

Notes of meeting

2nd China Area Focused Association meeting

22nd April 2014

Wragge & Co, Colmore Row

Attendees:

1. Gordon Harris, Wragge & Co [Chair]
2. Andrew Dunbar, Birmingham City Council [BCC]
3. Shou Shi Harrison, BMET
4. Mike Loftus, News from the Future
5. David Houghton, RBS
6. James Ng, JN Legal
7. Nicola Shipley, Grain [Library of Birmingham]
8. Bill Glew, Aston University
9. Jennifer Jacob, BCC
10. Peter Laybourn, International Synergies
11. Christine Hamilton, UKTI
12. Justin Benson, KPMG

Item 2. Direct Flights Beijing – Birmingham

AD gave an overview of the current achievements of direct flights from Beijing to Birmingham. On 22nd July, the first direct flight from Beijing to Birmingham will arrive at Birmingham Airport.

A first draft of the proposed activities to commemorate the event has been handed out to the board members.

AD invited board members to take part in the reception at the Council House on this date. A total of six charter flights have been planned so far, three from Beijing to Birmingham and three from Birmingham to Beijing. The last flight will leave for Beijing on 5th August.

China Southern, an airline based in Guangzhou, will be operating the flights. United Travel, a travel agency based in Birmingham's Chinatown sells tickets for the flights as well as travel packages.

Preceding the direct flights, Sir Albert Bore had been in Guangzhou to promote the idea of a direct connection to Birmingham. He was supported his aim by the mayor of Guangzhou.

AD said that Birmingham needed to get behind the CSA flights by using the service if possible. If the charter is a success then we are hoping for a scheduled direct flight to Beijing and other Chinese cities in the future.

JN suggested advertising the flights in the Chamber Link magazine and GH proposed a demographic study of where in the UK the Chinese people who are buying tickets for the direct flight are going.

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Item 3. Sir Albert Bore's visit to Guangzhou, wc 24th November 2014

a. Urban Innovation conference

Sir Albert Bore will attend an Urban Innovation conference in Guangzhou in November 2014. It is the second conference of the series. Birmingham will also submit an application for the Guangzhou International Urban Innovation Awards, the winner of which will be announced at the conference.

b. UHB seminar

University Hospital Birmingham is looking at holding a two day seminar to coincide with Sir Albert's visit to Guangzhou.

c. LoB photographic exhibition, 'Reference Works'

The Library of Birmingham will be setting up an exhibition at the library in Guangzhou (which was opened around the same time as the LoB). This is coordinated by NS. The LoB exhibition titled "Reference Works" has already been on display in the gallery at the LoB, at various places outdoors and at Birmingham City University. Both libraries have signed a Memorandum of Understanding committing them to future cultural exchanges and cooperation. Funding for the exhibition at the library in Guangzhou has been secured from Arts Council England as well as the British Council.

AD underlined that the week in Guangzhou should be as inclusive as possible.

GH suggested that as other major cities are close by, the delegation could visit them on unoccupied days.

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The question was raised how and on which day the delegation is going to fly to Guangzhou. No exact flights have been chosen yet but it was argued that the delegation could take a direct flight to Guangzhou from, for example, London, Paris or Frankfurt airport.

Item 4. Update on Aston Villa – Guangzhou Evergrande engagement

AD reported on his visit to Guangzhou with a delegation from Aston Villa. He had joined the CEO of Aston Villa in February this year. Guangzhou Evergrande is one of the most successful football clubs in China. A match between the two teams is agreed in principle but diary commitments by both teams means no date could not be agreed upon for this year. A draft Memorandum of Understanding between the two clubs is being developed that focuses on youth training and facilities management. Aston Villa training squad will fly to Guangzhou at the end of May to undertake some Youth training work and it's hoped the MOU could be signed then.

Item 5. Guangzhou export event – UKTI report

The task to identify people who would like to trade with Guangzhou was identified by CH. AD reported that the municipal government in Guangzhou has offered an import duty relief for goods from the Greater Birmingham Area (this area is defined by the point of departure) shipped to Guangzhou. The importance of obtaining data on who already trades with Guangzhou was identified, but it's recognised that this info is difficult to amass.

DH noted that the University of Birmingham could become involved and PL suggested asking the 2,500 companies which are registered with his company.

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Item 6. Birmingham China Youth Exchange Programme – Mike Loftus, News from the Future

ML reported on the project he is setting up a youth exchange programme. China would pay for travel and accommodation of the youth group (probably 6th formers, age 16-18) coming to Birmingham.

GH asked whether accommodation at student halls of residence of Birmingham universities would be possible as this would be a chance for them to showcase themselves.

ML pointed out that schools in Birmingham would need to be engaged as well and that another option for accommodation would be homestay (which would be less expensive). AD needs to check whether this engagement can be officially connected to Sister City relations, but he also suggested that the Board could support the idea as an entity in itself.

Item 7. British Consul General Chongqing visit on 21st May 2014

Tina Redshaw will be visiting Birmingham on the 21st May and AD is drawing up her schedule. The purpose of the visit is to familiarise TR with Birmingham as a city and investment location.

AD underlined that as many people as possible can be included but time was tight. Aston Uni, Birmingham Airport, International Synergies, Innovation Birmingham and Marketing Birmingham were all already scheduled to meet with her.

Item 8. AOB

a. Future meeting dates

The next meeting date will be decided upon via email.

b. Ambassador/UK event

It was proposed that the China Board find the funds to host a networking drinks reception with either the Chinese Ambassador or a UK govt minister as guest speaker. Details tbc as it's just an idea at present.

Further items raised were the renewal of the long-term contract with the Badminton event (ML), a meeting with Lord Livingston (and the possibility to invite him to a meeting in the future) (PL) as well as the annual national meeting of the Bank of China, which might be held in Birmingham (JN). JN also informed the Board that there are plans for the building in Colmore Row to use a business hub for Chinese firms.