

A MEETING OF THE TWIN TOWNS

HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, EAST GRINSTEAD

On Saturday 15th May, 2010

9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Councillor Stephen Barnett, Mayor of East Grinstead presiding

Present : Bourg-de-Péage - Eric Josserand Town Councillor
 Mindelheim - Herbert Kugler 2nd Mayor
 Mindelheim - Paul Baumer – Twinning
 Sant Feliu de Guixols – Laura Aiguaviva Councillor
 Sant Feliu de Guixols – Pere Carreras – Town Hall representative
 Sant Feliu de Guixols – Josep Escubairo School Head
 Schwaz – Walter Egger – Councillor
 Schwaz – Nicole Brandl – Twinning
 Verbania – Farah Attalla – Councillor
 Verbania – Comoli Giacomo – Twinning
 East Grinstead – Bernard Gillbard – Councillor
 East Grinstead – Ken Averill Twinning

Minute secretary - Paul Johnson - Councillor

Cllr. Stephen Barnett, Mayor of East Grinstead welcomed everyone to the meeting which he said was being held as an opportunity for all the towns to review the twinning arrangements between them. He handed over to Ken Averill, Chairman of East Grinstead Town Twinning Association to begin the review.

East Grinstead

Ken Averill said that the East Grinstead arrangements for Twinning differed from those on the ‘other side of the Channel’ in that operations were carried out by the Town Twinning Association which is not a Council body. Being separately constituted, if the Council political balance changed, there would be no effect upon the Twinning Association, which would continue its activities. The Association has a membership made up of people from the town, schools and organisations. Nonetheless, the Association has close links with the Town Council and there is a protocol between us. The matter of civic Twinning rests with the Town Council, but the Town Council devolves all other Twinning administration to the Twinning Association.

The Twinning Association currently receives an annual grant from the Town Council of £1,640. The Town Mayor is President of the Association for his/her year of office and is the head of any delegation visit during that year. However, he/she pays his/her own expenses for the visit personally. In the event that the Mayor is unable to attend through other commitments, the Chairman of the Association will lead the delegation, not a Councillor, and pays his/her own expenses in the same way.

The Town Council appoints three members of the Council to serve on the Executive Committee of the Association. The East Grinstead Town Twinning Association organises all hosting and oversees visits and costs. The Town Council reserves the right for the Mayor to hold a civic reception to greet visitors from abroad, which the Mayor defrays from his expenses allowance.

Ken Averill handed out a leaflet produced by the Association, designed to give details of the Town Twinning aims and arrangements, and as an application form.

The delegation from Verbania arrived at this time (9.27 a.m.).

Bourg-de-Péage

Eric Jossierand said that Twinning does not work in the same way as in East Grinstead. There is a Twinning Committee but it does not work with young people and is more like a travel agency. The Mayor and Town Clerk handle Twinning matters. There is no overall annual grant, but a one off grant is made to each activity. It is 'easier for them than for us'. If an event is to take place, it must be planned 18 months in advance. As far as the Town Council is concerned, the Town Twinning Committee does not exist.

In answer to a question as to whether there is a limit on what is spent on Twinning, he answered that each year there is a global sum to cover all cultural events, and Twinning benefits from that pool. This year the pool is 500,000 Euros, but by far the largest grant from that for the year was for the hire of equipment for a sporting event. 15,000 Euros was the last grant given for a Twinning exchange. An end of August/early September cultural event cost 80,000 Euros.

Answering another question from Cllr. Gillbard, Eric said that he and the Mayor headed up official delegations and then, subject to the number invited, followed by the Presidents of the organisations involved also took part.

Sant Feliu de Guixols

Laura Aiguaviva said that Twinning works in much the same way as in Bourg-de-Péage. There is no Twinning Association. Depending on who the Mayor is, some give more priority to Twinning than others. Up to now there has been no-one on the Town Council with responsibility for Twinning. Now there is a media appointment on the Town Council responsible for Twinning – it is no longer the responsibility of the Mayor. They have never organised any meetings other than the Games, apart from organising visitors for a carnival held some years ago, when 3 visitors were invited from each Twin Town.

The Council budget 13,000 Euros for twinning per annum currently. They have a parallel twinning arrangement with other towns with the Sant Feliu prefix to their names in the region – all smaller, and some very much so, than Sant Feliu de Guixols. There are events every two years between them.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that they do have an independent full time worker for twinning on the Town Council, but the Mayor still holds the say on the grant, though the minimum allowance is set at 6,000 Euros.

Verbania

There is a Twinning Association made up of 50% councillors and 50% from the population. The recent elections have brought in a Mayor very favourably inclined towards the aims of Twinning. He initially took responsibility for it, but has now delegated this down to his deputy. An initial grant for Twinning was put at 15,000

Euros, but this was not sufficient and a further 15,000 Euros was allocated, but any unused to be re-directed. It has been decided to invite all Twin Towns to send delegations to the Flower Festival this year and invitations will be sent shortly. Verbania is introducing a card for all visitors, giving reductions in prices in shops, hotels, bars, etc. (much like East Grinstead Loyalty cards). They would like to see all Twin Towns extend such a scheme to their towns to encourage twinning and trade. Verbania will hold a craft fair in October and would like to invite craft makers from the Twin Towns to participate. They have a choir coming from East Grinstead and had a band 2 years ago. Verbania has friendship agreements with a town in Croatia, Crikvenica, another town in the south of Italy and another in Rumania, separate from the Twinning arrangements.

Mindelheim

The Town wishes to extend Twinning. It all started 50 years ago with their arrangements with Bourg-de-Péage. So far as the Town Council is concerned, they do not have set sums available for Twinning, though 15,000 Euros have been allocated this year. Naturally, the Town Council works with the Twinning Association at the time of a Frundsbergfest, and with different clubs when events are organised. The 'big decider' for many pupils is that they want to come to England to learn English, but, unfortunately, this is not matched by English students who want to learn German. Exchanges with other towns work well, but it is important to attract young people, and through them others will become involved. Business connections are more difficult. When exchanges take place there is a chance to network. They felt the Verbania idea of a craft fair is brave, but that they are unsure it will work. Paul Baumer said that the Twinning Association has 100 members. They will be hosting the 2011 Youth event. They receive voluntary contributions towards the games and help towards the trip costs. There is a harmonious relationship with the Mayor, and they can rely upon interpreting services. Hosting is mainly in families. Any problems come under the auspices of the Town Council. Members of the Town Twinning Association come from all society. In answer to a question, they confirmed that they do actively recruit new Twinning Association members, but it is more difficult to get young people to join.

Schwaz

Felt this was a very important meeting for the future of Twinning. Their Town Council is part responsible for Twinning, along with the Town Twinning Association, which has 240 members. They have a partnership with Tramin and Trento and a friendship agreement with a town in Rumania. They have successful schools exchanges with Trento and Bourg-de-Péage, Mindelheim and Tramin. There are also sport and cultural exchanges between different organisations. They consider it important that every effort is made to make the public aware of why the Town continues to encourage these exchanges.

PROBLEMS

Recruiting Young People

For **East Grinstead**, Ken Averill said that there was always difficulty recruiting young people. There was unanimous agreement that this is a common problem.

Communication between the Towns

Following complaints that certain towns were not able to get email responses from others, it was agreed that each Town should make it known precisely whom others should communicate with for early response. Ken said that he has a full list. After some discussion, it was agreed that Towns should continue to write in their own language, and that rapid translation facility is available in all towns.

(Coffee break – resumed 10.55 a.m.)

Ken Averill said that all Towns have access to the East Grinstead Website, and have their own passwords, which he would circulate again. Anyone is able to update this at any time. He requested that they input their own website identity.

East Grinstead

How Towns get their message out to the people

Communication in East Grinstead is through word of mouth at the regular Saturday Coffee Mornings in the Library and Newsletters. However, Press publicity remains difficult, though we are getting some (if late) publicity now that Ed Drury has taken on that responsibility for the Association.

EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES

Sant Feliu de Guixols

The town is celebrating the 60th Anniversary of its Music School this year. Their objective is to share the celebration with others. Therefore they wish to invite young musicians from the other Twinning Towns, with the object of forming an orchestra of young musicians over the period of one week to perform a programme. They would like to invite 3 to 6 musicians from each town, aged between 12 and 19 years of age. These will stay with host families and practice in the morning with a social programme in the afternoon. (Go to the beach!). Initially they put the suggestion that this could be held either in early September this year or July 2011.

Discussion ensued, when it became clear that neither of these times would be suitable for the other towns, and it was finally agreed that they will try to arrange a time later in September this year, though members did feel that the notice is rather short, but will do their best to try to gain some engagement. Email notice will be sent by Sant Feliu as soon as possible.

The second proposal by Sant Feliu relates to an invitation from their Official School of Languages, which is for pupils over 16 years of age, mainly young professionals or university students. They give certificates validated by the Council of Europe and teach French, German, English and Catalan for 5 year courses from beginners to

advanced levels. They have 450 students per annum. There are 42 schools of their type in the region, helping students to become competent in their language of study, in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Their main objective is to develop positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity and the cultural pluralism of today's world. The proposal is for people from the Twin Towns, beginners or 'false' beginners (those who learned a bit some time ago but have not kept up with their studies), two per town, to travel to Sant Feliu for a four week course in Spanish, covering 80 class hours. (9a.m. – 1 p.m. for 5 days per week) This was suggested for July 2010 and for the two subsequent years (different students each year), but after discussion was thought subject to change of date, as this allowed little time this year. It is thought next summer may be better to start. The charge for each student would be 300 Euros and they are talking to their Council to see if they may subsidise this figure to any degree. Accommodation will be with host families and it represents a great chance to learn in a family environment.

Cllr. Johnson recommended to Ken Averill that Central Sussex College should be approached as it would probably be difficult for schools to arrange for pupils over 16 year of age heavily engaged in examinations. There was no expressed upper age limit. Sant Feliu would also like to contact schools to offer the same kind of courses in Twin Towns to those from Sant Feliu who could do some form of voluntary work in the Town as well, to increase their involvement, but would prefer this to be in Spring or Autumn, not in the summertime.

Bourg-de-Peage

Reported that it was working on a similar kind of programme at this time. It was particularly appreciative of East Grinstead's placement of a young girl to work at the Library for a time this year, and there was the possibility of a placement in Mindelheim..

Primary & Secondary School Exchanges

East Grinstead

Ken said that there have been primary school exchanges in East Grinstead under the Comenius plan, but he wanted to go out to the town's Primary Schools, one learning Spanish, one French and German to urge exchange by computer communication via the Internet.

Every Town wants to send pupils to East Grinstead but it doesn't work the other way. We are trying at all times to encourage exchanges. Very disappointed that the Verbania/Imberhorne exchange seems to have died, and no explanation given. The young are the future and they can communicate with each other. Sackville School has started teaching Spanish and a teacher was interested, but there was some suggestion that they would prefer a place speaking only Spanish and not Catalan. Efforts are in hand to try to arrange place for a girl from Bourg-de-Peage who wants to stay for a year. Not known if a German speaking boy is connected with Twin Towns, but maybe with an Austrian Assistant currently at Sackville School.

Bourg-de-Peage

No primary school exchanges as they do not teach foreign languages. Have had secondary school exchanges with Schwaz for 23 years. Another Secondary school visited Sant Feliu last week, and another travel to London – attempt to get them to

come to East Grinstead. Trying to revive Italian exchanges. Used to have primary school exchange with Mindelheim, but problem of two pupils having to stay in same family. To facilitate exchanges, Town Council takes responsibility for accommodation for teachers and trips out. Budget this year 5,000 Euros. Work experience visits this year to East Grinstead and Mindelheim for 18-20 year olds, part of their study.

Verbania

They have the problem of not being used to hosting young people. Last year the Imberhorne/Verbania exchange fell apart because of a strike of teachers in Verbania. There was no exchange with Mindelheim either for financial reasons. This year Mindelheim is sharing 50 % of the transport costs. Verbania has paid the transport costs of their own students as well as the visitors in the past. However, only two pupils have expressed an interest so far, and they were not advised previously of the lack of interest in the School. Will talk to the school on their return.

Ken interjected to say that schools have too much to do now, and so often we find reticence because teachers do not live in East Grinstead. There was some agreement.

Mindelheim

Has the same problems as Verbania at Secondary level. Primary school exchange with Schwaz. Great wish to come to East Grinstead, but not the enthusiasm the other way. Youth exchange (not school) with Bourg-de-Peage, no longer teaching French, so has terminated.

Schwaz

Good exchanges with Bourg-de-Peage and Mindelheim and Trento. Main problem is lack of interest by teachers and they being overloaded with projects. Will try to speak to teachers.

General

Ken said that East Grinstead pupils have to pay their own fares. If they genuinely cannot afford to do so, the Twinning Association will step in to pay them. The same applies in Bourg-de-Peage.

The matter of **CRB and ISA accreditation** in Britain was raised. A system of checks for every single adult working with children. Applies for those with sustained contact with children, not the one off odd occasion. (No response from the floor suggests our Twin Towns do not have any such restrictions)

LUNCH BREAK – resumed 1.35 p.m.

‘Youth in Europe’

Ken Averill said that various people round the table had commented that the Games were too expensive to run. The question arises as to whether it was the wish for them to continue or involve other projects instead. Delegates had spoken of cutting the numbers of participants and delegations. If Towns were seeking European Community finance by way of grants, the matter of how many months have to be allowed for the application to go through and what grants are available becomes

important as a consideration. Four years ago it was decided that Towns would do what they wished – either run the games or engage in another sort of activity for the youth. We in East Grinstead decided to stop the games. Apart from the cost (stated by Verbania to have cost them 40,000 Euros) we had found attendance by the public dwindling. ‘It’s a Knock Out’ is seen as a 1970’s thing in Britain. Grants qualification criteria requires more than a Knock Out or Sports connotation. Next year has been designated as the ‘Year for Volunteers’, and anything with a volunteering connotation will find favour for a grant. We have to think of projects, cut the numbers from 12 to eight, and come up with a suitable name for the exercise.

The forward planning of the youth events was agreed as follows:-

2011	Mindelheim
2012	Schwaz
2013	East Grinstead
2014	Verbania
2015	Bourg-de-Péage
2016	Sant Feliu de Guixols
2017	Tramin

Verbania said they felt the principle was more important no matter what the content. Ken said we could only continue with 12 people if the content was music or arts based.

Sant Feliu and Schwaz said the duration should be 5 days including travel. Each town should say what they want to organise, how many they would invite, and how many adults. Must know at least 6 months before the event in order to qualify for grants.

Schwaz young people enjoy the games. Ken said that if it were the games then there must be a second project, otherwise grants will not be given.

Mindelheim also agreed 5 days was best. They thought the object was bringing young people together, but that it also brought in older people. The Town has to decide the format. They prefer sporting events. Many clubs involved and they think to diversify will lose support. They are ‘dealing with the public as to where the money is coming from’. Important to keep the event going.

Verbania said they felt the culture of young people is changing. and this has not caused young people to exchange. Have to discuss real opportunities for how young people can come together. They felt workshops between them were much better than competition. They learn about different cultures that way. In the past each Town has tried to outdo the others with the games, and that is not what twinning is about. Young people are much happier talking to others about what they do in their free time. We need to reduce costs, emphasize how lucky they are to be chosen, and to encourage them to come back and talk about their experiences in school. They are thinking of giving educational credit points for those who display the fact that they have learned from their experience.

Sant Feliu said that many ideas were coming out of the meeting, giving more priorities. They agree with Verbania, East Grinstead and Bourg de Péage that these events should be about getting people together rather than competing against each other. Every Town should decide the event for itself. We had all made commitments for July each year, which should be adhered to, but there should be more consideration of other activities. Options: a) Keep the games, or b) change events. Previously the people expected, but now they do not know what to expect. They were critical of the games in that in the past Towns had chosen the most talented as the

overriding criteria, and they had found the last games in Tramin as unfair, because some of the participants were outside the age limits and it was too competitive in nature. Either a Town will keep the games, or will organise educational cultural events including those of a sportive and social kind. Sant Feliu had found the musical event arranged in East Grinstead as one of the most constructive Twinning engagements in the history of our Twinning. They think it should not be difficult for each town to find 3 young people to attend a musical event, as Bourg-de-Péage and Mindelheim have not found difficulty for other types of event in the past. They ask if it can be arranged for late September this year to coincide with their Anniversary of the Music School. Schwaz was not sure, and Mindelheim also, but Schwaz thought it a good idea and Mindelheim said it should be tried, and, if successful, could be repeated in place of the games.

Bourg-de-Péage said there was need for a new formulation. They would continue the games, but each Town must choose. They had very much enjoyed the East Grinstead Music Festival. Sant Feliu has its own ideas, similarly Verbania. Expense is an issue. Up to hosts to decide how many young people to invite. Delegations of 6 to 8 are too many. They arrange accommodation partly in homes and partly in hotels. They have a winning formula to get people to come. The Town Council works with a special Committee of Sport and Culture, independent of the Council to involve and attract people to the Town. This is an umbrella organisation receiving a grant of 60,000 Euros. 2 years ago they got participants to do a painting of their own town. They do not think competition and co-operation cancel each other out. Many exchanges taking place, including young firemen.

The Town Mayor of East Grinstead, Councillor Stephen Barnett, then brought this session to a close with the following 3 agreed conclusions:

- 1. The content of the Annual Youth Event shall be decided by the Host Town.**
- 2. Such an event to be held during July of each year.**
- 3. The number of young people involved shall be a Minimum of 6 (six).**

It was further agreed that each town should announce the content intention and numbers of participants in good time, if possible the year before, but definitely at latest 6 months before the event.

It was agreed that the duration should be 5 days including travel - 4 nights in each town.

Further agreed that DELEGATIONS should be a minimum of 4 persons, that Towns may invite more. If more than the invited number the extra visitors will be pay, not the host town.

The age limits of participating young people will be 14-17 years.

The towns will re-name the event under the following headings:

Bourg-de-Péage	: Jeunesse en Europe
East Grinstead	: Youth in Europe
Mindelheim	: Jugend in Europa

Sant Feliu de Guixols : Joves a Europa
Schwaz : Jugend in Europa
Verbania : Giovani in Europa

Commercial Business Connections

East Grinstead raised the matter of closed shops in some of our Towns due to the financial situation. Ken wondered if other Towns have ideas for keeping their retail businesses open.

Cllr. Paul Johnson raised the matter of whether firms from our Twin Towns might like to take part in our local East Grinstead Business Association exhibitions, thinking of next year. He explained the format. Mindelheim said they had tried such a thing with Schwaz, but it didn't result in extra business. Bourg-de-Peage said they are currently involved through their Chamber of Commerce in a joint effort with Romans under the title of 'Expansion'. It was agreed that local contacts should be exchanged so that organisations and firms can pursue the matter themselves. We can only facilitate the contact, we cannot arrange it ourselves.

General Matters

East Grinstead has been organising visits by members of the Twinning Association to Twin Towns over the past few years, so that our people know what our Twin Towns are like and can appreciate them. Over 40 people have travelled with the party around Easter each year. This has been done to compensate for the reduction in other exchanges.

Next year East Grinstead will host a visit from Mindelheim Stadtkapelle. They will stay in private homes. Ken asked, "What is the point of Twinning if we can only involve an exchange of 6 people? What should we do to improve activities?" Schwaz said that it has difficulties hosting in homes as most live in small apartments. Bourg-de-Peage echoed some problems with accommodation, but still there is a group going to Mindelheim on Monday. The Rugby Club rotates visits every two years with East Grinstead, which is very successful, and there are 14 cultural associations involved in twinning.

Verbania said that a blood donors group still travels annually to Bourg-de-Peage. There have been individual scouting exchanges. They are happy to give contact details. They too find family exchanges very difficult due to the nature of accommodation.

Mindelheim said they have a Tennis group going regularly to Schwaz. Their firemen go to Tramin. Their Newspaper arranges trips for readers to Twin Towns.

It was announced that the Tour de France will go through Bourg-de-Peage on July 16th.

Ken Averill indicated that if anyone from the twin towns wanted to come for the 2012 Olympics, he was certain that Twinning members would be willing to offer them accommodation.

The meeting closed at 4.49 p.m. with an expression of thanks by all present for the Town Mayor and Ken Averill, and East Grinstead Twinning Association for the calling of the meeting., which all felt to have been highly productive.

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PJ. 16.05.2010.
KA 23/5/2010