

Essex and Suffolk Twinning Congress AGM

Saturday 8th October 2022 – Seagull Theatre, Lowestoft

Guest Speaker:

Councillor Alan Green, Mayor of Lowestoft and Representative of Pakefield

Twin Towns Represented

Sudbury, Chelmsford, Brentwood, Hadleigh, Haverhill, Beccles, Lowestoft (host)

Richard Allen of **Lowestoft and Plaisir Twinning Association** welcomed everyone and introduced the Mayor of Lowestoft, Councillor Alan Green.

The Mayor opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending; he stressed the importance of twinning and spoke of its many benefits, such as getting to know people personally, understanding each others' lives and breaking down barriers.

The Mayor also spoke highly of the venue, The Seagull Theatre, adding how impressed he had been when attending a performance, also the ease of wheelchair access.

Mary Dunk, Chairman and representative of Sudbury, thanked the Mayor for his support, thanked everyone for attending, gave out reports from associations who were unable to attend and introduced the new Treasurer – Elaine Oddie.

The ETIAS Waiver (European Travel Information and Authorisation Scheme) is due to come into effect in November 2023, which means that UK citizens will not need a visa to enter the EU but will need a Travel Authorisation of 90 days maximum. It is designed so that eligible travellers can enter the Schengen Area visa free. Travellers will need a passport, an email address and a debit/credit card; the online application is intended to take only a few minutes. Applications are to be made by individuals, not groups.

Apologies

Felixstowe, Bury St Edmunds, Dunmow, Great Waltham, Stansted Mountfichet and Downham Market (Norfolk), also Gloria (Chelmsford)

Minutes 2021

Approved.

Matters Arising

The “bee” arrangement with Chelmsford never materialised.

All associations present have had visits this year, either hosting or travelling to their twin towns.

Discussions:

Sustainability/Climate change initiatives with our twin towns

Lowestoft Town Council has declared a Climate Emergency. Initiatives such as this could be shared with the twin as a matter of course - “pour encourager les autres”. We need to share experiences, eg how climate change is affecting heritage conservation; how to respond to old buildings losing heat etc.

There are practical considerations as to whether we should travel by rail, road or air, bearing in mind participants' age and mobility.

Achievements: some highlights

The French Circle in Chelmsford had a fortnightly presentation.

Brentwood were active in promoting their twinning. They spoke of their art trail. They had organised a town centre French Day in summer. Very popular was the face painting and every parent, as they queued for this with their child, had the benefits of twinning explained to them. The day resulted in one new member.

Brentwood had joined many FaceBook groups in and around the town and actively promoted twinning on these pages. It was not necessary for a twinning association to have its own FaceBook page, they explained, but helpful to post on everyone else's. It had been hard work but profitable, resulting in eight new members in the half-year that they had been working on it.

Furthermore, they asked if any associations had sought to piggy-back on a Macmillan coffee morning.

The importance of protecting individuals' data (GDPR) was also stressed, as well as being vigilant about privacy settings.

Lowestoft had attended a celebration in France of its twin's 40th anniversary of twinning with a town in Austria. The French town's twins in Portugal and Germany were also represented. There is potential in these secondary twinning links – if we have within our associations the volunteers to take this on! (Participants were assured by an MEP present that in the corridors of “Brussels” the mark of a thriving town was the number of twins it had.)

In Lowestoft also, some French and English twinningers enjoy weekly bilingual Zoom calls, practising the foreign language as their counterpart encourages them, gently correcting and refining skills.

Beccles had its twin involved in the attempt at the world record for the longest length of knitted bunting, to mark the Platinum Jubilee: “14km – le record à battre pour entrer au Guinness”.

Beccles also took part in a three-town virtual art exhibition.

The sixth-form college in Bury St Edmunds has offered work experience placements in its twin towns.

Treasurer's Report

We have as much money in the bank account as last year; some of this pays for the website, but £10 is not considered enough to cover the host association's costs, i.e. payment for venue and buffet (Seagull Theatre was free of charge as they have corporate membership of Lowestoft Twinning). The host association must not be in debt and must set the fee for the following year. Non-attendees have previously sent cheques.

The next two years

Lowestoft firefighters are invited to their twin town to join the other four twins mentioned above in a tournament planned for June 2024, one month before the Olympic Games.

In the past there was an annual Essex/Suffolk Quiz hosted by one of their towns. This could perhaps take place in the future, perhaps via Zoom or in person alternately.

Should twinning associations simply be a facilitator of exchanges by others – sports clubs, artistic ventures etc? Secondly, a means of sharing ideas with the twin as to how we might improve our towns – all of this done apolitically. Does the UK too often seek solutions from distant English-speaking lands, shunning the proven good practice nearer to home?

How to promote our towns and keep costs down

The adjacent towns of Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth are twinned with neighbouring French towns. This was not the case for other associations represented today, but this can lead to pooling resources, eg being able to fill a coach. On a recent visit to Great Yarmouth's twin town there were spaces on the coach which were offered to Lowestoft members, one of whom took up the offer and very much enjoyed the experience.

Data Protection

If the Twinning Association's Chairman is not available, who else can be allowed access to emails etc? Emails should be sent to members bcc and permission for contact details should be put on membership forms. Members should be asked if they are willing to have any photos of events etc published but without names. FaceBook privacy settings are vital.

Any Other Business

We need to think about changing the way we pay for things. Some associations have a debit card while others still use cheques and/or bank transfer.

We are all trying ways to encourage new members.

Mary Dunk, having completed three years as Chairman, was unanimously elected to remain in the role.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 12.30pm.

Next Year's Venue is yet to be decided but will take place on **Saturday 7th October 2023**.