
Report to
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

13 December 2006

Report of
Councillor Chater

Title
Report Back on the Work Of Outside Bodies – Coventry Association for International Friendship

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 At their meeting on 10th May, 2005, the Cabinet approved a process of reporting back to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee on the work of those outside bodies appointed to by the City Council. This reports sets out details of the work of Coventry Association for International Friendship over the preceding twelve months and details of attendance by the City Council's representatives.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the City Council continues to support the Coventry Association for International Friendship.

3 Information on Work of Outside Body

3.1 Objectives

Once again, the Association has sought to further the cause of international friendship and understanding in Coventry and to create closer ties between the citizens of Coventry and the peoples of its twin towns, especially through focus on its core activity of exchange visits. It seeks to interest young people in these aims (as in its invitation to Coventry schools during one of its 2006 Peace Month events), to co-operate with Coventry Council in the implementation of its international policies and to attract other organisations as well as individuals to these policies.

3.2 Membership & Finance

The City Council's grant guarantees the running expenses of the Association, such as postage and printing. Subscriptions are also a significant part of our income and we collected them from over two-thirds of our membership of more than eighty. Receipts paid into the Hospitality Fund drawn from social events helped to increase total reserves.

3.3 **Officers and Committee Members**

President	The Lord Mayor, Cllr Ram Lakhar
Chairman	Cllr Dave Chater
Vice-Chair	George Miles and Pru Porretta
Secretary	John Moore
Assistant Secretary	Mary Goodwin
Treasurer	Ben Freeman
Social Secretary	Pat Trickett

Committee:

Cllr John Cazez
Diana Dodd
Maureen Porter
Christine Oddy
Linda Hirons
Jennifer Smith
Margaret Warman (Coventry French Circle)

The Nightingales Choir is affiliated to CAIF and is represented by its director, Pat Trickett. Stoke Park Over-Fifties Club is also an affiliate.

3.4 **Incoming Visits**

In January, the City's International Policy Officers drew CAIF's attention to the European Commission's award of grants to encourage town-twinning activities, with a view to the development of a European consciousness amongst the peoples of the Union. CAIF immediately pursued this matter with vigour, with the hope of a grant to assist with the hosting of a large group from the Vannes district of Brittany in August 2005. The form-filling proved worth while and notification appeared on the Internet of a grant to CAIF of some five thousand euros, towards the costs of the Bretons' visit, which was extremely successful - probably the best ever twin town visit - and which is described in the Appendix.

3.5 **Outgoing Visits**

St Etienne

In May, a CAIF party accepted an invitation from the Franco-British Club of St Etienne to be their guests, in parallel with the official visit to their City by Coventry's Lord Mayor, Cllr Gazey. CAIF members increased Coventry representation and made their presence known at the civic reception and elsewhere in the City, where they were given good press coverage. They also learned that in some important respects St Etienne and Coventry are both cities with a recent history of declining industries, still seeking to adapt to change. There was no doubt that an exchange group would be hosted by CAIF in 2006.

Graz

A year's negotiations with the International Relations officers of Graz laid the foundations for a CAIF visit in June 2005. It included the former year's Lord Mayor, Cllr Gazey, and proved highly successful, with a very good meeting with members and officers of the City Council. We hope to have helped form the nucleus of an exchange group, which will visit Coventry soon.

3.6 Other links

We have had periodic email exchanges with several other twin and partner towns and cities, notably Meschede, Volgograd, Coventry Rhode Island and Dresden. Our newsletter is usually sent abroad by email (and a copy is supplied to every Coventry councillor). Our website (caif.net), attracts some interest, but it is due for an overhaul under a new editor.

3.7 General Meetings

There is an outside speaker for our usual bi-monthly general meetings, usually on an international theme. May's meeting was cancelled owing to the closure of the Council House during an industrial dispute. This year's speakers were: Councillor John Gazey: *My Year as Lord Mayor, 2004-5*

Ann Farr: *Fair Trade*

Dr Madeleine Sharp M.B.E.: *Medical and Scientific Aid for Vietnam*

The November meeting was replaced by the debate on global warming.

3.8 Peace Month

CAIF's contribution to the peace events was a presentation in the Council House of contrasting views on the crisis of global warming. The main speakers were a nuclear consultant, a local consultant on greenhouse gas emissions, and a Friends of the Earth national officer. It was another well attended, special meeting, chaired by CAIF chairman, Cllr Chater. It received excellent publicity from interviews with two of the speakers on BBC CW Radio.

3.9 Publicity

The historical sketch of CAIF -the Blue Book - continues to be useful publicity, and a source of information about Coventry to foreign visitors. CAIF also put on a display during Heritage Week-end, in September.

3.10 Social Activities

Socialising has again been a positive influence on the morale of the association. Nearly fifty members and friends, young and old, came to November's annual dinner, another tribute to the skill and enthusiasm of CAIF's social secretary.

The Nightingales choir gave more lively concerts, with some of the receipts going into CAIF funds, or to the city's Tsunami relief appeal, which has also been supported by CAIF social occasions at members' homes.

Coffee mornings at the homes of members have again been popular and profitable to the association, and to the relief collection.

3.11 CAIF Development Plan, 2006-7

CAIF will continue to support the initiatives taken by the City Council to strengthen Coventry's identity as a city that remembers war and seeks to support peace and reconciliation in the world.

3.11.1 Incoming Visits:

Planning for 2006 started with a further application for a grant from the EU, to help finance a gathering in the City of 20 representatives of four European twin and partner towns.

Visits from partner town Meschede, in the Sauerland region of Germany, and from Coventry Rhode Island are under discussion.

3.11.2 Outgoing Visits:

A return visit to the Vannes area of Brittany is arranged for August 2007. Short breaks in other twin towns on the continent will be arranged later in 2006 or early 2007.

3.11.3 Peace Month

This year, CNF will again make a distinctive contribution to the varied activities that constitute Coventry's Peace Month. Twenty guests have accepted invitations from Vannes, St Etienne, Kiel and Dresden, from October 13 - 19. They will all stay with CAIF members. The programme includes an opening meeting with Eurolinx, an organization of UK towns having twin towns abroad. Its aim is to throw new light on ways to extend support for twinning in the community. This occasion, attended by the Lord Mayor, will launch the City's Peace Month.

There will be discussion with Michael Cashman MEP, on How the European Union Works. It will be attended by our guests, together with senior pupils from Coventry secondary schools.

A second meeting emphasising common European concerns will discuss a European programme for dealing with climate change. A tour of London is also built into the programme, together with exploration of Coventry and surrounding places of scenic and historical interest.

3.11.4 Meetings with Civic Visitors

Whenever it is asked, CAIF gives support to the International Officers in entertaining foreign visitors and showing them round the City. For example, in November, it helped to host a small group of medical personnel from Volgograd, visiting the Walsgrave Hospital. CAIF will welcome further opportunities to be of such assistance.

3.11.5 Social Activities

These are still on the increase, including coffee mornings, garden parties and evening excursions to operatic performances in Birmingham. They attract new people to the association, and bring existing members closer together.

3.11.6 Publicity

The historical sketch of the Association in its Blue Book will be distributed on suitable occasions in Peace Month. The Association will again mount a display during the city's Heritage Weekend, in September.

4 Benefits to the City Council of the Appointment

- 4.1 CAIF continues to play a worth while role in stimulating public interest in the City's international policies of peace and reconciliation, in bringing together people of various political persuasions, and in fostering friendship with peoples overseas, especially in our twin towns.

5 Attendance Record and Remuneration for the Appointment

- 5.1 Councillor Chater is the City Council's representative on Coventry Association for International Friendship. There have been 5 meetings held in the last twelve months and Councillor Chater has attended all five.

- 5.2 There is no remuneration associated with the appointment

List of background papers

Proper officer:

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Other contributors:

Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

Location CH61

Schedule of City Council Appointments to Outside Bodies

APPENDIX

Final report of the visit to Coventry by a group of French Citizens from Vannes, August 20-27,2005

It can be stated categorically that the visit, with all the activities that flowed from it, was an unqualified success. The link between Coventry Association for International Friendship and Amitie et Recontre entre les Peuples, of Vannes and district was formed in 1994, when a group of seven Coventrians went by minibus to stay with hosts in Vannes.

Since that time, exchanges have taken place every two or three years, with increasing numbers of participants and a deepening relationship between the two groups. The one that has just concluded has reached a new quality of mutual understanding and agreement, partly because the terms of the European Commission's grant application directed our thoughts to our common cultural, political, social and economic interests.

The events that took place during the week's visit are outlined in the accompanying programme, which was a slight but not significant modification of the first proposals submitted to the ARP and included with our application. The general theme of living together in unity was exemplified firstly in family hosting, which is of paramount importance in acquainting guests with differences in lifestyle on the one hand and common humanity on the other, and in developing mutual understanding through ongoing conversation, humour and laughter. As one host said, "It's great fun! "

Of course, there were discussions on national differences socially and economically, with comparisons between social security and health provision in Britain and in France, and between education systems. No one saw any important contradiction between our unity and our diversity.

The specific theme of European identity was dealt with formally in discussion with Phillip Bushill-Matthews MEP, and informally in the days after the meeting.

The second particular theme was the common problem of environmental degradation due to global warming, and alternative energy sources to fossil fuels. It was brought out in the visit to the remarkable hydroelectric plant quarried out of the Electric Mountain at Llanberis. This event replaced the original plan to visit the Centre For Alternative Technology at Machyntleth, in mid-Wales, as the journey was felt to be too far from our base in North Wales.

The third theme of Celtic culture was developed by visits to Welsh art and handicraft museums, by the concert of the Bangor Male Voice Choir and by the stimulus given to the Bretons' interest in the Welsh language.

With regard to the daily programme:

Sunday, August 21:

An introductory talk on the Shakespeare legend was given to the guests during the coach ride to Stratford on Avon; most of them made the tour of Shakespeare's birthplace. They showed great interest in the Cotswolds, particularly Broadway. They appreciated these places - and of course Shakespeare himself - as an important part of British identity.

Monday, August 22:

A Lord Mayoral reception is an invariable part of the programme for our overseas guests. The civic welcome is significant because it links the visit to Coventry's twinning and peace policy, and so emphasises its ultimate purpose, namely the promotion of international understanding and friendship.

The afternoon question-and-answer session on the European Union went extremely well. An attempt had been made to get two MEPs as speakers but only Mr Bushill-Matthews was available. He asked the audience how many of them had ever met a Member of the European Parliament. No one had. He expressed his views on the distribution of power between Brussels and national Parliaments, and on Britain's adoption of the Euro currency. There were many questions from the audience, who gave various reasons why the French people had rejected the European Union Constitution in the referendum. The meeting was a useful stimulus to thought on these and other questions, and was universally approved as very worthwhile.

Tuesday August 23:

The visit to the Electric Mountain and the lakes that feed it with waterpower prompted the discussion on alternative technology to fossil fuels that was intended when the programme was drawn up. The uncertainty about the future contribution of nuclear energy to reduction of carbon emissions mirrored the state of thinking generally in Europe.

Wednesday, August 24:

The slate museum was the dominant interest during daytime. "Museum" is perhaps misleading, since the complex is a compelling social history, including miners' cottages, large industrial machinery and, above all, an intriguing demonstration of shaping slate material. An excellent collective picnic prepared by a catering team in the group, followed.

The evening concert of the men's choir was traditionally Welsh, in the language of most of the songs - culminating in the Celtic Anthem and the Welsh National Anthem, which seemed to strike chords in the hearts of the Bretons.

Thursday, August 25:

At last, the ascent of Snowdon, well regarded by the French, despite its modest proportions in comparison with the Alps. Another splendid collective picnic.

Friday August 26:

A trip to Birmingham, the UK's second city. Its central area has completely changed its appearance in recent decades, with the aid of EU funding. Our guests praised the massive International Convention Centre and Indoor Arena, the Symphony Hall and the theatre, and its many other attractive features. It now looks worthy of its status.

Finally, the evening social surpassed expectations, with an exuberant mixture of Breton and English dancing, which nearly everyone joined in, and songs from the young women's choir affiliated to Coventry Association For International friendship.