

**Motion – proposed by Rosemary Dartnall, seconded by Kate Halliday.**

**Shrewsbury Town Council meeting, 28 September 2026**

After World War 2, European towns twinned primarily to promote reconciliation and mutual understanding between former enemy nations. By connecting local communities across borders, grassroots leaders hoped to heal the trauma of war, rebuild broken relationships, and prevent future conflict in Europe.

Shrewsbury was formally twinned with Zutphen in the Netherlands from 1977 until 2018, when the partnership ended due to budget constraints and a review of agreements at the Dutch end of the partnership. It's possible Shrewsbury is the only UK county town without a twinning partner.

Bridgnorth is twinned with two partners: one in France, one in Germany. Ludlow, Market Drayton, Wem, Whitchurch, Wellington and Oswestry are variously twinned with towns in France, Italy, Belgium and Wales.

Metropolitan Boroughs have twinning agreements, mostly in Europe but also China, Oman and India. Notably Barnsley is twinned with Horlivka in the Donetsk region of Ukraine and Malvern is linked to Korosten.

Twinning and solidarity partnerships between British towns/cities and Ukrainian communities have grown significantly, especially as a tangible symbol of support following the 2022 Russian invasion. Notable UK-Ukraine twinning links include Edinburgh & Kyiv: Twinned near the end of the Soviet era in 1989, representing one of the earliest major capital-to-capital pairings. Sheffield & Donetsk: Sheffield famously twinned with Stalino (later renamed Donetsk) in 1956 as part of post-WWII peace initiatives, leading to commemorative names like Donetsk Way in Sheffield. Formal relations with Donetsk have been heavily impacted by the prolonged war following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Mila Prysyazhna is resident in Column and Sutton. She is energetic and wants to work with local people to support her home country as it faces extreme hardship. Mila runs a charity called Shropshire Supports Ukraine. Mila has a contact, Andrii Brynchak, a priest from Lviv: a city in the safest part of Ukraine, who moved his family to help those living in Okhtyrka, a town on the Ukraine/Russian border. He has remained there since.

Shrewsbury has not been twinned with another town for eight years. Local people have shown their generosity in recent times, providing much-needed support and supplies for refugees living here at a time of crisis. In return, refugees fleeing war and strife in their home countries have contributed enormously to Shrewsbury through work and culture. With the ongoing war in Ukraine, twinning with a town on the front line seems like a suitable focus for our citizens.

Okhtyrka, in Ukraine's northeastern Sumy Oblast, has a long and proud Cossack history. Cossacks were free warrior communities who defended Ukraine and fought for their freedom and independence. The modern town was founded in 1641 as a wooden fortress and quickly became an important and powerful military and administrative centre.

Centuries later, Okhtyrka, once again became a fortress when it defended itself fiercely from the very first day of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Ukrainian forces and local defenders stopped Russian troops from taking the town. Okhtyrka was strategically important because capturing it would have opened routes deeper into Ukraine, including towards Kyiv. Okhtyrka endured a month of intense fighting, artillery shells and air strikes. Hundreds of buildings and critical infrastructure were damaged or destroyed, and many Ukrainian soldiers and civilians were killed. Despite this, Russian forces never succeeded in occupying Okhtyrka. In recognition of the courage and resilience shown by its defenders and residents, Okhtyrka was awarded the honorary title Hero City of Ukraine in March 2022 and Ukraine's defenders today carry the spirit of the Cossacks — courageous, resilient and determined to defend their land, their people and their freedom.

Like Shrewsbury, Okhtyrka is on the border with another country. Okhtyrka has a Ukrainian population of 87% and 8% Russian: a total population of approx. 47,000. In the future, it may be possible to consider reciprocal visits and exchanges, shared interests and promote mutual understanding in the future, but at present, this proposed twinning will be an act of friendship and support for those in Okhtyrka at a time of unimaginable crisis.

This proposal is about looking at twinning, not as a costly civic commitment between governing bodies, but instead as an initiative that reaches out a hand of friendship to other towns in the hope our citizens will embrace the connection at grassroots. With this in mind, we suggest also making contact with Zutphen to ask whether a new and different twinning arrangement could be restarted between our two towns.

Shrewsbury Town Council resolves to create a cross-party working group to look at the potential for Shrewsbury twinning with Okhtyrka and also to consider how to reconnect with Zutphen.

The working group should be small and focused and it should comprise councillors, Mila and other interested individuals. The working group should work quickly and report back with an update and recommendations to the Policy and Resources Committee, on 7 December 2026.