

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services

Corporate Cultural Sub-Committee: 30 November 2009

Subject: Exploratory visit to Beauvoisin

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report gives details of the exploratory visit to Beauvoisin undertaken from 15-17 October 2009 and invites the Sub-Committee to consider further the proposed link with Beauvoisin and the area of Languedoc-Roussillon.

2. Background

- 2.1** At its meeting on 18 August 2009, this Sub-Committee approved an exploratory visit to Beauvoisin by the Provost, up to 2 elected members and at least one officer.
- 2.2** The purpose of the visit was to obtain further information on Beauvoisin and its surrounding area with a view to getting a better understanding of the potential for a friendship link with the town and economic and tourism links with the wider area of Languedoc-Roussillon.
- 2.3** Provost Agnew and Councillors McNair and Casey took part in the visit accompanied by Anne Laird, the Manager of Administrative Services.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The group received a very warm welcome from the Mayor and his team in Beauvoisin. The French Council is very keen to establish a formal link with this area, particularly to benefit young people. The short visit involved meetings with the Mayor and senior councillors from Beauvoisin together with a high profile meeting with Executive Directors of the Languedoc-Roussillon Region in their Montpellier Headquarters.
- 3.2** The Mayor and Council of Beauvoisin have emphasised the importance of making links between schools and visits were arranged to the local primary school and the new nursery school to meet the staff and see the schools in operation. There is no secondary school in Beauvoisin – pupils travel to the neighbouring community of Vauvert or to the lycée in Nîmes.
- 3.3** It has already been agreed that Whitecrook Primary School will link with “Les Moulins”, the single primary school in Beauvoisin, and it is hoped that pupils will be able soon to establish contacts by email. The headteacher of the French primary school will make contact directly with his counterpart in Whitecrook.

- 3.4** A secondary teacher who lives in Beauvoisin, but teaches in the lycée in Nîmes, the closest large town to Beauvoisin, has asked if it would be possible to link her school with a school in West Dunbartonshire. Since there is no secondary school in Beauvoisin, this will not be controversial to the Beauvoisin Municipal Council. The matter is currently under discussion with the Department of Education and Cultural Services to see if the request can be accommodated.
- 3.5** At the meeting in Montpellier, economic, cultural and tourism developments were discussed. It was agreed to pass the details of the Dunbartonshire Chamber of Commerce to the London Office of Languedoc-Roussillon, with a view to establishing contacts for their mutual advantage. It was proposed that the Region could consider taking a stall at the next Scottish Pipe Band Championship Event in West Dunbartonshire and that each Council's website could include a link to the other.
- 3.6** It is clear that there are opportunities to be gained by contact between the two areas, although these would clearly take time to develop. The short-term gains are in school to school contacts. In the medium term, the Council could seek to establish contacts between individual groups and organisations, although this would best be done through a self-sufficient community twinning association which would establish and promote community links. In the longer term, the intention would be to foster economic links and cultural and tourism initiatives. It is understood that European funding may be available to support particular initiatives and this can be further researched.
- 3.7** The French Council has now requested a formalisation of the link between Beauvoisin and West Dunbartonshire. It is clear that its preferred option would be for a formal twinning. The existence of a formal twinning link may be more advantageous when it comes to funding joint projects.
- 3.8** West Dunbartonshire Council already has a formal twinning agreement with a French town, namely Argenteuil. This link is no longer active because of the change of political administration in the town, although certain individual contacts continue.
- 3.9** An option is to enter into a friendship link with Beauvoisin. This is a less formal arrangement which does not require the signing of a twinning agreement but which still permits the development of links and projects. It could be extended to a formal twinning link at a later date. The twinning with Argenteuil began as a friendship link with Clydebank.
- 3.10** The third option is to decline to form any link with Beauvoisin. This would be counter productive to the school to school link which has already been initiated and would inhibit access to external funding for future joint projects or visits.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** There are no personnel issues arising from this report although a commitment to a formal link will have resource issues for existing staff.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** The complete cost of transport for the exploratory visit, including lunch on the return journey, was £731.75. No accommodation or subsistence costs were incurred in Beauvoisin as these were met by the local council.

- 5.2** The financial implications of future developments with Beauvoisin and Languedoc-Roussillon will depend on the level of contact which is agreed between the two areas. It is not possible to quantify these exactly at this stage.

- 5.3** If the Council agrees not to proceed with any link, there would be no cost to the Council but also no prospect of benefits to the area in future.

- 5.4** A friendship agreement would establish the possibility of links and visits between schools and special interest groups which could require some funding by the authority in the future, but which might also benefit from external financial assistance which would not be available in the absence of the friendship link. It would also clear the way for the possibility of developing economic, cultural and tourism initiatives for the future.

- 5.5** A formal twinning would be the most costly initiative in the short term because it would require a formal twinning charter, to be signed by both authorities. However, the status of a formal twinning might be more likely to attract external funding for future activities.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** The main risk in pursuing a link with Beauvoisin and Languedoc-Roussillon is negative publicity for the Council if it is seen to be developing links which do not benefit the community. If the Council is minded to pursue a link, it should be clear in establishing the underlying principle of using that link proactively for young people and local groups and organisations and for the development of economic, cultural and tourism contacts.

- 6.2** The main risk of not pursuing a link, even on an informal level, is a failure to capitalise on an opportunity for schools, for organisations and for the potential long term benefit of tourism, commerce and cultural events.

7. Conclusions and Officer's Recommendations

- 7.1** The Sub-Committee is asked to consider the options in relation to linking with Beauvoisin and the Region of Languedoc-Roussillon and to agree how it wishes to pursue these in the best interests of West Dunbartonshire in the future.

Joyce White, Executive Director of Corporate Services

Background Papers:

Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services to the Corporate Cultural Sub-Committee of 10 March 2009 and minute thereof

Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services to the Corporate Cultural Sub-Committee of 18 August 2009 and minute thereof

Wards Affected: All wards

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