

NORWICH CITY COUNCIL

TWINNING COMMITTEE - 5th March, 2009.

REPORT OF NORFOLK AND NORWICH – EL VIEJO FRIENDSHIP LINK.

1. The Link is submitting its annual report for 2008 to the Committee. The report sets out the Link's record for the year and provides a record of our activities during 2008. The report was adopted by the well attended Link Annual General Meeting on 10th February, 2009.
2. Proposed Visit to Nicaragua

The Link Executive Committee will meet on 4th March and is to be asked to approve a visit to Nicaragua at the end of April/beginning of May this year at an approximate cost of £1,500. One of the purposes of the visit is to meet the new local administration to discuss the development of the Link and to gain their support for the twinning and, also, to acquaint the new Mayor with our proposals for activities. A full work plan for the visit has been developed and will be available and a further verbal report will be made following the meeting of the Link Committee..

In anticipation of the approval of the visit by the Link Committee we are taking this opportunity to make a request to the Twinning Committee for a grant towards the cost.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. A. Conde', with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the signature.

Link Secretary.

NORWICH CITY COUNCIL TWINNING COMMITTEE – 5th March 2009.

CIVIC AWARD FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE IN NORWICH – Report by the Norfolk
and Norwich – El Viejo Friendship Link.

1. In December last year the Link received the annual invitation from the Lord Mayor and Sheriff inviting the submission of nominations for the Civic Award for Voluntary Service for the 2008/9 civic year.
2. On reading the information accompanying the invitation there appeared to be some confusion about the qualifications for the award and it was not clear whether the award related solely to voluntary work within and for the people of Norwich or whether work benefiting people and communities overseas would also be eligible.
3. On making enquiries of the Civic Office we were informed that the award was, in fact, limited to voluntary service and support to the community of Norwich and that international activity would not qualify.
4. It appeared to the Link that this limitation fails to recognise an important area of voluntary activity by people and groups within the City. Quite apart from the organisations represented on the Twinning Committee, there are many other individuals and organisations that carry out a wide variety of activity on behalf of disadvantaged people and communities in many parts of the world that give a valuable international perspective to activity within the City. It seems a pity that this area of work should be ignored in the Civic Award Scheme.
5. In the circumstances, the Link seeks the agreement of the Twinning Committee to raise the matter with those responsible for the Civic Award Scheme to consider the introduction of an additional category to the scheme to recognise international voluntary service.

THE NORFOLK AND NORWICH – EL VIEJO FRINESHIP LINK

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2008.

1. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND MEETINGS.

The following members were elected to serve on the Executive Committee for 2008.

Officers	Chairperson	-	David Trevanion
	Secretary	-	Ralph Gayton
	Treasurer	-	Susan Thomas
Trustees	Tony Bailey		Pamela Lowe
	Rhys Jenkins		Simon Nobbs
	Frances Knight		Jonathan Sheales

The Committee met on seven occasions during the year. Meetings did not take place during February, when the Secretary was absent visiting Nicaragua, in March due to the date of the Annual General Meeting, In October due to the Secretary's absence on holiday, and in December due to lack of business.

Attendance at the seven meetings was;

Tony Bailey	-	7
Ralph Gayton	-	7
Rhys Jenkins	-	4
Frances Knight	-	4
Pamela Lowe	-	7
Simon Nobbs	-	5
Jonathan Sheales	-	4 (<i>6 possible</i>)
Susan Thomas	-	6
David Trevanion	-	7

2. MEMBERSHIP

Membership has remained fairly static during the year with some 40 individual members and eight affiliated organisations. One member resigned during the year due to a change in personal circumstances.

The Committee always welcomes new members and we urge existing members to encourage friends and relatives to take up membership where possible.

3. OBITUARY

It is with great regret that we record the passing during the year of Joan Fowler, a long serving member of the Link.

4. FINANCE

The Committee receives regular monthly financial monitoring reports from the Treasurer setting out the state of the Link's finances. Funds are transferred to our bank account in Nicaragua as required in order that our local representative can maintain our projects there. Our representative sends us detailed quarterly financial

accounts of expenditure and a summary of the accounts held in Nicaragua is attached to this report.

A number of small donations and grants have been received during the year including local schools and several members continue to make regular contributions to the scholarship project by way of bankers standing orders.

The annual bike ride, which took place in July, realised just over £1,000.

The Link has benefited hugely from a bequest in the will of the late Rowan Mellor who was a member of the Link for many years. Rowan left the Link a share in her estate amounting to £57,898.89. This will ensure the Link's financial position for the foreseeable future. The money has been deposited in two accounts, one with the Halifax Building Society and the other with the Norwich and Peterborough Building Society. The Link Treasurer and Executive member Tony Bailey have been asked to investigate possible investment of some of these funds with the help of an independent Financial Advisor.

5. LINK REPRESENTATIVE IN NICARAGUA

Sra Magdalene del Carmen Hernandez, known as Carmela, has continued as the Link Representative in Nicaragua. Carmela has worked very effectively and conscientiously during the year. She has supervised the operation of the scholarship project and has built up a very good rapport with the teachers and pupils. The local committee of teachers from the eight schools in the project meets regularly under her leadership to ensure proper communication and development of the project. Carmela visits all the schools on a regular basis and she submits very full and detailed reports to the Link Committee every month. She also sends us quarterly financial reports setting out full details of expenditure.



Link Representative Carmela Hernandez

Carmela also informs us about the various problems that beset the schools, such as effects of extreme weather, problems with school attendance and such things as difficulties for children getting to school because of flooding.

One of Carmela's initiatives concerns the setting up of a 'Link Corner' in each of the schools to inform the children about the Link and the assistance we provide. The corner will contain information and pictures about Norwich as well as work by the children themselves about their schools and communities and their daily lives which will be passed on to us for use in our publicity. This is an imaginative idea and will help the children to learn about life in another country. We also hope that a few local primary schools will form links with the scholarship schools and exchange information and experiences.

During the year Carmela told us about a problem of lack of drinking water at one of the scholarship schools caused by the school well drying up during the fry season. The school is in a isolated position with no alternative source of water for the children, a very serious situation in

temperatures which often reach 40°C, or higher. The Committee agreed to make a grant of \$150 to pay for the deepening of the well to ensure a secure source of water.

Regrettably we do have to report disappointment at the failure of the local council to give proper support to Carmela, particularly with the provision of transport in her monthly visits to the scholarship schools. These visits are a very important feature of her work and it has become necessary to hire a vehicle and driver to enable them to be carried out.

6. VISIT TO NICARAGUA

In February 2008 the Secretary and his wife had a holiday in Costa Rica and they took the opportunity to spend a week in Nicaragua, including a few days in El Viejo. They were able to visit Carmela Hernandez for discussions about the Link's projects and to visit some of the scholarship schools. Brief meetings were also held with the local Alcalde (Mayor) and the Municipal Council to discuss Link activities. They also attended one of the meetings of the teachers' committee and were able to have face to face talks about a number of issues arising from the scholarship project.

A visit to the small school of El Recreo took place to inspect the results of internal redecoration that had been funded by the Link. This had resulted in a significant improvement to the school which now presented a much more attractive environment for the children than its previous drab and depressing condition.



El Recreo School – before and after internal; decoration

A visit was also made to the Norwich settlement school to meet the scholarship pupils and the teachers. An inspection of the classroom funded by the Link and opened in 2007 was also made to look at a few problems that had arisen. These were taken up with members of the local Council who promised to have the matters attended to.

Meetings also took place with a local farming co-operative to discuss the possibility of setting up a small rotating loan scheme to assist poor farmers. Leaders of the co-operative provided information about their experience with similar schemes which was very useful. In view of action being taken by the Government in this area the Link Committee decided to take no action on the proposal for the time being but have left the possibility open for reconsideration at a later date.

A meeting also took place with the local representative of the Ministry of Education. He told us about development in education policy introduced by the new government. He told us about government help for poor pupils. However, demand far exceeded the ability to supply and he stressed the important part played by the scholarship project in helping the poorest children to get an education.

The Government now provided food supplies to schools which made it possible for all children to have a hot meal every day. This was a great incentive for children to attend school and there had been 18,300 enrolments in El Viejo for the 2008 school year.

The visit to Nicaragua concluded with a few days spent at the home of the local representative of the Leicester/Masaya Link Group, John Perry who lives permanently in Nicaragua. This provided an opportunity to talk about possible projects and to draw upon the experience of the Leicester Group, particularly in respect of their experience in setting up a successful school garden project.

7. EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

2008 has been a quiet year so far as events and activities are concerned. The only activity was the annual sponsored summer bike ride on Sunday 20th July. It was fine day and seven riders took part in the ride to Burston. It was a successful event with just over £1,000 being raised from sponsorships.

8. COMPUTERS FOR SCHOOLS

Unfortunately it has not been possible to make any progress with providing computers for the schools in our scholarship project. Apart from the problems of cost of transport, discussions with the City Council about surplus equipment being made available have failed to make progress. It had been hoped that surplus lap-top computers arising from the re-equipment of City Councillors might provide a solution but this has not happened.

The teachers at the scholarship schools are eager to have the opportunity to bring the advantages of computer technology to their pupils so we are investigating the possibility of purchasing equipment in Nicaragua.

There is no doubt that computers would be beneficial in providing much improved access to teaching material, particularly in view of improvements in education policy by the present Government. In the circumstances the committee decided not to place too much reliance on the City Council producing the goods but to explore the possibility of purchasing appropriate equipment direct in Nicaragua. Our representative is looking into possible sources of supply and costs.

9. THE SCHOLARSHIP PROJECT

The project has now completed its sixth year of operation. No less than 36 of the project students successfully completed their six grades of primary education and graduated in November making it possible for 36 new pupils to be awarded scholarships for the new school year.



There have been a few dropouts from the project, generally caused by poverty of the families. Also parents of a few children have moved away from El Viejo in search of employment. Fortunately the number of losses from the project have been few and the level of achievement obtained by the vast majority continues to be high.

Two 6th grade graduates of 2008 with teachers, parents and Carmela Hernandez at the Hermana Maritza School.



Schoolbags given to each scholarship pupil now carry the Link logo

Much is due to the dedication of the teachers who workresources to assist them. The Link Committee sent a letter of thanks to all the teachers involved in the scheme, and particularly to those who serve on the local committee. They certainly are deserving of our thanks. Many of the teachers live considerable distances from the rural schools some of which are very isolated. They depend to a large extent on the informal travel service of lifts given in the ubiquitous Toyota pick-ups which travel the area. They also have to walk long distances to reach some of the schools either in the heat and dust of the dry season or the rain and mud of the rainy months.

The project is due to finish this year and it was hoped that the economic situation in Nicaragua would have improved sufficiently for the scheme to be no longer necessary. Unfortunately this is far from the case.

Although there have been, and continue to be, important improvements in the education system under the present Government there is still a very long way to go before standards become anything like satisfactory. There is no doubt that the contribution the Link scheme has made is highly valued and remains very important. A full report, including the views of the local teachers and the local council will be considered by the Link Committee later in the year to consider extending the scheme for a further period.

10. SCHOOL GARDEN PROJECT

The Committee agreed to carry out a pilot scheme for a school garden project. The objective is, firstly, to encourage schools to create a garden to grown produce that can either be used to supplement the food provided by the Government to provide children with a daily hot meal. Secondly it is hoped to be able to commission teaching material which can be used in the schools to teach the children about environmental matters both in terms of the global environment and, also, to create an understanding of their local environment and how to care for it.

The pilot is to be undertaken in the lead school In the group to test the project and to make any changes that may be necessary.

Investigations are being made to find an organisation from which the education material can be commissioned.

11. NICARAGUAN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 2008.

Elections of local Mayors (Alcaldes) and councillors took place in November 2008. The system in Nicaragua is modelled on that of the USA where the local Mayor is a combination of the Chairperson of an English council and its Chief Executive. Councils also tend to be small. In El Viejo with a population of just over 100,000 covering an area of 1308 sq. km. the Council has ten members, including the mayor. Mayors are not allowed to serve for more than one four year term at a time and this can, and often does, result in a lack of continuity. The membership of the councils also tends to undergo considerable change.

This year the Mayor who was elected is well known to the Link. He is Sr Alcides Moradel who was the Mayor from 2001 to 2005. He was also the person who was

instrumental in the creation of the scholarship project. He also visited Norwich in 2002. We look forward to renewing our acquaintance with him. *(But see item 8)*

12. NORWICH CITY COUNCIL TWINNING COMMITTEE

The City Council's Twinning Committee meets three times each year and all four of the City twinnings, with Koblenz in Germany, Rouen in France, Novi Sad in Serbia, and El Viejo, are represented. The Committee has a small budget but the Link receives support in kind rather than finance. The Link Committee meetings are held at City Hall and we receive help with postage and the printing of agendas and reports.

The Link is represented at meetings by the Secretary and reports of our activities are submitted to each meeting.

13. TRANSLATION

It goes without saying that in a link with a Spanish speaking community where English is almost unknown, there is a real need for translation services in order to maintain reliable contact. This year, as in the past, Link Committee member Pamela Lowe has carried most of the burden of translation. We have also been helped on occasion by Simon Nobbs and his wife Rosario. Link member Francesca Majorano has also helped while working in Mozambique - thanks to e-mail. Also, more recently we have been pleased to have the services of Patrick Allen who is a volunteer for the Norwich based NGO Banana Link. Many thanks to all of them.

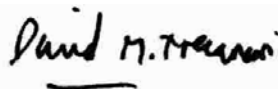
14. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As always in a voluntary organisation such as the Link, many people are involved in all sorts of ways and it is right and proper that their contribution should be recognised and acknowledged. Most important is the continued support of our own members. Without their support nothing would be achieved. We are always ready, and anxious to welcome new members to help with that we do.

Our small group of translators has already been mentioned but we must also give our thanks to Gill Holmes who lives in Managua and who, once again, accompanied the secretary and his wife during their visit to Nicaragua in February. She puts her personal vehicle at our disposal on these occasions as well as providing interpretation. Her knowledge and experience of the country and its people is most valuable. Gill also sends us useful information from time to time.

We particularly thank the members of the Executive Committee for their time and enthusiasm in turning up each month for our meetings.

Finally, we thank the City Council for the facilities they provide for our meetings at City Hall and for the printing services that we receive. We couple with that our gratitude for the support we receive from the Council's Twinning Officer, Andy Emms and the Twinning Committee Officer, Valerie Hay.



David Trevanion
Chairperson



Ralph Gayton
Secretary.