

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

Edition No. 100

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1. How Are We Doing?

Last week's edition of the Thanet & East Kent Insider suggested that an optimist invented the aeroplane and a pessimist the parachute. As we look at the recently released unemployment figures, we conclude that the parachute makers are still in the ascendency but aircraft builders have some cause for satisfaction. We have commented before that monthly statistics do not provide a meaningful guide. It is the year-on-year figures on which we might base investment decisions and all those critical judgments on the state of our economy. Thanet remains burdened with the highest rate of unemployment in Kent at 6.2% against a mere 2.2% in Tunbridge Wells; but, we take heart from learning that the annual rate of decline in Thanet has fallen from the 28.1% listed in last month's data to 18% in the most recent calculation. Similar falls in the annual rates of decline are noted in Kent, down from 37.6% to 15.4%, and the South East, now 35.7% against last month's 13.4%. We are also beginning to see genuine rises in annual employment rates in certain wards. In Thanet, more people are in jobs now than a year ago in Bradstowe, Nethercourt and the Thanet Villages. In the Canterbury District, Barham Downs, Chartham & Stone Street, Seasalter and Sturry North all record annual rises, as do 13 wards in the Ashford District, 5 wards in the Dover District, 7 wards in the Maidstone area, 6 wards in Shepway and 5 wards in Swale. As with all such statistics, caution is necessary when looking at individual data items. For instance, the largest increase in Kent in annual employment is 50% in Weald East in the Ashford District, but this equates to just 13 more people with jobs than at the same time last year; lucky 13 if you are one of them but not indicative of a general trend. Overall, the figures tell us that the slide into unemployment is getting less steep, but employment has not started to rise.

2. Give Us The Hard Facts, Please

If you insist, here they are. We are grateful to the ever-excellent Research & Intelligence department at Kent County Council for providing the following information on unemployment in Kent.

	February 2010		Change since Feb 2010	
	Unemployed	% of workforce	Number	%
Thanet Villages	88	2.4%	-11	-11.1%
Margate Central	411	14.4%	78	23.4%
Ashford	2,060	3.1%	221	12.0%
Canterbury	2,610	2.8%	311	13.5%
Dover	2,608	4.2%	338	14.9%
Maidstone	2,679	3.0%	488	22.3%
Swale	3,385	4.2%	231	7.3%
Thanet	4,482	6.2%	685	18.0%
Kent	37,744	3.8%	5,050	15.4%
South East	161,432	3.2%	19,092	13.4%

3. Be Prepared

It was Robert Baden-Powell who gave the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides their motto of “Be Prepared”. In Scouting For Boys he explained that a good scout is ready, “having thought out beforehand any accident or situation that might occur, so that you know the right thing to do at the right moment, and are willing to do it.” How often have you faced a situation in business which you have not considered, for which you have not prepared and on which you have to spend considerable sums to escape? Chamber member The Fire Strategy Company at Manston has been supplying business continuity advice to UK and Irish companies since 2004. To mark the launch of International Business Continuity Week, 22nd – 26th March 2010, our local experts are offering a unique Business Resilience Pack of coordinated business continuity consultancy services. The strategy and action plans are equally applicable to single site locations or part of an overall corporate approach covering several sites. The team of advisors, trainers and coaches include lead auditors for BS:25999 Business Continuity, IT resilience experts and experienced crisis management specialists. With the availability of year-long support, there has never been a better time to be ready for the unexpected so that when it happens your company survives and flourishes while your competitors may not. Be Prepared with The Fire Strategy Company. For details, telephone 01843 826282 or email enquiries@firestrategy.com with the subject line “Be Prepared Business Continuity”.

4. Au Revoir, Matt

Matt Clarke, outgoing Managing Director of Kent International Airport, left his post last Friday with the good wishes all those business colleagues and associates who have worked with him and supported the successful expansion of the airport and its activities. The Thanet & East Kent Chamber Chief Executive and the Marketing & Membership Officer visited Matt in his office on his last morning to pay their respects and to thank him for the close cooperation with this Chamber. We also learned of the ambitious plans to add further destinations to the route to Edinburgh, due to begin on 27th May this year, and will keep readers informed of developments. Matt will continue as a board member at Manston, more a question of au revoir than goodbye, and we look forward to seeing him from time to time in East Kent on his visits from Wellington, New Zealand.

5. Business Rates

Regular readers will know of the Thanet & East Kent Chamber’s long standing campaign against the iniquitous empty rates legislation and our continuing efforts to reduce the extra costs loaded on to our members through ever-increasing legislation and its associated expense. Members will recall the business breakfast of 22nd September last year, see Thanet & East Kent Insider of 25 September 2009, when with our associates at the Dover District Chamber of Commerce we welcomed the key decision-maker at the Valuation Office Agency who is responsible for setting business rates in East Kent. His announcement of an overall reduction of 5% in the average charge for business rates to East Kent companies from April 2010 was about the best result we could have expected. A rise of 10% for London businesses did not give rise to anxiety for the vast majority of our members. Businesses in East Kent should have now received their business rates advice for charges from 1 April 2010. If you are still unsure about how your charges have been assessed, Chamber members may email manager@tekc.co.uk with the subject line “Business Rates Info” and we will send you the latest official advice together with guidance on what to do if you think you are paying too much. Please take note that whatever rate is set for you this year will be your base rate for the next five years. In fairness to the VOA, we must record that in the “Review of the Valuation Office Agency 2009” published on 10 June 2009, the VOA was roundly praised for its operations and a satisfaction score of 93% was noted for 2008/9. There was a particular tribute for the integrity of the Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rating list, a sharp contrast to the data management history of some other government departments. One of the few quibbles was that “More commercial awareness could benefit both the Agency and its customers”. As the largest business support agency in the area, this is where the Thanet & East Kent Chamber packs a punch in making representations to government departments and securing the best deal for our members.

6. What Are The Facts On Business Rates?

Send for our information pack as listed above and we will tell you. But, in general terms, the rateable value of East Kent business premises will increase and will be based on rental values in April 2008. The 'multiplier' will decrease from 48.5p to 41.1p. Any company with a rateable value from 1 April 2010 of below £18,000 may qualify for small business rate relief.

7. Medway and Water

The Thanet & East Kent Chamber was invited to Medway last Thursday evening to hear the transport plans for the next twenty years from Medway Council. In a fluent presentation, Senior Transport Planner, Mark Johnson, gave a fulsome account of Medway's Transport Plan 3 (TP3) which aims to define the main transport routes which will inform all subsequent development in the area. This has important implications for all East Kent companies. Currently, the Kent County Council proposal for a third Thames crossing to link the A2/M2 with the M11 does not feature prominently in the main Medway strategy which is focussed mainly on reducing current and forecast bottlenecks based on current development plans. Mark was given a hard time by some erudite fans of shipping routes who stated that insufficient attention is given to river and coastal traffic. The word river was apparently mentioned only once in TP2. Their detailed research included a list of the wharves that had been closed on the River Medway and the opportunities for moving non-urgent goods in an environmentally friendly way that have been lost as a result. The growing influence of groups such as Freight By Water, see www.freightbywater.org and South East Marine Association, see <http://www.seama.org>, suggest that Tim Lowry, Peter Ward, Bill Moses, Roy Brooks and other local UK shipping experts are going to have a much bigger influence on government policy in the future than has hitherto been the case.

8. Healthy Mind, Healthy Body

Dave Woodward, Social Care Commissioner for Mental Health at Kent County Council, has written to the Thanet & East Kent Chamber as follows, "I love the Thanet & East Kent Insider and appreciate the emphasis on well-being and emotional health. Your readers might be interested in our website at www.liveitwell.org.uk." We are indeed, Dave, and there are some most useful tips for all employers interested in looking after their staff and getting the best performance as a result. Individuals will also welcome the guidance on healthy eating. We learn that according to research from the University of London, we spent ten times longer preparing our food 60 years ago than we do today.

9. Diary Dates

Dreamland Wakes Up business networking breakfast 24 March 2010, Dover Business Exhibition 10 June 2010, Thanet Business Exhibition, 11 June 2010, Chamber Golf Day at Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club 8 October 2010. For details, email manager @tekc.co.uk or contact Graham Rayner, tel: 07899 873535.

10. Man's Best Friend

We receive many stories from Chamber members. Unable to reveal their hand to their staff and with families none too enthusiastic to share the burden of corporate responsibility, the Chamber is often asked to assist, comment or sometimes just listen. Of course, we welcome such discussions which are always treated as completely confidential. From time to time, we hear anecdotes from members which they are happy for us to relate and this is the case with a trader from East Kent who took his lethargic cocker spaniel to the veterinary surgeon. Concerned that his beloved Oscar was over-eating, he rested in absolute silence as the white-coated professional held Oscar in his arms and examined his teeth and throat. After a dramatic wait of nearly two minutes, the vet announced portentously "I'm sorry. I'm going to have to put him down". "Oh, no", said the devastated owner, "Is it his heart or what?". "No" said the vet, "it's because he's very heavy."

11. Our Sponsors

The Thanet & East Kent Insider is grateful for the support and sponsorship provided by Girlings, Express By Holiday Inn and Adecco. Girlings Solicitors has been managing the managing the legal affairs of commercial and private clients for over a century. Twenty-six partners and one hundred and twenty members of staff ensure a comprehensive range of services from the local offices in Ashford, Canterbury, Folkestone, Herne Bay and Margate. Offices in France and Spain complement specialist departments for charities, individuals and companies. For details, telephone 01843 220274. Express By Holiday took on the daunting task of restoring the former Prospect Inn at Minster. The result is a spectacular hotel that combines the best of Oliver Hill's 1930s design with ultra modern facilities and technological support. Conveniently located for business guests and holiday makers in East Kent, the meeting rooms and 105 bedrooms are available at competitive prices throughout the year. For details, telephone 01843 820250. Adecco is the world's largest HR solutions company offering a comprehensive service of temporary and contract staffing, permanent recruitment, outsourcing, outplacement, career services, training and consulting. Officially designated as a 2009 British Superbrand, Adecco is represented in Thanet and Dover by its Broadstairs office, tel: 01843 609292.



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David Foley
Chief Executive, Thanet & East Kent Chamber Limited
Industrial Professor, Thanet College
Fellow, Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce
Tel: +44 (0) 1843 609289
Fax: +44 (0) 1843 609291
Email: davidfoley@tekc.co.uk
Mobile: +44 (0) 7967 284850

It's happening now, it's happening in Thanet & East Kent.

For details of membership, email admin@tekc.co.uk

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