

## APPENDIX A

### OVERVIEW OF SHEFFIELD'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

#### 1. China

##### i). Review of Existing Relationships

**Anshan** has been linked with Sheffield as a Twin City since 1983. **Chengdu** and Sheffield have been twinned since 2010. Sheffield City Council signed Trade & Collaboration Agreements with the cities of **Daqing** and **Nanchang** in 2016, for an initial 3-year period, both of which have subsequently expired.

The **Anshan** relationship is effectively dormant due to no active engagement for c. 17 years and limited quantifiable benefits having resulted from this connection.

Sheffield has been twinned with **Chengdu** since 2010, established through a 'Memorandum of Friendly Cooperation' signed by Sheffield City Council representatives, together with a Collaboration Agreement between the Olympic Legacy Park and Chengdu's HI Tec Zone. Prior to this, Chengdu and Sheffield already had close links, for example, with Sheffield's local Chinese community playing an important role in its appeal to support Chengdu after the earthquake in Sichuan in 2008, which helped cement closer connections between both cities. Our two universities have had a disproportionately high percentage of international students from Chengdu and Sichuan Province, which has a direct benefit to the universities along with the City's economy.

Our links with Chengdu have also brought significant investment into Sheffield. For these reasons, it is felt appropriate to retain a Twin City relationship with Chengdu, although at the present time consideration needs to be given in respect of the financial implications of maintaining this relationship, for example the Council no longer has the resource to maintain a dedicated Sheffield China Business Programme. It is felt desirable to retain the relationship, whilst acknowledging the reduced financial resources at our disposal.

The Trade & Collaboration Agreements signed with **Daqing** and **Nanchang** have not resulted in any defined economic or trade benefits. Both agreements expired in 2019, and there has been no subsequent contact with either city. Therefore, it is proposed that we do not seek to renew these agreements.

##### ii). Representations Received in Respect of 'Detwinning'

Over the last 12 to 18 months, the Council has received representations and petitions from Sheffield residents, calling upon the Council to relinquish all ties with our four Chinese Partner Cities, as part of the 'Global Detwin with China' movement.

The rationale behind these demands has been on the basis of alleged human rights violations. Maintaining city-to-city relationships with China amidst these macro issues has become more complex.

Current UK Government policy in respect of China, is outlined in the Integrated Review Refresh 2023 (IR2023). Since IR2021, the Government has acted to protect the UK's interests and values in relation to China. This has included increasing cooperation with partners through the G7 and NATO; continuing to raise grave concerns about human rights violations in Xinjiang at the UN and other fora, and imposing asset freezes and travel bans on those involved under the UK Global Human Rights sanctions regime. At a city-to-city level, the UK Government is keen to encourage people to people links, such as education and cultural activities that are seen to be in the national interest. The preference being for better cooperation and understanding, and predictability and stability for global public good.

Specifically looking at Sheffield, we need to consider the implications for the city if the Council was to relinquish all formal links with China and the potential impact on the Chinese population living in Sheffield and on our two universities.

Sheffield has had significant Chinese investment into the city in the past. Pre-Pandemic we had c. 10,000 Chinese students studying at our 2 universities. In respect of the wider Chinese community, the (non-student) Chinese population living in Sheffield is in excess of 15,000: the city has a significant diaspora. Given potential population numbers of c. 25,000, the value of both aspects of the Chinese community to the Sheffield economy and cultural mix can therefore not be underestimated.

Considering the 'detwin' petition received, we also need to be aware of the potential unintended consequences of taking such a stance and the impact on the local Chinese population. Whilst there is no suggestion that the City Council condones any of the alleged behaviour of the Chinese Government, it is felt pertinent to retain links with Chengdu and relinquish links with Anshan, Daqing and Nanchang, for the reasons outlined above rather than being a direct response to the 'detwin' petitions received.

It will be important to engage and support members of the Chinese community living in Sheffield, including those who have campaigned against the twinning arrangements we have with Chinese cities.

### **iii). China - Summary of Activity and Approaches during 2023-24**

The **new Consul General from the Manchester Chinese Consulate, Consul General Mr Rui Tang** and a delegation visited Sheffield on 16 and 17 October 2023, where they met with the Leader of the Council and the Lord Mayor. Due to existing diary commitments, two separate meetings were held on consecutive days. Discussions focussed on welcoming the Consul General to Sheffield and developing a better understanding of his role in respect of the North of England. The Consul General also passed on the best wishes of colleagues in the Chengdu Government and their desire to re-engage with their Twin City of Sheffield. He also provided a written update in respect of recent developments in Chengdu.

**The Chengdu Foreign Affairs Office** contacted the Lord Mayor's Office on 29 November 2023, requesting the opportunity to explore how our two cities might re-engage in the areas of commerce and industry, culture and education. A formal response was issued, beginning the start of an ongoing dialogue. Initial activities being focussed on welcoming an acrobatic troupe from Chengdu, travelling over to

Sheffield to perform for the Lunar New Year Celebrations in February 2024. An offer to host them in the Lord Mayor's Parlour was made at the time.

Other approaches for Sheffield City Council to receive civic delegations from **the CPC Guang'an Municipal Committee** and **Cheng Jewel International**, a company whose main activity is to work with Chinese government agencies, enterprises and schools to make delegation visits abroad, have also been received. These requests were politely declined on the basis of already having historical links with four separate Chinese cities.

## 2. Europe

### i). Review of Existing Relationships

**Bapaume**, France – Sheffield has had an 'Adoptive' relationship since 1920 and is sometimes referred to as Bapaume's 'Godmother'.

**Bochum**, Germany – Sheffield's Twin City since 1950.

**Donetsk**, Ukraine – Twin City since 1956.

**Khmelnitskyi**, Ukraine – Twin City since 2022.

The relationship with **Bapaume** is a result of circumstances relating from the first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916. Men of the 12th Battalion, York and Lancaster Regiment ("the Sheffield Pals") were entrenched ready to launch an attack on the German position in the fortified hilltop hamlet of nearby Serre. The troops met with devastating machine gun fire and by the end of the day, the Battalion reported 248 killed, 246 wounded and 18 missing.

Given the connection, in 1920, the city of Sheffield decided to 'adopt' Bapaume and local fundraising events and donations with a value of 210,000 francs were raised and presented to Bapaume officials. These monies were used to finance the construction of workers' homes and later a children's nursery.

Sheffield and Bapaume have been linked for over 100 years; whilst the two locations could not be more different in terms of size, geography or economic make-up, it is a prime example of how the Sheffield community came together to support a location affected by the blight of the First World War. The 'adoptive' relationship costs little to maintain and rarely requires any Member or Officer time, save for significant Anniversaries. It is more of a symbolic relationship.

It is suggested that this relationship is maintained on the basis of civic links and historical significance, rather than there being any imminent opportunities, whether they be cultural, sport or investment and trade.

**Bochum** has been linked with Sheffield since 1950. Following the end of the Second World War, Sheffield City Council, through its Education Committee, responded to an initiative by the British Control Commission in Germany proposing links and exchanges to promote peace, understanding and friendship. Bochum has much in common with Sheffield, having grown to prominence through the development of its coal and steel industries, suffered devastation in the war, and experienced a decline

in its traditional industries followed by regeneration through diversification. Like Sheffield, Bochum is twinned with Donetsk in Ukraine.

After a period of inactivity, Bochum reached out to Sheffield in June 2023 with an invitation for the Lord Mayor to visit Bochum to coincide with the Bochumer Musiksommer event, held over the August Bank Holiday weekend. Bochum were keen to re-establish links with some of their Partner Cities, with potential for defined projects and mutual benefits. Following on from this visit, there has been regular engagement between the two cities. Activities include collaboration with the Master Cutler-led Trade Mission to the Eisenwarenmesse in Köln in early March 2024, whereby Sheffield businesses will engage with their Bochum counterparts, Bochum being less than an hour's drive away. A return visit to Sheffield 3 - 5 May 2024 by Oberbürgermeister Thomas Eiskirch has also been arranged.

Recent engagement with Bochum has highlighted many similarities and opportunities: both cities have Innovation Districts; our universities have similar areas of expertise; there are opportunities to exchange ideas and best practice in how our respective Councils deliver services. There is also long-standing and continuing community engagement through our Philharmonic Chorus and an annual tournament of junior football teams. It is therefore recommended that the City Council continues and strengthens this relationship.

Along with the USA and France, Germany has recently been identified as a 'Core Immediate Market' (for trade, investment, and innovation) in SYMCA's Internationalisation Plan.

Council officers are currently working with the University of Sheffield in respect of developing a MBA Internationalisation project, which will focus on identifying market opportunities in Germany, Japan and the USA.

Sheffield has been twinned with **Donetsk** since 1956 when the cold war was at its peak, aiming to build peace between Britain and the Soviet Union. In common with Sheffield, Donetsk also has historical Twinning relationships with Bochum and Pittsburgh. Relations dwindled in the 1990s and there has been minimal engagement for many years. The Donbas region was annexed by Russia in 2014 and since this time there has been no engagement with city officials. It is recommended that no further action is taken until such time as the conflict in Ukraine has been resolved, upon which time an appropriate assessment can be made.

**Khmelnyskyi**, Ukraine became a Twin City of Sheffield in December 2022 on the basis of wishing to develop closer relationships between the two cities to include cultural and educational exchange and to explore future business and trade opportunities. The relationship followed on from active participation with the local Ukrainian community in Sheffield, facilitated through the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB) in respect of Sheffield's bid to become the host city for the Eurovision Song Contest 2023.

Regular engagement with Khmelnyskyi leading up to the twinning over Teams has taken place and continued subsequently. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor visited

Sheffield in December 2022 to sign a Memorandum of Understanding which established our twinning relationship.

## ii). Europe - Summary of Activity and Approaches during 2023-24

In March 2023, the Lord Mayor received an appeal letter from the **City of Lviv, Ukraine**, seeking financial help to acquire new equipment, the city having experienced problems in maintaining their existing refuse collection equipment, much of this equipment being of Belarusian origin and either obsolete or required repairing. A response was issued stating that Sheffield City Council was unable to provide any financial assistance to help, on the basis of our own limited financial resources.

The Deputy Mayor of **Khmelnyskyi** visited Sheffield 11 – 14 May 2023, together with Ukrainian singer Maryna Krut and photo artist, Oleksandr Savenko. Their visit coincided with Sheffield's Official Eurovision Party, Maryna Krut headlining the event. A photo exhibition of Khmelnyskyi, curated by Oleksandr Savenko, was held in the Winter Garden.

Subsequent activity has included the provision of advice and content for a 'British Day' held in Khmelnyskyi in June 2023, which incorporated a Sheffield photography exhibition and video messages from the Leader, Lord Mayor and Chief Executive. Introductions have been made between Sheffield secondary schools and Khmelnyskyi School Number 1, looking to develop links and potential future student exchanges. Introductions have also been made between Sheffield Children's Hospital and Khmelnyskyi Children's Hospital, both keen to develop links and potential knowledge exchange.

The current conflict in Ukraine restricts activity, however, opportunities currently being explored include: 1) Potential participation in a competitive sporting event (to be determined) taking place in Sheffield; 2) An online children's art competition; 3) Exploration of the potential for an e-sports tournament; 4) The potential for a further delegation from Khmelnyskyi, to include the Director of their Children's Hospital and possibly education representatives, visiting Sheffield; and 5) Exploring the potential for business collaboration through the recently announced UK Ukraine TechBridge programme.

On 26 June 2023, the Lord Mayor received a request from the Mayor of **Melitopol City Council, Ukraine** seeking financial assistance towards the implementation of the city's Recovery Plan. The request was declined due to budgetary constraints. The response also referenced our existing links with the Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Khmelnyskyi.

The Lord Mayor visited **Bochum** 25 – 27 August 2023. The visit included company visits, site tours, a visit to a business start-up incubator, meetings with university representatives, and civic participation including the Lord Mayor speaking at the opening of the Musiksommer event. As a consequence of this visit, follow-up activity has included introductions to contacts in Youth Services, colleagues working on the Innovation District, both Sheffield universities, and Business Sheffield in respect of start-up and incubator activity, plus exploration of an Arts Council England funding opportunity. Introductions have been made between contacts at High Storrs School

and Erich Kästner School, looking to establish a new Schools Exchange programme. A potential youth placement with Nordhausen (Bochum's German Twin City) is also being explored. The Council's Director of Regeneration and Development was also invited to Bochum and spoke about the Heart of the City development at an 'Urban Transformation' event held on 1 February 2024.

### **3. The Americas**

#### **i). Review of Existing Relationships**

**Pittsburgh**, USA - Sister City since 1980;  
**Estelí**, Nicaragua – Twin City since 1984.

**Pittsburgh**, is known as "the Steel City" for its more than 300 steel-related businesses. Aside from steel, Pittsburgh has led in the manufacturing of aluminium and glass, and in the petroleum industry. Additionally, it is a leader in computing, electronics, and the automotive industry. After 1990, Pittsburgh transformed into a hub for the healthcare, education, and technology industries. Historically, several business delegations have taken place between our two cities.

Pittsburgh's most recent Sister City agreement was signed with Glasgow in 2020. Issues that the two cities are addressing together and learning from each other include guaranteed income, climate action (including energy, transport, food, open space, buildings, and waste), and the need for equitable resources, health resources and capacity building. There is a strong sense of bilateral problem solving and metro-to-metro idea exchange. Pittsburgh is keen to resurrect engagement with international partner cities to develop mutually beneficial relationships in the areas of commerce, education and culture and to work together to address and solve global challenges facing cities of tomorrow. As an example, the Glasgow - Pittsburgh work plan is focused on projects that reflect the UN Sustainable Development Goals and seeks to address issues including workforce development, the inclusive economy, equality, environmental issue, culture and health. A work plan is being developed for Sofia, Bulgaria which includes air quality, SMART cities, healthcare, and energy. Educational exchanges feature prominently in their work with Da Nang and Saitama City.

Given Pittsburgh's desire to collaborate, initial discussions to reacquaint ourselves have taken place. The AMRC are planning to hold their June 2024 Industrial Board meeting in Pittsburgh, and dialogue is underway as to how Sheffield City Council and South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority could be involved in this delegation.

Along with Germany and France, the USA has recently been identified as a 'Core Immediate Market' (for trade, investment, and innovation) in SYMCA's Internationalisation Plan.

Identification of market opportunities in the USA is the focus of a current University of Sheffield Internationalisation project.

Sheffield has been twinned with **Estelí** since October 1984. The twinning was Sheffield's attempt to support the cause of peace in a country recovering from the Somoza dictatorship which brought poverty and oppression to Estelí, a civil war having taken place in 1978-1979. Links were formed via the Sheffield Estelí Society and focused on humanitarian aid and supporting education and environmental projects.

The Sheffield Estelí Society has been in existence for over 30 years and continues with regular fundraising events, exhibitions, and support to organisations in Estelí. The Society is part of a network of four European cities also twinned with Estelí: Saint Feliu in Catalunya, Delft in The Netherlands and Bielefeld in Germany.

The relationship has been kept alive through the activities of the Sheffield Estelí Society. The most recent engagement with the City Council was in March 2018, when the Mayor of Estelí visited Sheffield to open Estelí Parade, together with the then Lord Mayor, the Nicaraguan Ambassador and Paul Blomfield MP for Sheffield Central. It is proposed that the Society continues to lead in maintaining this relationship going forward.

## **ii). The Americas - Summary of Activity and Approaches during 2023-24**

An introductory Teams call to reacquaint Sheffield City Council officers with **Pittsburgh** contacts in both the Mayor's Office and the Sister Cities Association of Pittsburgh took place in December 2023, as a precursor to potential engagement linked to the AMRC delegation in June 2024.

In January 2024, the Lord Mayor received an invitation to represent Sheffield at the **4<sup>th</sup> World Meeting of Cutlery Capitals, 14 -18 October 2024 in Tandil, Argentina**, the event to include a General Assembly of the Association, World Exhibition of the Itinerant Museum of Cutlery, a Business Convention and a Cutlery Fair. Sheffield has not previously been involved in this Association. The invite has been shared with The Cutlers' Company to determine whether the Company has any desire to attend.

## **4. Asia (excluding China)**

### **i). Review of Existing Relationships**

**Jeonju**, South Korea – Exchange City Agreement since 2013;

**Kawasaki**, Japan - Friendship Agreement since 1990;

**Kotli**, Pakistan-administered Kashmir - 'Declaration of Friendship' since 1994.

Sheffield City Council's engagement with South Korea has focussed on an 'Exchange City Agreement' for the purposes of collaboration on industrial, business and research-based opportunities, signed in July 2013 with **Jeonju**, South Korea. Sheffield City Council is also a signatory to a 'Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Cooperation relating to Small and Medium Businesses' with the **Small and Medium Business Administration of the Republic of South Korea**.

Whilst these two agreements in themselves have not directly resulted in any specific outcomes to date, they have helped to raise awareness of Sheffield within South Korea. There has been a renewed interest in Sheffield post-Pandemic (see comments

in section below). It is felt pertinent to retain these links presently and undertake further work to assess their potential.

Sheffield City Council representatives signed a Friendship Agreement with **Kawasaki** in 1990, subsequently renewed in November 2010. Kawasaki has several factories and development bases of major heavy industry companies, including JFE Group and Nippon Oil Corporation. High technology companies including Fujitsu, NEC Corporation, Toshiba, Dell Japan and Sigma Corporation also have bases there. Kawasaki has moved away from being a heavily industrialised 'steel city' and now has R&D facilities for Fujitsu, IBM and NEC.

The two cities came together through the involvement of the University of Sheffield School of East Asian Studies. Synergies between the two cities include sports (particularly football), post-industrial cities, existing film and documentary industries, music and festival heritage, and a shared desire to address public health issues.

Contact with Kawasaki has recently resumed, and the city is keen to collaborate with Sheffield City Council in respect of projects that could include tourism through to specific sector specialisms and how we can encourage greater collaboration between our respective SMEs.

Japan is identified as a Priority Market within the recently developed SYMCA Internationalisation Plan and given Kawasaki's desire to collaborate on specific projects it is recommended that Sheffield City Council continue and explore strengthening this relationship.

Identification of market opportunities in Japan is the focus of a current University of Sheffield Internationalisation project.

August 1993 saw a municipal delegation from **Kotli** visiting Sheffield, with the purpose of exploring twinning links. An agreement to form a 'Friendship Link' was subsequently ratified at Council. March/April 1994 saw a civic delegation from Sheffield visit Kotli, which included the transfer of c. £7,300 raised through donations from Sheffield businesses for the Kashmir Flood Disaster Appeal.

A 'Declaration of Friendship' was signed on 24 March 1994 with Kotli, with the *'intention to promote international understanding and co-operation'*.

Sheffield welcomed a delegation from Kotli in May 1994 - the last formal engagement between the two cities. The civic relationship appears to have been dormant since this time, c. 30 years. However, there are some community ties to Kotli and to the broader Azad Kashmir region. The Sheffield-based charity Friends of Azad Kashmir (District Kotli) was established in March 2009 and historically raised funds towards the refurbishment of primary, middle and secondary schools. The funds were utilised to repair boundary walls, install drinking water and toilet facilities. Laptops and interactive whiteboards, together with purchasing furniture to improve the classroom environment.

In October 2005, a group from Sheffield, including representatives of Heeley Development Trust and Heeley Asian Women's Group, visited Azad Kashmir following



a major earthquake which had destroyed most of the area's schools, taking the lives of many residents. In response to the disaster, the group set up a small charity with the task of re-building a Girls College, which was subsequently achieved in 2012.

The civic relationship came about for a specific purpose, provision of aid following a flood disaster, with minimal engagement since. It is recommended that enquiries are made of the Trustees of Friends of Azad Kashmir (District Kotli), Heeley Development Trust and Heeley Asian Women's Group to understand their current engagement with Kotli.

## ii). Asia - Summary of Activity and Approaches during 2023-24

Contact has been re-established with Daejeon University's Bio-Health Convergence Open Sharing System (Bio-Health COSS) Project Team representing the **South Korean Bio-Health Open Sharing System Group**, which consists of 7 universities. The COSS Group are keen to co-operate and develop Bio-Health Partnerships with other universities in the UK starting with the delivery of an International Bio-Health Symposium that took place in Sheffield in October 2023.

1 July 2024 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the city of **Kawasaki** and officials are keen to re-engage with all of their Sister Cities. A number of Teams call have taken place between Council officers during November and December 2023. The city is keen to exchange ideas and learn from each other. Kawasaki are keen to encourage more start-up businesses and see them grow. They have a sizeable SME business base and would like to encourage more collaboration with SMEs here in the UK. To this end they recently sent a small business delegation to London, although they are keen for businesses to think beyond London, specifically Sheffield. Discussions have considered how both cities might work together to encourage their respective businesses to trade with each other, and the City of Kawasaki would love to host a future 'Study Tour' for Sheffield / South Yorkshire businesses if this was of interest. Kawasaki would also like to work with Sheffield to encourage more tourism activity between our two cities.

Visitors from **Jeju Island, South Korea** representing Jeju Regional Innovation Platform, Jeju National University and Jeju Free International City Development Center (JDC) visited Sheffield week commencing 15 January 2024. Jeju Island are looking to establish a health and wellbeing partnership with Sheffield Hallam University's Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre (AWRC). The Lord Mayor hosted the delegation in the Parlour, keen to support an initiative that could result in significant research collaboration and potential income coming into the AWRC.

In January 2024, a meeting was held with the **Japan Local Government Centre**, an organisation that has helped to foster the Sheffield/Kawasaki relationship over the years. A potential funding opportunity which might help to support participation in their next Japan Study Tour (2025) was identified, which links well with the initial discussions with Kawasaki.

Council officers are currently working with the University of Sheffield in respect of developing a MBA Internationalisation project, which will focus on identifying market opportunities in Germany, Japan and the USA.

## 5. Africa

### i). Review of Existing Relationships

**Kitwe**, Zambia – Sister City since 1981.

Correspondence dating back to 1978 indicates that a formal relationship with **Kitwe** was established in 1981 with the desire to '*foster good relations between the 2 cities and countries*' and to '*help Zambia in its central role in the struggle against South Africa's Apartheid regime*'. Sheffield and Kitwe became sister cities in 1981.

Records suggest that this relationship has never been particularly active or a high priority. As far back as September 1993, an invitation for a 3-person civic delegation from Sheffield to visit Kitwe on the basis of '*wishing to reactivate the warm relations, which once existed between our two sister cities*' was received. The invitation was subsequently declined on financial grounds.

In February 1995, the Mayor and Town Clerk of Kitwe visited Sheffield. An invitation was extended for a reciprocal visit. This was not formally considered but Labour Group (the then administration) Exec minutes from 31 January 1995 stated that there were no issues with hosting a visit, although a reciprocal visit was not recommended as '*reactivating links between the two cities is not seen as a priority*'.

Previously there was a Sheffield Kitwe Society, although this appears to no longer exist.

Civic links with Kitwe are effectively dormant, however it must be noted that in 2022 Jon McClure, frontman of the band Reverend and the Makers, travelled to Kitwe in as part of a tour of North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in search of understanding countries' histories and cultures through their local music scenes.

The original rationale behind establishing links with Kitwe was in respect of a response to neighbouring South Africa's apartheid regime. Legislation supporting apartheid was repealed in the early 1990s and a new constitution, which enfranchised racial groups, was adopted in 1993. Given that the last formal engagement with Kitwe was over 29 years ago and that there was no desire to strengthen links back in 1995 it is recommended that further enquiries are made in respect of existing community links, prior to a decision being made as to whether this relationship is relinquished.

### ii). Africa - Summary of Activity and Approaches during 2023-24

None.

## 6. Other International 'Friendship Links'

In having undertaken a review of all of Sheffield's known international relationships, brief mentions in historical Cabinet reports have suggested that the City Council may, at one time or another, have had links with locations that include: **Bangalore**, India; **Cheonan**, South Korea; **Malealea**, Lesotho; **Sapporo**, Japan; **Sheffield**, Alabama, USA; **Sheffield**, Tasmania, Australia; and **Stara Zagora**, Bulgaria. However, other

than individual locations being named there are no further written or electronic records that document how these links may have been initiated, what engagement might have entailed, and whether there were any tangible benefits. Links with two of the locations are likely to have been simply down to sharing the same name, but there does not appear to be anyone within the Council that has any detailed knowledge of any of these links. Given that these appear to be dormant links, it is proposed that no further action is taken.

## **7. The Middle East**

### **i). The Middle East – Summary of Approaches from Nablus**

Sheffield City Council does not currently have any formal links with any cities in the Middle East region. An approach to the then Lord Mayor was received from the Mayor of **Nablus** seeking to establish a formal relationship with Sheffield in April 2019. This followed on from a visit by the Sheffield Labour Friends of Palestine to the West Bank in November 2017. The primary objective of the visit to explore possibilities for developing links between Nablus and Sheffield. A connection between The House skate park in Neepsend and the skate park at Asira al-Shalyia provided an initial platform to engage. It is not clear whether any formal response was made to this approach at the time.

Sheffield City Council passed a motion at Full Council on 4 September 2019 recognising Palestine as a state. Follow up correspondence to the approach made in April 2019, was made to the (then) Executive Leader of the Council, in December 2019. A response was issued in January 2020 from the Leader's Office, offering a meeting to consider the request. A date for the meeting was set for 27 March 2020. Unfortunately, the in-person meeting was subsequently cancelled due to England entering the first national COVID-19 Lockdown on 23 March 2020.

COVID-19 restrictions continued in their various guises and the Executive Leader left office. No further correspondence appears to be in existence in respect of rescheduling the meeting when restrictions were lifted.

On 20 February 2023, a public question was presented to Full Council expressing concern over a lack of progress in respect of responding to Nablus' approach, made almost 4 years previously.

On 27 April 2023, a Teams call was held between Council members (consisting of representatives of all 3 main political groups, including the then Leader, Deputy Leader, Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor, Leader of the Green Group, and Cllr Abtisam Mohamed) and representatives of Nablus Municipality (the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and two Directors).

At the time of the meeting, there was no formal Policy in place in respect of responding to approaches to establish new international relationships. It was noted that the Council regularly receives approaches to forge new relationships, enter into specific agreements or host visiting delegations.

It was further determined that there was a need for clear objectives and decision-making criteria for entering into any Twinning / Sister City agreements or developing new less formal international links. To this end, the development of a Partner City Policy was initiated, the principles of which were agreed in November 2023.

Separately, it is worth noting that An-Najah National University represented by the Political Sciences Department at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences signed a cooperation agreement regarding academic exchange and research cooperation with Sheffield Hallam University on 21 June 2022. The signing ceremony took place via video conference.

Palfest Sheffield has sought to build bridges of friendship between Sheffield and Palestine through cultural events beginning with their first festival held in June/July 2022, which culminated in a grand celebration with a mass dabka dance in Barkers Pool. Other cultural activities and events have followed since.

For a variety of reasons including several changes in personnel and a global pandemic, Nablus' approach is almost 5 years ago without any decision having been made. In April 2019 there were no formal procedures in place to assess new approaches. Given that in excess of 20 locations have been identified as having some form of historical link with Sheffield, precedent suggests that in all likelihood, without the circumstances outlined above, the City Council would have established a formal link with Nablus. Unacceptable delays have occurred in this matter and on this basis it is recommended that a Friendship Agreement with Nablus is entered into, the Friendship Agreement to be reviewed after an initial 12-month period.

Notwithstanding this, going forward, now that an agreed Partner City Policy is in place, any new approaches will be subject to formal assessment. Steps will be taken to ensure that assessments are undertaken in a timely manner, although this will depend on information on the other location being readily available, staff availability and with regard to the Strategy & Resources Policy Committee meeting cycle. It is suggested that ordinarily an assessment should take no longer than 3 months to complete from initial approaches through to a Committee decision.