

INTERNATIONAL LINKS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the activity undertaken by the recent Wirral delegation visit to Suzhou, China from the 23rd – 27th September 2008. The report also recommends the development of four projects that will build upon the relationship that has been successfully developed.

Background

- 1.1 Cabinet approved on 22nd May 2008 further work to be undertaken to develop an International Links Strategy, including the establishment of a link with China. A similar discussion took place within the Investment Strategy Board which concluded that a link with China could significantly enhance the delivery of Wirral's Investment Strategy. A further report was considered by Cabinet on July 9th 2008 and it was agreed that a delegation should visit Suzhou between 23rd – 27th September.
- 1.2 The City of Suzhou was identified as a city with which it would be advantageous to develop a link. Suzhou is an ancient city with a history of achievement in arts and culture and it is also a major industrial centre and its high tech industries are at the centre of China's rapid development. Cabinet was clear that the developing relationship be not just economic but should also encompass cultural and social areas such as education, the arts, and tourism.
- 1.3 The Government of Suzhou had expressed a strong desire to establish formal links with Wirral. Following a meeting in London with Mr Wang Yang, the Director of the Bureau of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, a detailed proposition on what the mutual benefits might be was progressed and Cabinet approved the visit of an appropriate delegation to formalise this activity.

2. Overview of visit

- 2.1 It is felt that the visit and associated meetings were very successful in taking the first steps towards economic and cultural co-operation. A statement of intent was signed between Mr Xie Ming (Mayor of Suzhou's port City of Taicang) and Councillor Steve Foulkes to explore further the links between the two areas. Councillor Foulkes and Mr Yan Li, the Mayor of Suzhou, formally agreed to work together to secure full economic co-operation between the areas of Suzhou and Wirral. A series of meetings were held with senior Government and business representatives throughout the week. As a result a number of projects will be developed over the next few months relating to business, tourism, culture and educational links as detailed in this report.
- 2.2 The delegation also visited Liverpool University's Suzhou campus and a range of business parks in the municipality. Councillor Foulkes was also invited to meet children and local people at a community project in the historic Jinchang District of

Suzhou. The success of the visit was widely reported including coverage across television and the printed media in China.

2.3 The visit culminated in Councillor Foulkes delivering a key speech to the prestigious international Mayoral Consultation conference during which he set out Wirral's Investment Strategy and the Council's ambitions for the future. Other speakers included the two other government representatives invited to the conference from Venice and Constance in Germany and a range of international private sector organisations including Porsche and the American Chamber of Commerce.

2.4 The delegation comprised:

Councillor Steve Foulkes	Leader of the Council
Jim Wilkie	Director of Corporate Services
Kevin Adderley	Head of Strategic Development
Emma Degg	Head of Tourism and Marketing
Dr Kegang Wu	Chief China Advisor, British Chambers of Commerce (Interpreter)
Lindsey Ashworth	Development Director, Peel Holdings

2.5 The Investment Strategy Board received an update on the Suzhou visit and planned activities at its meeting on November 7th and endorsed the proposed actions detailed below.

3 Key projects recommended for development: **Education links**

3.1 A key objective for both areas is to build upon the excellent work already undertaken by a number of Schools in Wirral to enable their students to capitalise on the opportunities that China is likely to generate in the future. For example, Calday Grange Grammar School has been awarded a prestigious role in the development of Mandarin teaching through the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and has been chosen to be the "Confucius Classroom" for the North West of England.

3.2 The delegation visited the Jianxiong Institute of Vocational Technology to view the facilities and meet students and staff and to discuss the future potential for partnership activity with Wirral Metropolitan College for the benefit of students from both areas. Particular interest was expressed in the potential for joint training programmes concerned with the logistics and port sectors. The delegation also visited Suzhou Xian-Liverpool University at the Dushu Lake Education Park.

3.4 Key contacts established:

Jeremy Smith	Vice President Suzhou Xian-Liverpool University
Chen Zhi-Qiang	Principle, Jianxiong Institute of Vocational Technology

3.5 Activity to be taken forward

1. An agreement to build upon existing school activity and develop further partnership activity with schools in Suzhou for the benefit of children and teachers from both regions.
2. The development of a firm proposal to take forward formal training links potentially as part of the development of the educational quarter on the Wirral Waters site focussing on logistics and port sector related activity

3. Possible co-operation between the Wirral Based Maritime Institute and Jianxiong Institute of Vocational Technology to develop Maritime training in Taicang

4. Port and business links

- 4.1 The Taicang Port of Suzhou benefits from over 25 kilometres of deep water. It has 172 designated berths and in 2007 it handled more than 1 million standard containers and over 30 million tons of cargo. The Port is currently implementing plans that it believes will, over the next three years, see it raise business to 5 million standard containers and 300 million tons per year.
- 4.2 The development of the Twelve Quays Ferry Terminal has secured Wirral's place as the key strategic location for passenger and freight movement between mainland UK and Ireland. In addition the new terminal in Liverpool will be capable of handling the new generation of larger post-Panamax vessels that will enable the development of new trade routes and increased cargo volumes.
- 4.3 In the light of this the delegation visited the Taicang Port Zone to investigate the potential for the establishment of shipping links between Taicang and the Port of Liverpool. Over the course of a number of meetings during the week the potential for the establishment of a Chinese business district focussed around port related businesses was explored.
- 4.4 In addition Suzhou has identified outsourcing as a key area for continued expansion. Wirral would like to support companies in Suzhou who wish to explore the establishment of trading bases in Europe.
- 4.5 Key contacts made:

Lu Yan (Alice)	Vice Mayor of Taicang responsible for Port activity
Wang Yang	Director, Suzhou Bureau of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation
Yuan Rong Hua	Director, Foreign Economics and Trade Bureau, Jinchang District, Suzhou
Sam Crispin,	Chairman of the British Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai
- 4.6 Action to be taken forward:
 1. Discussions to commence with Peel Holdings regarding the establishment of a direct Port link between Taicang and the Port of Liverpool.
 2. A proposition to be developed to establish a location for Chinese port related businesses located at Wirral Waters/Cammell Laird with an excellent business support service integral to the proposition.

5. Sustainable technology

- 5.1 Wirral shares a number of challenges with Suzhou when seeking to grow our economy, in particular the challenge of delivering massive economic development while protecting the heritage and natural assets of our regions. All aspects of sustainable development are of keen interest including power generation, environmental technologies and environmental protection. Wirral Waters aims to become an exemplar of sustainability. We would like to explore opportunities to share knowledge, investment and technologies for mutual benefit.

5.2 The delegation visited the Huaneng Thermal Power Plant and discussed the challenges of sustainable development across a number of meetings.

5.3 Actions to be taken forward:

1. Seminar to be organised to coincide with return visit by Chinese delegation to Wirral that would feature Wirral Companies and organisations who could demonstrate best practice.

6. Tourism

6.1 Suzhou was built in 514 BC and lies upon a network of canals and rivers and is referred to as the “Venice of China”. It has a sister city relationship with Venice, Italy and is famous for its canals and gardens and contains nine World Heritage sites. Visitor numbers have increased by 10% per year and income from tourism has been growing at 18% per year. It makes full use of its ancient cities, classical gardens, canals and lakes and is also home to the Chinese International Silk Festival and has an annual International Tourism Festival. It has in excess of 150 graded hotels, with over 50 at or above 4* and an additional 14 opened in 2007.

6.2 There are many common cultural and tourism attributes shared between Suzhou and Wirral – including our rich maritime heritage. Desire was clearly articulated at a number of meetings during the visit to explore cultural and tourism exchanges between Wirral and Suzhou.

6.3 Actions to be taken forward:

1. Cultural exchange exhibition to be organized to coincide with return delegation visit.
2. Tourism packages to be selected for mutual promotion.

6.4 It is considered that the projects detailed above should be progressed and cabinet is asked to endorse them. It is expected that additional opportunities for co-operation will be developed as the relationship between both areas develops

6.5 As a next step, it is suggested that Wirral hosts a return delegation from the Suzhou area in the early part of 2009

7 Financial and Staffing Implications

7.1 The cost of the visit was contained within existing budgets.

8 Equal Opportunities Implications

8.1 The links which might be developed in the future promote a greater understanding of different societies and cultures essential to the promotion of a sound and balanced approach to equality and diversity.

9 Community Safety Implications

9.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

10 Local Agenda 21 Implications

10.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

11 Planning Implications

11.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

12 Anti-Poverty Implications

12.1 Developing awareness of international links will encourage a deeper understanding of economic interdependence and our joint responsibilities as global citizens

13 Human Rights Implications

13.1 Our strategy for international links would embrace fully the fundamental principles of respect for human rights.

14 Social Inclusion Implications

14.1 Respect for other cultures will be enhanced and deepened through the wide range and variety of international links. This should enhance and improve relationships within our own community.

15 Local Member Support Implications

15.1 This report affects the entire Borough.

16 Background Papers

16.1 None were used in compiling this report

RECOMMENDATIONS

That

- (1) the projects outlined in this report be endorsed;
- (2) Members support the continuing development of relationships between Wirral and Suzhou; and
- (3) an official invitation be sent inviting a return delegation in the spring/early summer of 2009.

J. WILKIE

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