
Visit of Calne Town Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Director of Council Services to Eningen Unter Achalm, Germany (18th – 21st October 2024).

**Written by Calne Town Mayor, Cllr Jon Fisher.
Report also shared with Eningen Partnership Committee and Calne News.**

Overview

Between the 18th and 21st October 2024, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Calne, along with the Director of Council Services Ali Robinson, visited Eningen Unter Achalm, Germany, as part of the longstanding twinning relationship between the two towns. The purpose of the visit was to reinvigorate twinning, discuss ‘twinning with a purpose’, deepen mutual understanding, exchange ideas, and explore opportunities for future collaboration with a particular focus on local governance and public services. Opportunities arose over the visit to also focus on arts, music, and culture.

The visit provided valuable insights into how Eningen operates across several key sectors, including local government, the fire service, kindergartens, schools, community support and libraries. Additionally, discussions took place on revitalising the twinning relationship, with ideas focusing on youth engagement, reciprocal visits, and significantly - a plan for renewing the twinning vows.

Eningen is a small town of approximately 11,000 people.

Key Learning Points

1. Local Government Structure in Eningen Unter Achalm

Eningen Unter Achalm operates under a Bürgermeister (Mayor) system, with the Bürgermeister serving as the head of both the executive and the council. This is very different to Calne. The mayor is elected to an eight-year, full time salaried term. We had detailed discussions with the town’s mayor regarding its structure, responsibilities and funding.

The local council consists of elected representatives who oversee various administrative and community services. There are 18 Councillors, four of whom serve as Deputy Mayors. The council has authority over local primary education (shared with higher tier authorities), urban planning, licencing, cultural services, police, fire and ambulance services and some public works. There were plenty of lessons to learn for Calne even with the context of tighter financial restrictions.

During meetings with the Mayor and officials of Eningen, it became evident that local governance emphasises community participation. Public consultations are a regular feature, and there is strong encouragement for civic engagement from both young and old residents alike.

2. Fire Service Operation

The fire service in Eningen is volunteer-based like Calne's volunteer service. The Feuerwehr Eningen is composed of 90 local residents who volunteer and undergo regular training, ensuring they are prepared for both emergency response and prevention activities. The service is tightly integrated into the community, with regular public safety events, such as fire drills and educational outreach, particularly in schools and kindergartens. The fire service has five fire tenders, one 32 metre ladder truck, one 4X4 cargo truck, one minibus, and a pick up. This contrasts markedly with Calne's one fire tender.

Flooding and water run off from the Achalm mountain were discussed as key fire service pressures. Discussions were held about a potential future exchange programme between the fire fighters/blue light services and first responders from both towns. This would involve mutual learning opportunities, such as sharing best practices on flooding, on fire safety education, on rescue operations and community outreach initiatives.

3. Kindergarten Services and Schools

The Kindergarten in Eningen is funded through the town and offers comprehensive early childhood education. A strong emphasis is placed on outdoor activities, with children regularly engaging in nature walks and forest exploration as part of their curriculum. The education system supports a play-based learning approach, preparing children for formal schooling with a focus on social development and environmental consciousness. We visited the primary school and the town funded music school where we listened to rehearsals for Christmas.

This approach impressed the Calne delegation, prompting a discussion on future reciprocal visits involving students, but also teachers and school administrators to exchange on teaching, education and administration.

4. Library Services

Eningen's library serves as a central hub for learning, culture, and community engagement. The library hosts a wide range of activities, from children's story time, to book clubs and cultural exhibitions, making it a dynamic community space.

The delegation discussed the potential for collaborative projects in the future, particularly involving library staff from both towns.

Discussions and Options for Future Reciprocal Visits

Throughout the visit, discussions centred on broadening the scope of twinning activities through reciprocal visits and exchanges. The following potential areas for future collaboration were identified:

- 1. Youth Engagement (Schools and Youth Projects)** Both towns recognised the importance of involving young people in the twinning relationship. Eningen has an active youth engagement programme we could learn from. Reciprocal visits between school groups or youth project teams were discussed, which would offer students

from both towns opportunities to learn about each other's cultures, languages, and civic responsibilities.

2. **Fire Fighters/Blue Light Services/First Responders** As previously mentioned, there is potential for an exchange programme between the fire fighters/blue light services and first responders of Eningen and Calne. This could be a practical and educational experience, helping both teams to enhance their skills and knowledge in emergency response, community safety outreach, and cross-cultural collaboration.
3. **Teachers and School Administration** An exchange programme for teachers and school administrators was discussed, with a focus on early childhood education, curriculum development, and pedagogical approaches. There was a shared interest in promoting cross-cultural education, with potential collaborations on environmental education, outdoor learning, and creative arts in schools.
4. **Music and Arts** Both towns have vibrant music and arts communities, and there was significant enthusiasm for future collaboration in these fields. Eningen has an annual music and cultural festival, and it was proposed that Calne musicians or artists could be invited to participate. Similarly, Calne could reciprocate by inviting German performers or artists to participate in events such as the Calne Music and Arts Festival or Spring Sing.

Revitalising the Twinning Relationship: Slow, Small Steps

During discussions with the Eningen representatives, there was a mutual agreement to revitalize the twinning relationship through a series of small, manageable initiatives. Both parties acknowledged that recent years have seen a decrease in twinning activities. The plan moving forward is to reinvigorate the twinning partnership through gradual, purposeful actions that foster deeper connections between the two towns.

Key actions to achieve this include:

1. **Focus on Youth and Community Engagement**
Small steps will involve creating more regular exchanges of ideas between schools, youth projects, and community groups. Building on these foundations, both towns aim to bring younger generations into the twinning relationship by involving them in exchanges, cultural projects, and local events that promote understanding and collaboration.
2. **Firefighters/First Responders as Early Participants**
The suggestion to start with an exchange between firefighters and first responders was warmly received. As community-centric groups, this partnership would allow the towns to develop practical, professional ties that also benefit public safety and emergency preparedness. These smaller steps could pave the way for more diverse professional exchanges in the future.
3. **Integration of Twinning into Calne Town Council's New Member Induction in 2025**
A key part of ensuring the twinning relationship thrives is integrating it into the core structure of Calne Town Council. Starting in 2025, new councillors will receive a formal introduction to the twinning programme as part of their induction. This will include education on the historical context of the twinning agreement, the

opportunities it presents for international cooperation, and ways to actively contribute to its success.

4. Formal Renewal of Twinning Vows in 2025

Both towns expressed a desire to formalize the renewal of their twinning partnership. This renewal will be marked by a ceremonial event where new members of the Calne Town Council will formally renew the twinning vows between Calne and Eningen Unter Achalm. This will symbolize a fresh start in the relationship, acknowledging past successes and looking ahead to future collaboration. This can also be widened to include CharlieU, or twin town in France.

5. Budget

Eningen has a large twinning budget (approx. 23,000 Euros) which has grown as activities have diminished. This is not the same for Calne, so a new budget will need to be identified to support ongoing twinning activities. A budget of approx. £2,500 per year will likely be sufficient in the short term.

6. Renewal of twinning as a community activity in Calne

The twinning partnership will be supported but not led by Calne Town Council. The Council will through advertising and community engagement look for a new resident committee. This will likely need to be led by the Town Mayor in the first instance.

This phased approach will help to reignite interest in the twinning relationship by focusing on tangible, small-scale projects that allow both towns to build a strong foundation for ‘twinning with a purpose’.

Conclusion

The visit to Eningen Unter Achalm was a successful step toward renewing and revitalising the twinning relationship between the two towns. The key insights gained on local governance, fire services, education, and library systems offer valuable lessons for Calne. The discussions held on future reciprocal visits, cultural exchanges, and twinning activities outlined a clear path forward, with a focus on gradual, sustainable steps that will engage both communities. With plans for more youth involvement, professional exchanges, and a formal renewal of twinning vows in 2025, the future of the Calne-Eningen twinning relationship looks promising, with a renewed commitment to fostering international friendship and cooperation.

Recommendations

Calne Town Council to advertise and undertake community engagement to recruit a new twinning committee. This work will include reaching out to previous members.

To include twinning information in new member inductions following the 2025 local elections.

Calne Town Council to contact the professional services detailed in this report to gauge their initial interest in professional twinning activities.

To note: A new twinning committee will likely ask for a budget for the years 2025/6, 2026/7, 2027/8 and 2028/9. There is no recommendation on this at present.