



ITEM 5 – Twinning Update

Wells City Council

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What is the purpose of Twinning?

Twinning is about enabling the citizens of different towns in different countries to gain a better understanding of each other's society and culture through personal contacts organised by officially recognised organisations in the respective partner towns.

In the UK twinning does not attract public subsidy but town to town twinning links are usually authenticated by the appropriate local council, in this case, Wells City Council.

In response to public requests, the Wells City Council has formalised each of the twinning links by arranging for the creation of charters and hosting the signing ceremonies. The Wells Twinning Association organises and sustains the links.

The Mayor of Wells is the president of the Wells Twinning Association.

What is the difference between a Twinning Agreement and a Friendship Agreement?

A twinning agreement is a formal, long-term, and indefinite relationship between two communities, while a friendship agreement is often a more informal, shorter term partnership. The key difference lies in the commitment: twinning implies a deep, stable bond that endures changes in leadership, whereas a friendship agreement might be for specific projects with short term benefits and can be renewed or converted into a twinning arrangement.

What is the formal governance for Twinning?

The governance is found from within Wells twinning association with support from Wells City Council, all be it, not a formal responsibility or statutory duty of the Council. The Mayor of Wells serves as the president of the twinning association.

The association is managed by annually elected committee of volunteers, comprising a Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and a rep of the City Council and has approximately 140 members who all pay a subscription.

Who is Wells City currently Twinned with?

Paray-Le-Monial, France

Twinning Established: 1979 (46 years)

The twinning movement in Wells was started in the mid-1970s and led to the first twinning link being completed in 1979. Paray-Le-Monial which is renowned for its 11th century basilica and lies in the heart of the French burgundy country.

Paray-le-Monial is a town of about 10,000 people and is situated in the Saone-et-Loire department of France. Apart from its basilica it is an administrative centre for an area of farming and wine production. It has a railway station and some light industry. It is a centre of pilgrimage for many Catholics around the world.

Bad Durkheim, Germany

Twinning Established: 21st May 1983 (42 years)

Our French partners suggested that Wells should also twin with their German twin town Bad Durkheim, so that we have a twinning triangle.

The twinning link with Bad Durkheim was completed in 1983. Bad Durkheim is located in the Rhineland Palatinate and is renowned for its annual Wurstmarkt and its wine production.

Bad Durkheim is a town of over 20,000 people and lies twenty miles to the west of the industrial cities of Ludwigshaven and Mannheim, to which it is connected by tram. It is a spa town and is said to have the largest barrel in the world, which is now partly used as a restaurant. It claims to be the largest wine-producing commune in Germany. Its wine festival every September attracts over 500,000 visitors each year.

Fontanellato, Italy

Twinning Established: April 1st 2012 (13 years)

Wells established a twinning link with Fontanellato in northern Italy in response to requests from the Italian community in Wells and others to have an Italian twin town. This was completed in 2012 with ceremonies in both towns. Fontanellato shares with Wells the fact that during world war two there were prisoner-of-war camps in both places, each having POWs from the other's country.

Fontanellato is a small town serving a population of over 7,000 people in the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna, about ten miles west of Parma.

It is an administrative centre with a stunning medieval moated castle and market place. The area is renowned for its production of Parmesan cheese and Parma ham. It is also close to the famous operatic composer Verdi's birthplace, and his final home, which is now a museum dedicated to his life and work.

Who does Wells City currently have friendship agreements with?

Kluczbork, Poland

Friendship established: 2010 (15 years)

Kluczbork is a town in southwestern Poland with approximately 25,000 inhabitants in the Opole-Voivodeship. It is the capital of Kluczbork County. Its major industries are the production of machinery. Knitwear and construction material. The town is famous for the production of honey and science behind beekeeping.

Bad Berka, Germany

Friendship established: 2022 (3 years)

Bad Berka is a town of approximately 7,500 inhabitants situated in the south of the Weimar region of Thuringia in Eastern Germany. It is a spa town with mineral rich springs and awarded “state recognised spa with mineral spring health facility” status in 2002, which comprises its major economic activity.

What is the value of the Wells Twinning Association and Twinning in General?

The Wells Twinning association has a number of benefits to those within both sides of the twinning agreement. The connections built help develop the communities through cultural exchange and international friendship which would otherwise be difficult to foster. In addition, the engagement with annual trips to the different towns is a highlight to many residents of all towns/cities and is available to everyone within their respective areas.

Civic receptions are the key event with all towns/ cities hosting residents for days of exploration and discoveries of the local culture. With development, cultural exchanges, such as school visits, music and art collaborations and sporting events would enable individuals of all ages to gain insight into other cultures and ways of life. This promotes tolerance, broadens perspectives and nurtures international friendships that can last a long time.

Twinning can also help support youth development. By involving schools and youth groups, young people in Wells can travel, develop language skills and grow in confidence. For older generations, it offers community, volunteering opportunities and the chance to share local pride on a broader stage. Currently focus is mostly on the latter but if the association wanted to develop, then including the younger members into the society could be extremely beneficial.

Beyond resident enjoyment and culture, twinning can foster economic and tourism links. Visitors from twin towns boost local hospitality sectors and bring people across for events and other locally organised festivals.

What does the function of Twinning cost the Tax Payer?

While town twinning offers valuable cultural and social benefits, it does require careful financial planning to remain sustainable and inclusive. Most twinning associations, including Wells, operate as volunteer led organisations and depend on fundraising, donations, membership fees alongside occasional small grants from cultural bodies.

Costs to Wells City Council typically include travel and accommodation fees for any member of Wells City Council asked to visit by other towns. In recent years this has been limited to the Mayor and managed through the Mayoral Allowance.

It goes without saying that the greater the number of Twinned or Friendship Towns, the greater financial burden this places on the Mayoral budget.

The Mayoral budget is offered to the Mayor bi-annually and if it is unused, will be returned to the Council. The decision on how these funds are used, is completely up to the Mayor. The current

mayoral allowance is £8,500 annually, of which approximately 10% was spent in 2024-25 on twinning activities, hosting or gifts.

In return, the economic benefits can be subtle but real. Visitors from twin towns often stay locally, dine in restaurants and shop in the area, offering a small but consistent boost to the tourism sector. Sustained financial support can help ensure that twinning remains active and that the partnership grows.

Future

The future of Wells Twinning is likely to continue in a very similar fashion to that in which it has been run for the last number of years. This is due to its success and popularity among residents. The council does not influence the running of the association, apart from within discussions with the Mayor who acts as the chair of the association.

While the Twinning Association operates independently, the City Council plays a supportive role. Beyond this, the day-to-day operations, event planning, and exchanges are largely managed by the volunteers and members of the association itself. This balance between civic support and community led activity is what has made Wells Twinning a success in the past and so ensuring that the key features remain while expanding community engagement and bettering the use of funds offers a bright future for the Wells Twinning Association.

Looking ahead, maintaining this model ensures stability and continuity while planning for any proposed changes. These changes could be adapting to new funding opportunities or broadening participation across the community.

The Council will offer guidance and support as appropriate, but the active involvement of local residents is key to the success of Wells twinning.

Within a financial mindset and from the Council's perspective, the future of Wells Twinning lies in a slight reorganisation of focus within our existing commitments. Rather than increasing spending, we propose prioritising key visits, such as arranging for members of the council to participate in official exchange trips every five years, while continuing to support the annual visits enjoyed by residents. This approach allows us to maintain strong international relationships while managing resources

Recommendation:

The Civic and Archives Committee is asked to:

1. Note the content of the report and background of the Twinning function.