits.
- (e) To promote Guildford and the UK as a destination for investment.
- (f) To promote Guildford as a tourist destination.
- (g) To raise the international profile of Guildford.

7.3 Given the logistical issues, we consider that any links developed with Dongying are more likely to be focused on businesses and institutions rather than the exchanges between local groups and clubs familiar to our relationship with Freiburg. Therefore, to reflect this distinction and whilst not diminishing its significance in any way, we are proposing that a link with Dongying be taken forward in the form of a partnership agreement.

7.4 Whilst the potential benefits of an agreement may focus on economic links, time and traditional values such as hospitality and reciprocity will still be crucial to build a trusting relationship between Guildford and Dongying. Cultural and friendly exchanges will help build a relationship that is conducive to economic collaborations. Such exchanges will also enable both sides to establish a better understanding of the potential for cooperation.

7.5 To this end, we welcomed a delegation from Dongying to Guildford on 17 July 2017 to discuss areas of cooperation and signed an expression of interest to develop a formal partnership agreement. Following further discussions, a delegation from Guildford will visit Dongying on 15 and 16 October 2017 and, subject to Council approval, sign the proposed agreement attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

7.6 The Guildford delegation to Dongying will comprise the following representatives:

Councillor Paul Spooner, Leader of the Council  
Councillor Matt Furniss, Deputy Leader of the Council  
James Whiteman, Managing Director  
Professor Max Lu, Vice-Chancellor, University of Surrey  
Saskia Cochrane, President, University of Surrey Students' Union

- 7.7 Although we believe that the proposed agreement with Dongying has significant potential benefits for local businesses, jobs and the economy, the size of the delegation has been kept deliberately small to limit costs. Members of the delegation accompanying Council representatives will also be meeting their own costs.
- 7.8 The developing high-level councillor and officer relationships with Dongying will be used to open doors for local businesses to trade with China and the possibilities for future dedicated specific trade delegations should not be under-estimated. Relationships are an integral component of the business culture in China and the success of these initial civic exchanges will be crucial.

## **8. Mukono, Uganda**

- 8.1 Building on existing ties between our communities, we formed a Guildford-Mukono Link in 2003. Alongside this, an external Guildford-Mukono Link group was established which also receives a small annual grant from the Council (currently £450).
- 8.2 The link has proved very successful with a valuable contribution being made at grassroots level to the Mukono community. Strong links have been made between groups in Guildford and Mukono, particularly schools. Guildford schools have raised funds for classrooms, dormitories, water-harvesting systems, boreholes, computers and books.
- 8.3 Guildford residents have raised funds for several initiatives in Mukono, including:
- (a) sponsoring orphans to enable them to attend university;
  - (b) establishing a new library;
  - (c) planting woodlots and installing fuel-efficient stoves in schools;
  - (d) introducing school farms;
  - (e) workshops on literacy, science, economics and nutrition; and
  - (f) introducing sports sessions after school.
- 8.4 More recently, the Guildford-Mukono Link has started new projects to sponsor children at risk of dropping out of school because their families are unable to afford uniforms, books, lunches and fees and, separately, a scheme to reduce the cost of school lunches.
- 8.5 The Town Twinning Working Group commends the Guildford-Mukono Link for developing such strong links and for delivering so many successful projects to benefit residents and, particularly, children in Mukono. The continuation of the formal link is very much supported.



## **9. Chinese Delegations**

- 9.1 We are hosting an increasing number of delegations from various cities and provinces in China. Discussions have also been ongoing with representatives of Shangqiu about developing business and agricultural links.
- 9.2 Arrangements for these visits and attendance by senior representatives, such as the Leader, Deputy Leader, Mayor and Managing Director, can involve significant officer and councillor time. However, we take the opportunity to promote local businesses and particularly tourism to the huge potential Chinese market. Therefore, we intend to continue accommodating these delegations where possible.

## **10. Consultations**

- 10.1 This report has been prepared in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and reflects the work of the Town Twinning Working Group. This includes a consultative meeting with the Guildford-Freiburg Association and the contribution of Surrey Chambers of Commerce.

## **11. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 11.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report. Activities undertaken as part of our twinning or partnership arrangements will need to comply with our equality duty and support our Equality Statement.

## **12. Financial Implications**

- 12.1 We award small annual grants (currently £450 per annum) to both the Guildford-Freiburg Association and Guildford-Mukono Link to support their activities.
- 12.2 Proposals to strengthen our existing twinning arrangement with Freiburg and to develop new relationships with Dongying and Versailles may have future financial implications and these will be kept under review. However, until detailed plans have been developed, support for twinning and other international partnerships will be provided within existing budgets.
- 12.3 In the short-term, the visit to China in October 2017 to sign a partnership agreement with Dongying will be funded through existing resources. The size of the delegation has been kept small and the cost to the Council is estimated at £5,000. We consider this to be good value for money in terms of the potential future benefits for local businesses, jobs and the economy.

## **13. Legal Implications**

- 13.1 We can rely on the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, in particular Section 2, to authorise existing and new twinning and partnership arrangements. The Act gives councils the powers to do anything that they consider likely to promote or improve the economic or social wellbeing of the area.

## **14. Human Resource Implications**

- 14.1 Inevitably, increased activity to support our relationship with Freiburg and any new actions and projects to support potential agreements with Dongying and Versailles will require increased officer support. In the short-term, we will look at delivering the required support through existing officer resources.
- 14.2 However, as the work of the Town Twinning Working Group continues and the scale of future plans and projects becomes clear, the provision of additional officer support for international partnerships may need to be considered. Dedicated support may be required in future to provide the drive and commitment required for partner city initiatives and to champion and coordinate a programme of activities.

## **15. Summary of Options**

- 15.1 The Town Twinning Working Group has spent some time considering the objectives and benefits of town twinning. We are not required to become more proactive with our existing relationships or to develop new partnerships. We also recognise that, as our plans and activities develop, there may be financial and human resources implications to provide additional support for this area of work.
- 15.2 However, we concluded that the development and strengthening of existing and new agreements has the potential to bring significant benefits to Guildford, including by stimulating trade and investment opportunities, business links and tourism. In addition, many residents could benefit by enhanced cultural, educational and other links with our partner cities.

## **16. Conclusion**

- 16.1 The Town Twinning Working Group has been reviewing our existing twinning and other international links and considering opportunities for new overseas relationships.
- 16.2 As a result of the Group's deliberations to date, we are recommending that the Council should be more proactive in supporting the existing twinning agreement with Freiburg. We are also proposing that new international relationships be forged with Versailles and Dongying.

## **17. Background Papers**

None

## **18. Appendices**

Appendix 1: Proposed Partnership Agreement between Guildford and Dongying

**PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN  
THE BOROUGH OF GUILDFORD, SURREY, UNITED KINGDOM  
AND DONGYING, SHANDONG, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

Guildford Borough and Dongying City recognise that they have great potential for cooperation to deliver mutual benefits.

This partnership agreement signals the intention of Guildford Borough and Dongying City to enhance the understanding and friendship between their places and people.

On the basis of equality and mutual benefit, Guildford Borough and Dongying City will seek to promote people-to-people friendly exchanges, economic and trade interflow and cooperation in the science and technology, energy, culture, tourism, sports, health care and education and other relevant fields.

This agreement has been made in both the Chinese and English languages, with both texts being equally authentic.

Leader and Managing Director  
Guildford Borough Council  
United Kingdom

Representative of Dongying  
The People's Republic of China

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Date: .....