

Cherwell District Council

Executive

8 October 2013

Sister City Agreement with Xishuangbanna

Report of the Chief Executive

This report is public

Purpose of report

To update Members on the recent signing of a 'Letter of Intent' between Cherwell District Council and Xishuangbanna Dai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture to establish formal 'Sister City' status between the two authorities.

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note the signing of the Letter of Intent
- 1.2 To consider the establishment of a cross-party Member, Officer, Education and Business group to maximise the benefits of this link and to delegate authority for the establishment and running of the group to the Leader.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 A sister city agreement is a very serious commitment from the Governor, and has to be authorised by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 2.2 Xishuangbanna (XSBN) Dai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture is based in the Yunnan Province in the South-West of China. It has sister city agreements with a number of Asian communities but, until ourselves, has had only one sister city agreement outside of Asia, which is with Austin in Texas.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 There are many opportunities for promoting educational, tourism and economic links between the two authorities.
- 3.2 Banbury & Bicester College have signed an agreement with Jinghong College in XSBN which will enable the two colleges to work closely together, perhaps exchanging teaching staff as well as students. In the first instance contact would be

established through email and skype. XSBN already sends students to Austin, Texas on a regular basis.

- 3.3 XSBN's main economic activities are rubber and tea, (they produce a very high quality tea sold at the top end of the market), and internal tourism. The Chinese are also fairly advanced in a variety of construction and system building, including eco-town type initiatives. Whilst the initial prospect of economic links is not strong, it is hoped that by building on the relationship opportunities will emerge. For instance, they are very interested in learning from us how to market XBN as an international tourist destination.
- 3.4 Links between the two councils would also help to promote greater understanding and to enable staff to share experiences of working in local government.
- 3.5 XSBN would also appreciate assistance from us in a couple of areas. They have one of the best botanical gardens in China and would like greater contact with the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew. XSBN is the only tropical area of China, and experiences the challenges of tropical diseases. Again, they would like assistance in setting up formal links with the Institute of Tropical Diseases in London.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The establishment of the sister city agreement will enable the people living and working in the Cherwell area to have closer links with a fascinating part of China. Businesses will be able to get introductions to potential partners or supply chains and schools and other groups will be able to link with similar groups in the region. Ultimately both XSBN and Cherwell will benefit economically from this agreement.
- 4.2 It is suggested that a steering committee is established to support and promote the development of the agreement between the two authorities. The group could include Members from all parties, officers, representatives from Banbury & Bicester College, MPs, town councils, Bicester Village, Chambers of Commerce and perhaps the LEPs and the UKTI. It is also worth trying to identify any businesses in the district that already have strong ties to China and inviting them to join the group. This will ensure buy in from all parts of the district and, hopefully, ensure that real benefits for both XSBN and Cherwell come out of this agreement.

5.0 Consultation

Leader, Cherwell District Council

Positive to suggestions of establishment of steering committee

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To accept the recommendations of the report.

Option 2: To reject the recommendations of the report.

6.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising at this stage. Officer resource to support the steering committee and support its actions would need to be found.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

- 6.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report at this stage.

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Risks

- 6.3 If the Steering Committee is not established the goodwill and opportunities presented by this agreement will be lost.

7.0 Decision Information

Key Decision No

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: No

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

A District of Opportunity. The promotion of local economic development.

Lead Councillor

Cllr Barry Wood, Leader of the Council

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
	None
Background Papers	
None	
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