



Weston-super-Mare / Hildesheim Twinning Strategic Plan

Approved by: (HS&FG) June 2025 & (F&GP) October 2025

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1. BACKGROUND

Twinning was widely promoted after World War Two to engender reconciliation and build relationships. Although twinning per se may not meet the needs of modern generations, the notion of friendship still has relevance in today's society. There are approximately 2,000 twinning arrangements in Britain and 75% are with French and German authorities.

There is no fixed definition or model of town twinning or partnership arrangements. A twinning link is customarily defined as a friendship agreement involving co-operation between two communities in different countries, endorsed by both local authorities. The two twinned communities organise projects and activities around a range of issues and develop an understanding of historical, cultural and lifestyle similarities and differences. These activities should involve a wide range of community members and in keeping with any agreements which are in place.

A 'friendship' can be seen as an affiliation between two communities that is considered and felt that it would be mutually beneficial to both parties.

2. HISTORY OF TWINNING IN WESTON-SUPER-MARE

The first contacts between Weston-super-Mare and Hildesheim date back to 1968, when Hugh Redman, leader of Bounville Youth Club in Weston-super-Mare, and Erwin Gödeke, a youth worker from Hildesheim, met at a motorway service station in Belgium. They became friends and arranged the first youth exchange between Weston-super-Mare and Hildesheim. As a result, two organising committees were formed in Weston-super-Mare and in Hildesheim, in which the respective mayor was automatically a member. As a result, the Youth Agreement was concluded between Weston-super-Mare and Hildesheim in 1977.

The twinning of Weston-super-Mare, with Hildesheim, a historic city in Lower Saxony, Germany, dates back to 1983. This partnership has fostered cultural exchange, friendship, and collaboration between the two communities for over forty years.

Twinning, or sister city programs, are initiatives that facilitate connections between communities in different countries, encouraging cultural, educational, and economic exchanges.

The twinning of Weston-super-Mare and Hildesheim has proven to be a meaningful and enriching experience for both towns. It has allowed the residents to appreciate their similarities and differences, promoting cultural diversity, and global understanding. The partnership has endured for many years, and it continues to strengthen the ties between these two vibrant communities.

Educational exchanges have been a significant aspect of the twinning relationship. Students from schools in Weston-super-Mare and Hildesheim have had the chance to visit each other's towns, staying with host families. This has provided invaluable cross-cultural experience. In recent years, the appetite for these exchanges has not been there from the English side but Germany has continued to take part in a yearly youth visit, apart from a brief hiatus due to the pandemic. Fortunately, Scouts in Weston are

looking into possible exchanges with German Scouts and two of the Scout commissioners in Weston have met with the Hildesheim youth leader and Lord Mayor.

Each year the Mayor of Weston visits the counterpart Oberbürgermeister in Hildesheim and vice-versa. Though these exchanges are largely social, there are many opportunities to see how our two very different systems of local government work and how we both try to tackle some of the social problems which we both share. Importantly, we are able to learn from one another and grow in understanding and friendship which is the whole purpose of twinning.

In recent years the Town Council have hosted employees from Hildesheim through the Erasmus scheme for 3-month work placements, the first business twinning took place in December 2023 between Weston's Pinkers Craft Brewery and Hildesheimer Braumanufaktur when they joined forces to create two special craft beers, both of which have gone to market and sold out.

3. THE PURPOSE AND BENEFITS OF TWINNING AND FRIENDSHIPS

- Increasing cultural awareness, including knowledge and understanding of the places of origin and understanding of the places of origin of the town's communities that can assist staff in their work and foster community cohesion;
- Instil a sense of community pride in Weston-super-Mare and Hildesheim;
- Broaden horizons in all of the towns through understanding cultural, linguistic and social exchanges;
- Provide opportunities for younger people to acquire new skills and contribute positively to a partnership between all towns.

4. MANAGEMENT

Weston-super-Mare Town Council works with Oliver Rösner-Civic Officer to Ingo Meyer. It would be worth considering whether, as in previous years, a partnership committee could be created in which a person from the city (e.g. civic officer or mayor) would be a permanent member and could discuss and implement partnership projects together with volunteers. North Somerset Council could be included here as it has also been twinned with Hildesheim since 1986 (District Woodspring, renewed as North Somerset in 1997).

5. PRINCIPLES AND VISIONS OF TWINNING AND FRIENDSHIP

To promote and celebrate the culture and heritage of Weston-super-Mare and Hildesheim through the following exchanges:

- Arts, Culture, Recreation and Heritage;
- Twinning and International Relations;
- Health and Wellbeing;
- Environment and Wildlife;
- Young People and Families;
- Business and Enterprise;
- Education, Training, Volunteering and Employment;
- Vulnerable People;

- Supporting Community Organisations and Assets;
- To promote all towns and their surrounding areas as a place to be visited.

6. WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL AIMS TO:

- Stimulate interest in foreign cultures, countries and their people, fostering friendships, tolerance and understanding between citizens of Weston and Hildesheim.
- Serve the town by providing relevant and popular opportunities for a significantly larger number of citizens to benefit from twinning activity and relationships.
- Contribute to a net inflow of revenue into the town from its activities.
- Promote Weston as internationally aligned and accessible, culturally tolerant and enlightened, commercially innovative and dynamic with an innovative twinning model adapted to the present day.
- Publicise Weston's civic heritage, history, traditions and geographical location to stimulate tourism, inward investment and cultural, educational and sporting exchanges.

7. THESE AIMS WILL BE ACHIEVED BY:

7.1. INCREASING RELEVANCE

- Facilitate sporting, cultural and educational exchanges with international partners, for instance: Arts, music, theatre, photography, dance, sports tournaments

7.2. GENERATING REVENUE, INWARD INVESTMENT AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Assist in the promotion of Weston's products and services internationally with particular emphasis on increasing visitor numbers to the town and stimulating exports
- Increased tourism and visitor stays and multiplier effect on Weston's income
- Encouraging work experience opportunities for Weston citizens in Hildesheim, as well as Hildesheim citizens in Weston
- To encourage promotion of community organisations and local opportunities that have shared initiatives and values (i.e. rotary, lions club, carnival etc)

7.3. PROMOTION

- Improved communication of the benefits and ethos of twinning to the town and its citizens
- Greater visibility of twinning in the town: Retail shop frontage in the town centre stocking items from twin town and providing information about twinning and Weston's twin town as well as tourist information about Weston for foreign/out of town visitors
- Revitalising promotion of school, college and university exchanges for students and teachers.
- Positioning as internationally aligned and accessible, culturally tolerant and enlightened, commercially innovative and astute and a model for others to follow

- Combination of social media efforts, combining information in a twinning focused social media programme

8. FUNDING AND REVIEW

Weston's Twinning Initiatives are funded almost entirely by Weston-super-Mare Town Council. The intention is to develop additional sources of income and to become self-funding.

Currently, Civic budget is available for the Mayor to attend Hildesheim annually, but this is encouraged and not necessarily enforced, and down to the individual Mayor to decide. Moving forward we would like to aim for this to be funded as a standard annual visit with the Mayor and a plus one. Exceptions to this rule should be the special anniversaries of the partnership, so that these can also be celebrated with a somewhat larger delegation.

It is also expected that there would be a full report and feedback following the visit, to bring back shared learning from Hildesheim. This should be presented to the full Town Council meeting. This would also be shared back with Hildesheim, ensuring that any information is provided in German.

- Access to international funding for twinning activity
- Revenue from retail sales/shop activities
- Twin town contributions from shop activities and promotion of their towns

The policy and all such agreement will be the subject of review on a periodical basis.

9. 3 YEAR PLAN

In order to ensure continued growth and engagement, a plan across the next 3 years has been devised and includes the following direction:

When Sections 1-8 are approved, it would allow for population of a rolling three-year plan. It is felt that it is sensible to look at a three-year period, in order to engage with the Current Mayor, Deputy Mayor and incoming Deputy Mayor alongside colleagues from Hildesheim.

YEAR 1 (2025)

YEAR 2 (2026 – 40 YEARS NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL - HILDESHEIM)

YEAR 3 (2027 – 50 YEARS YOUTH AGREEMENT WESTON-SUPER-MARE – HILDESHEIM)

10. FUTURE SCOPE

In order for twinning and friendships to survive, endure and become more relevant as society changes it is felt that the following aims and objectives must be considered and taken into account, where resources and capacity allow, when organising activities, events and projects:

- To encourage and increase levels of engagement and involvement in line with the principles and vision listed above;
- Increased awareness and knowledge of twinning and friendships within all towns;

- To proactively foster additional friendships with a view to entering into additional friendships;

Any future aims and objectives will be determined on the basis of how twinning and friendships develop in the interests of all parties

[Suggestions for the population of section 9]

- Community engagement – we know organisations who want to be involved.
- Forge Music/Cultural links with performances etc.
- Street Art possibly something on Hildesheim Bridge
- Link up with counterpart VIC to sell each other's items
- Support Scout Exchange
- Collage links possible exchange
- Link up and support the Weston-super-Mare German Language Group
- Youth Sports exchange
- Link up with Bristol/Hannover twinning
- Products from Weston-super-Mare at the Hildesheim Magdalenengarden festival in May / June every year
- Student exchange with Weston-College and Hildesheim university / vocational school