

Chairman's Report to the BBCA AGM - 22 May 2007

Summary

The last year has again seen the BBCA continue to consolidate its activities in line with the approach agreed at the EGM in September 2003. Much of this last year's efforts have been rather internal to ensure that the new mechanisms we have established can progress independently of the individuals involved. Following on from our last AGM the discussion of the Development Strategy has been documented into an on-going Action Plan. Some of these points may never come to fruition, whilst others will mature due to dedicated individuals progressing them or changing circumstances advancing the need; this document serves as a framework in which to record and develop our activities. Further it became obvious that we needed to rationalise tasks in order to be professional with respect to our Supporters (Sponsors), whom are generously financially assisting our operations. Individual responsibilities have been defined and documented; we have established an annual calendar for our monthly meetings and newsletter production, with its associated deadlines. We have invested in developing a database via the Website to hold all our membership details and status in a single place that can be accessible by all the committee.

People

Firstly I would like to start by thanking **Bob Hull** who stepped down as Chairman last Autumn, due to commitments in the UK; since 2003 Bob has been the single leading figure in ensuring that the BBCA continued. He is a hard act to follow: Bob agreed to continue as Vice Chairman, but due to his UK commitments will now stand down from this position. He will however remain on the conseil. **John Houston** has agreed to become Vice Chairman, and I would also like to take this opportunity to thank John for the excellent work as editor of the (approximately) quarterly newsletter. I am sure you will all agree the recent editions have shown a marked increase in substance, content and appearance. We look forward to this continuing in the next year. We would remind constituent groups that we always welcome articles and photos of general interest. **Janet Middleton** was co-opted as secretary for the committee during the last year, but due to various demands on her time must now stand down. I would like to thank Janet for being most efficient and professional in this role, and we are very sorry that you aren't able to continue. All the conseil have agreed to continue and be put forward to re-election, and I would like to thank them all for their efforts. **Jeremy Dixon** deserves mention for the excellent work on the website, which is very much the flagship of our association, and we will cover this in more detail more later. **Rhoda Grant** has continued as membership secretary and together with husband **Alec** have put in hard work to ensure efficient records and communication for our association by post and now mainly electronically.

We will also later in the meeting propose 3 new members to the committee: **Christina Applebee, Sara Murray** and **Roger Simons**. This brings a very welcome influx of younger people to the conseil.

We would also thank **Martin Hare** who has again continued as the Association's Auditor, and who has duly audited the accounts that will be presented later.

This school year we were involved with the British School of Brussels (BSB) where 6 students volunteered to work with us as part of their CAS programme (Creativity-Action-Service). Thanks to **Jordan Choynowska, Stevie Dennis, Rob Glasby, Lucy Chambers-Harding, Bruno Kronbergs & David Rushmer**. Activities included helping update constituent group website information and producing the newsletter, which we plan to continue again next academic year.

Finally I would like to thank HE Ambassador **Richard Kinchen** for his continued support as our President, and as we understand he will be retiring later this year, pass to him and his wife all best wishes for their future.

Events

In June last year together with the BCCB, we organised a reception for the British community to come together to **celebrate HM The Queen's 80th birthday** at the **rue Ducale Residence** of the UK Permanent Representative to the EU, in the presence of our Honorary President. It was a very successful evening, despite England's opening match in the football World Cup, and out of 280 acceptances, 200 people attended. The Jazz group and the bagpipes added to the excellent atmosphere. The event was generously sponsored by our patron and corporate supporters, as well as by company members of the British Chamber plus a leaving collection from attendees; this meant we were able to make donations of **€2000 each** to the **British Charitable Fund** & the **Community Help Service**.

Due to a clash on dates we have had to move this year's **QBP** at short notice from rue Ducale to **ave Henri Pirenne** in Uccle. We are very indebted to Ambassador Kinchen for making his splend residence available to us – here is hoping this April's splendid weather returns in June for the occasion.

(We have already taken intial steps towards holding the 2008 QBP in the Grand Place with a beating of the retreat by a British Military Band, followed by a reception at the Hotel de Ville and the entire event supporting the Royal British Legion, Brussels branch).

In **December 2006** we also held a successful **Christmas Cocktail** at ave Pirenne, organised again together with the BCCB and also the CBI. Thanks again to the Ambassador for kindly hosting this event.

Last year we had intended to take a stand at the **Welcome Fair** in September but the date clashed with many of us taking children to University so we had to cancel. This year it is in October and Roger Simons plans to help organise the stand, which will provide our Constituent Groups with an excellent opportunity to publicise their activities.

Supporters

As far as Patron Supporters we are delighted to report that **ING** (Expat Financial Services) has this year become our (maximum) 5th Patron joining **Eurostar**, **Eurotunnel**, **Europe Press** and **The Fry Group**. Equally the conseil is pleased that **Norfolkline** has joined **BMI**, **Eurocity**, **Fulcra**, **Houston Consulting Europe**, **Superfast Ferries** and **Stonemanor**, as the Corporate Supporters.

Finance

The financial situation of the Association remains very healthy as will be seen from the accounts. The conseil has operated well within the limits of the budget it proposed to the last AGM. This is obviously very much due to the supporter's donations that we receive. We hope again to be able to make charity donations following the QBP and should any constituent groups have worth-while projects that they consider justifies funding, the conseil would be pleased to review any such proposals.

Membership

The individual/family membership has seen an increase by 10 over the last year. We still find the collection of subscriptions to be over arduous, and we remind all members that non-payment will mean non-attendance at our future events.

Website

In the last month we have been pleased to launch our new look website. The emphasis of the main page is now as an Events Diary, and we are able to provide fuller information on our constituent groups upcoming events. (This we will demonstrate later). If we "google" British and Brussels, our website is top of the list. Statistics show that we continue to have increased numbers of visitors to the BBCA website:

Total visits for 2006: **24,643**

Average visit Dec. 2005: **2,200**

Average visit Dec. 2006: **3,100 (40% increase** from previous year)

Projected visits for 2007 is **38,000 (+/- 54% increase** over 2006; based on the first quarter visits of 9,775)

This is excellent news for both our member groups and also our advertisers.

Conclusions

We also show on the projector, the Action List that came out of last year's AGM within the Constituent Group Forum on discussing the Development Strategy document. Many are still future activities, but some we are already making advances on. As stated in last year's minutes we do not seek to duplicate the work of our constituent groups. However we do feel we can greatly assist in communication between all our members (individual and group) with the mechanisms we have recently established.

The next 12 months will see us again organising the Queens Birthday Party this June and a Christmas Reception in December, both together with the British Chamber of Commerce in Belgium (BCCB). The Chamber would like to invite the BBCA members to more of their activities, especially where events are more social and cultural, rather than business orientated. We recognise there are mutual benefits to be gained by our constituent groups "networking", as we are all experiencing similar problems in running "volunteer" based organisations in the 21st century (e.g website maintenance; difficulty in getting younger volunteers, etc.....).

I would like to thank all our committee members for the support they have given over the last year, in order to move us slowly forward in our mission. We are all very busy people, and those of us involved with other groups realise we have only limited time available. From that point of view we are very open to have other BBCA members join our monthly meetings and go onto form sub-groups to progress any areas of mutual interest.

I will now hand over to HE Ambassador Richard Kinchen for a few words, and again we wish him well for the future.



Stuart Dowsett
Chairman BBCA
22 May 2007