

Future of Town Twinning

Town Twinning Network

Date: 6th June 2018

Author:	Director of Law and Democratic Services
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 At its meeting of the 25th April 2018, the Network requested that a report be submitted to its next meeting concerning the future role of the Town Twinning Network, and whether the Council intends to continue to establish friendship links including the development of a statement about the role and benefits of a friendship link.

2. Recommendations

The Town Twinning Network is recommended to:

- 2.1 Consider its future role, and whether the Council intends to continue to establish friendship links including the development of a statement about the role and benefits of a friendship link.
- 2.2 Consider what further support could be provided to support town twinning activities such as promotional and marketing activities, through the use of existing Council services
- 2.3 Consider inviting representatives from Swindon City of Sanctuary to its future meetings.

3. Detail

- 3.1 Swindon Borough Council had two formal twinning arrangements, one with Salzgitter (Germany) that was established in 1975 and one with Ocotal (Nicaragua), established in 1990.
- 3.2 In addition to the formal twinning arrangements, Swindon also has friendship agreements with Torun (Poland) and Chattanooga (USA)
- 3.3 Each of these groups organise their own fundraising, activities, events and exchange visits and usually give an update on their activities at each town twinning network meeting.
- 3.4 The Town Twinning Network was established in 1999 to provide a forum for discussion and the exchange of information as well as encouraging the development of other international links. In addition to those twins and friendship links mentioned in 3.1 and 3.2 above, a number of other organisations involved in

Future of Town Twinning

Town Twinning Network

Date: 6th June 2018

twinning activities sometimes attend the town twinning network meetings. They are:-

- Wroughton – St Germain les Corbeil Twinning Association
- Highworth Twinning Association
- Somaliland
- Mauritius

- 3.5 The Town Twinning Network seeks to promote co-ordination and co-operation in the development of Twinning Links and in the development of other International friendship links between the people of Swindon and communities in other Countries.
- 3.6 The Town Twinning Network meets four times a year in order to encourage the development of International friendship links and commercial links between the people of Swindon and communities in other Countries by the provision of a forum for discussion and the exchange of information.
- 3.7 The economic benefits of twinning can include activities and events that generate interest in the town and bring money into Swindon either in grants or by visitors. Some examples of economic activity and income brought into the town over the last 20 years include:
- The Swindon Ocotal Link (SOL) charity raised on average £4,000 a year which supported 30 young people with their school and college costs, an old people's home, basic medical support and help for a large pre-school centre for the very poorest of Ocotal. The highlight of SOL activity came in 1998 during the Hurricane Mitch disaster. Over £27,000 was raised to support rebuilding projects in Ocotal and RAF Lyneham transported 7 tons of aid, collected in Swindon, direct to Nicaragua.
 - Last year SOL decided to bring to an end its charitable and fundraising status. It still has cash reserves to provide for another two to three years of financial support for projects in Ocotal. At its AGM in 2017 it decided that the administrative demands of running a charity and annual fundraising were not sustainable and it has moved to a more informal link called the Swindon Ocotal Link Association (SOLA).
 - One successful EU bid brought to the town £25,000 that paid for a youth work project.
 - Another successful EU bid brought in sufficient funding to redesign two streets in the Manchester Road area as well as attracting several EU partner workshops.

Future of Town Twinning

Town Twinning Network

Date: 6th June 2018

- There have been two EU twinning conferences over the years bringing 25+ visitors for several days and included conference venue bookings. One of these conferences focussed upon the benefits to tourism and business opportunities arising through twinning and was organised by the Swindon Salzgitter Twinning Association
 - Continental street markets held during the above conference
 - A visit by the Salzgitter football team brought 10-12 visitors for several days to the town, all spending money in Swindon
 - Adult education partnerships and EU funded projects have brought to Swindon around 5 conferences involving 10 - 20 visitors on each occasion which lasted over 4-5 days.
 - Visitors have returned to Swindon to study English
 - A number of work experience exchanges involving apprentices, office workers and students have taken place
 - Links with South America established an event at the Arts Centre attracting large audiences 'South America Comes to Swindon.'
 - Many schools have brought over teachers through EU funded programmes bringing income into the town
 - A number of events were organised to commemorate the Swindon – Salzgitter 40th Annual celebrations.
 - More recently, the Council is going to explore the possibility of exhibiting a mural by an Ocotol artist.
- 3.8 Over the last ten years, the town twinning network has reviewed their purpose and constitution and have actively encouraged attendance at their meetings from the youth forum, schools, police and the Chamber of Commerce. Unfortunately, attempts to encourage young people to participate in the network have been unsuccessful and the Chamber of Commerce have not attended meetings for a number of years.
- 3.9 Officer support is limited and, currently, the Council's commitment to supporting the Network is to provide a clerk to service the meetings. The Chair of the Network has requested additional officer support in the past but these requests were unable to be met within existing resources.
- 3.10 A small town twinning grants budget is available and currently stands at a few thousand pounds. Officers will be able to provide the exact amount at the meeting. Groups can apply for a grant of up to £1,000 but once the money has been spent, there will be no additional budget available for grant funding.
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Iain Tucker, Direct Dial 463605, itucker@swindon.gov.uk.

Future of Town Twinning

Town Twinning Network

Date: 6th June 2018

- 3.11 In order to increase its friendship links, the Network could invite representatives from the Swindon City of Sanctuary to its future meetings. A special meeting is to be held in July with a presentation from the City of Sanctuary which could explore this avenue.
- 3.12 In 2012 a report was submitted to Cabinet reviewing Town Twinning. At that time members of the Town Twinning Network were asked their views as part of the review; the main issues they raised were:
- Better recognition of town twinning activities and benefits by departmental heads and lead members
 - Greater promotion of twinning activities within the town
 - More focus upon the economic benefits of twinning to Swindon
 - Better resources available to access EU and other funding
 - Greater involvement from the Mayoral office/Mayoral attendance at events etc.
 - The value of the Town Twinning Network in helping to support the work of individual groups and to provide access to and an understanding of the functions of the Council

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no alternative options.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications relating to this update. Any future activity that has financial implications would be subject to a separate report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 This report has no specific legal or human rights implications.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 This report has no specific implications relating to staff, sustainability, health, rural, crime and disorder.

Future of Town Twinning

Town Twinning Network

Date: 6th June 2018

Links to One Swindon, Strategic Objectives, Plans and Policies

- 5.4 There are no specific links between Town Twinning and One Swindon, Strategic Objectives, Plans and Policies.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.5 A Diversity Impact Assessment has not been completed for this report.

Risk Management

- 5.6 A risk assessment has not been undertaken.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Board Director Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

- 8.1 None