

Essex and Suffolk Twinning Congress AGM
Saturday 9th October 2021, by Zoom

Guest Speaker, Joséphine Littmann, founder and honorary member of Plaisir Twinning Association, twinned with Lowestoft.

José highlighted the following:

Town signs which highlight the twin town remind us of our shared values of peace, democracy, openness to others and friendliness.

The aim of twinning is to develop understanding and tolerance of each other.

The pandemic has shown how digital means can overcome physical distance, but these will never replace real exchanges.

The future of twinning requires encouraging our schools to take part; very often this is one of the highlights of a twinning relationship.

Within twinning we need to consider themes that will affect young people most: environment, nature protection; health and wellbeing; education, training and employment; culture and sport, etc.

José was thanked for her heartfelt intervention.

Questions we considered in plenary, “Breakout rooms” not being possible:

How can twinning associations, with their partner towns, support sustainability and climate change initiatives in the 21st century?

Gloria Nichols (Chelmsford) mentioned a beekeeping project, as part of biodiversity. Richard Allen in Lowestoft mentioned the gift of a hive from Plaisir. The two will liaise over this.

David Beedle (Great Dunmow) mentioned a wildflower project.

Isabelle (Norwich and Rouen Friendship Association) reported the existence of a twinning garden in Norwich. (There is a similar one in Lowestoft.) She wanted there to be a sustainability project across East Anglian twinning associations.

Richard Allen wondered about Stansted/Rungis; both have a large airport nearby (Orly). How could the twinning link broach the subject of climate change? Should we join in climate action groups? Mary Dunk, in the chair, pointed out that our associations must remain apolitical, especially as some are in receipt of public money. It would be inadvisable to link with groups that could be seen as having a political agenda.

Michelle Golding (Beccles) mentioned a joint European Commission project between Northern France and our region: Interreg V-A - France-United Kingdom (Manche/Channel). She reported that to get funding through this any project would have to be of considerable size.

How have we managed to keep the spirit of twinning alive?

Geraldine Allars (Stansted) reported on a virtual walk.

Isabelle mentioned a Twelfth Night quiz around a “galette des rois” Epiphany cake.

Michelle Golding spoke of a prize donation draw; Diane Matthews (Brentwood) a blind auction, and a virtual exchange between art groups. Beccles had been part of a virtual art exhibition with their twin town.

Other points raised in discussion:

Cyclists from a charity based in Lowestoft had completed a relay challenge ending in the twin town near Paris.

Michelle Golding had been a volunteer at the London Olympics and was following closely what opportunities there might be at Paris 2024.

Norwich had weekly Zoom meetings with Rouen. Stansted/Rungis also had joint meetings.

In Sudbury it is the town council that is twinned. Interdepartmental visits between Council departments, e.g transport, environment, were mentioned as were opportunities for Work Experience. Could these be encouraged through the Council?

Following copyright issues on the Congress website, it was stressed that all images used on publications must have copyright permission or similar. Unsplash is a website offering copyright-free images.

It was agreed that for actual twinning visits to take place, all participants would need to have been sufficiently vaccinated.

This was followed by the formal Annual Congress meeting: minutes are on the website.

It was agreed that we will aim to meet in person, finally, at the Seagull Theatre, Lowestoft, on Saturday 8th October 2022.

Finally, Pat Pulham (Lowestoft) stated that José would be “distraught” if we did not carry through with our twinning ideal.

Further notes sent from Felixstowe Wesel Twinning Association who were not able to attend.

Felixstowe Wesel (Germany) Association report.

Sadly all our social, fund-raising and committee meetings were cancelled because of covid and it is only now that we are making outline plans for a social event in December and an A.G.M.in January 2022.

There has been continual contact via email and social media between committee members on both sides and private individuals.

There is also some talk of individuals making their own plans to visit Germany soon, but as an Association we shall not try to arrange a group visit before the end of this year.

One project that has benefitted from lockdown (because we had more time on our hands) is our scheme to publish a complete history of the twinning partnership. Lock-down has given us time to progress this initiative quicker than I had predicted. So far we have completed all the "History years" a complete diary of what happened and the names of individuals involved in the years up to the official twinning ceremony (1974) and every year since then to date, complete with photographs and newspaper cuttings. Alongside that we have written "Personal profiles" of the 50 or so people who have taken a significant part in the twinning. It is being prepared as a Wikipedia website. This has involved huge numbers of emails and drafts going backwards and forwards between our two towns.

Thanks to Richard Allen for compiling these notes.