

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

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1. Supporting Local Business

The Pegwell Bay Hotel was the venue for yesterday's business networking breakfast organised by the Thanet & East Kent Chamber in liaison with the Dover District Chamber of Commerce. The main speaker was Laura Sandys MP who gave an insight into the measures the new government is taking to reduce the deficit and stimulate the economy. Laura gave an assurance that a 1% increase in National Insurance Contributions scheduled for next year would be dropped. Careful not to pre-empt the budget speech due from the Chancellor of the Exchequer at 1230 hrs on Tuesday 22nd June 2010, Laura was nonetheless confident that measures would be introduced to provide "an incentive to support jobs". She also supports the aims of Vince Cable, Secretary of State for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS), to reduce the burden of regulations on companies by abolishing one law every time a new one is introduced. Laura even speculated as to whether two or more could be abolished for every one gained and thereby liberate companies from the "business policemen" and some of the barriers to efficiency that the relentless accumulation of rules has erected. Anyone who heard Vince Cable speak at the Cass Business School on 3rd June 2010 will recall that he began his speech with "Well, the first thing you may have noticed is that I am not Peter Mandelson. For one thing, I am a better dancer." Simply in order to survive, some local companies have been nimbly dancing around the most oppressive rules. It will come as a mighty relief if the burden of regulation is to be officially reduced.

2. Don't All Politicians Just Blame Their Predecessors?

Not all of them. Laura paid a rich tribute to her immediate predecessor, Dr Stephen Ladyman, the former Labour MP for South Thanet. She mentioned how hard Stephen Ladyman had worked when in office, praised his care for his constituency and explained that she has a hard act to follow. As mentioned in the Thanet & East Kent Insider last week, Stephen Ladyman supported this chamber's campaign for the abolition of the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 which has had such a damaging effect on commercial property in the East Kent coastal business community. Ably supported by his wife Janet, he helped many local companies with their trading and supply problems.

3. So Everything Will Be Wonderful From Now On?

Hardly. Laura stated that there is no disguising that there will be some harsh times ahead as the coalition government takes the actions necessary to balance the books. She continued that she is determined not to get involved in a popularity contest in the next few years but to back the measures necessary to restore the nation's finances.

4. That's Alright For Westminster But What About East Kent?

Laura envisaged a new green economy coming to East Kent. "We have the opportunity to be a leader in the field". The imminent completion of Thanet Offshore Windfarm, the world's largest, 12 km off Foreness Point, will be followed by The London Array which will be even bigger. In Laura's estimation, local business could benefit enormously by establishing an eco-economic zone servicing one of the fastest growing sectors in the European and the global economy. She will be lobbying hard for her colleagues in government to ensure that the proposals become a reality. "We will be looking for specific support for this area to develop a green technology base". With this in mind, she intends to put herself forward as a member of the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change.

5. What's This Got To Do With The Price of Eggs?

That's an Americanism. Just because England drew a football match with the USA last week does not mean we should adopt their slang. We tend to say "price of fish?" As it happens, it might have a lot to do with the price of beer. Pubs in East Kent have suffered horribly from the huge tax rises on the price of beer served in pubs and the concomitant heavy discounting of alcoholic drinks sold in supermarkets. Just about everyone in East Kent lives near an establishment that has closed in the last few years, probably never to reopen as the valuable community resource that British pubs uniquely represent. Laura has joined the All Party Parliamentary Committee On Beer. In November 2008, this 400-strong group reported to parliament calling for stern action to halt the closure of our pubs. The committee noted that big stores were offering beer or lager for as little as 90p for four cans while a pint in a pub could cost drinkers seven times as much. An all-party coalition to support our local pubs cannot come soon enough in this part of the world. Janet Dean, the now former Labour MP, co-chaired the parliamentary committee in 2008 and is quoted at the time as criticizing the attempt at social engineering being administered through legislation

inflicted on pubs. As she put it, "There are some extraordinarily committed licensees out there, delivering a remarkable array of activities, but they are labouring against the twin evils of cheap supermarket beer and a regulatory backlash from government seeking to curb alcohol disorder problems not of their making." Chamber members who enjoy a quiet drink after work or at weekends will be looking for the new government to halt the decimation of our pubs with the same vigour that has been recently applied to the protection of urban back gardens.

6. Any Questions, Then?

Chamber members were keen to raise questions of local and general concern. Mike Newell of chamber member Compass Internet Ltd, tel 01843 855114, echoed the anxieties of many small companies by explaining how difficult he was finding it to raise finance. Laura explained that she was looking hard at the workings of the government-backed Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme and urged any company which feels it has been unfairly treated to write to her. Phil Bowman of Acorn Bowman Finance & Investment Management, tel: 01843 609365, raised the matter of the new pension scheme announced last January which replaced the personal account pension. Entitled the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST), the plan was for employers as well as employees to be obliged to contribute to a NEST pension, subject to certain conditions. Laura asked for more details which Phil Bowman will undoubtedly supply. Phil will also ask whether it is worthwhile proceeding with the plan announced last year to cap pension relief to raise £3.4 billion when it will cost £3.5 billion to implement. We have a feeling that Phil may have a good point. Jessica Berry of TNG, tel: 01843 570250, told the packed room of delegates that she was 23 years old. Having cleverly secured everyone's attention, she then said that the major concern of people of her age was finding a local job. So many of her school friends are either unemployed or have been obliged to leave East Kent to find employment elsewhere. To nods of approval, she said that employment should be top of the agenda for young people. Laura agreed fully with the accent on employment and will be working closely with schools to improve the chances of local school-leavers. Phil Thorley of Thorley Taverns, 01843 602010, asked for a tip on imminent changes in VAT but expected that he would not get it. He didn't. He was more successful in raising the profile of the Building Schools for the Future programme. Both as a resident, an employer and a school Governor, Phil viewed the quality of school buildings as being a key driver of improvements in our educational system. Laura explained that education had always been close to her heart. She declared that she will be liaising closely with Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, as well as Kent County Council to secure the best deals for Thanet and Sandwich.

7. What About Thanet College?

Karen Evans of Thanet College Business Services, tel: 01843 605040, asked a question on this very subject. She wanted to know how Further Education was to be supported following the cuts in Train To Gain and the Future Jobs Fund. Regular readers will be aware that the promised funding of £78 million to relocate Thanet College to a new site was suddenly withdrawn in April last year. Our research reveals that a written question was raised in parliament on 15th June 2010, i.e. just three days before the chamber breakfast meeting: "What criteria will be applied to decide on provision of additional capital funding for further education colleges", to which the BIS Minister of State, John Hayes, had replied, "The Chancellor of the Exchequer on the 24 May announced that £50 million of Train to Gain funding would be reallocated to support a range of capital infrastructure projects prioritising those colleges who have not previously benefited significantly from previous further education capital investment.". Laura was obviously well aware of this answer, which is not surprising as she was the MP who had written the question. John Hayes's final words that "The Skills Funding Agency will be inviting colleges to apply shortly with a view to successful projects starting on site as soon as is practicable" suggest that Karen and her team will be warming up their word processors to be first in with a bid. The business networking breakfast finished with an enthusiastic round of applause for the star speaker and a reminder from the chamber Chief Executive of an upcoming visit to the House of Commons, a deadline for advertising in the 2011 chamber diary and mention of a chamber business group visiting Calais

8. Apprenticeships

One of the subjects that seems to unite all the parties in the House of Commons is the importance of apprenticeships. At a regional level, Kent County Council has given unstinting support to increasing the number available and is anxious to publicize the opportunities for Kent companies to participate in the various schemes. The latest information from KCC can be found by telephoning 0800 098 8825 where you will be encouraged to speak to a Kent Apprenticeships adviser who will assist you to find a suitable apprentice. Support is offered during the recruitment process and there are arrangements to find an appropriate training programme. If you prefer to communicate by email, try info@kentapprenticeships.com. You might like to mention that you read about the scheme in the Thanet & East Kent Insider.

9. Chamber Diary 2011

The Thanet & East Kent Chamber Diary 2011 promises to be the definitive business directory that will sit on the desk of company owners, buyers, elected representatives and persons of influence throughout next year. All Chamber members with paid up subscriptions on 15th July 2010 will be featured with basic contact details listed both in alphabetical order and in a classified section by sector. Advertising in this prestigious publication will provide a continuing reminder to potential customers of your presence in the local market. For details of how you can promote your company, email manager@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Chamber Diary 2011 Info" and we will respond promptly

10. House of Commons Visit

The Thanet & East Kent Chamber is arranging a visit to the House of Commons, provisionally scheduled for Tuesday 2 November 2010. The intention is to enjoy a guided tour by the appropriate Member of Parliament and to communicate the views of East Kent companies direct to those who are responsible for making many of the key decisions that regulate our business lives. Further information will follow in later editions of the bulletin.

11. Thanet Business Exhibition

As promised in last week's edition, here is some news on other exhibitors. Jeremy Bailey of Auditel, Ramsgate offers companies the opportunity to examine what they pay to suppliers with a view to reducing costs and increasing margins. Jeremy's services are free of charge and he provides a written report following a health check on your business. Give him a call, tel: 01843 588776 or 07990 561616. Carol Peters Travel is Thanet's premier coach company offering a comprehensive range of excursions, tours and holidays as well as providing transport for corporate travel and theatre trips. This is a family company based in Manston Road, Ramsgate that values customer satisfaction and enjoyment above anything else. Even the company's website offers visitors the opportunity to try their hand at "Games for a rainy day". For information on Carol Peters Travel, telephone 01843 591007. Claridge Upholstery offers quality to last a lifetime. If you require a chesterfield sofa or simply an easy chair this specialist manufacturer can make one to your specification. Visitors to their stand at the Thanet Business Exhibition were treated to a photograph of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh sitting comfortably on a sofa made by Claridge Upholstery. The company offers a combination of quality, price and celebrity endorsement that no chain store can match. Give yourself a treat that your grandchildren will appreciate, eventually. For details, call 01843 290855. ID Matters is a group of companies that offers a rainbow of support in business planning, design, websites, photography, print and embroidery. For details, call Nigel Stevenson at Oast House Media, tel: 01843 369440 or Martin White at Empowered Business tel: 07768 267515. Thanet College prides itself on offering "a dedicated, flexible service to employers with training that can be individually tailored for your business needs." Listening and responding is a key element in the portfolio of programmes available. Thanet College promises to provide "a flexible delivery model to suit employer's business needs". What more can you ask? Give Karen Evans and her team a call and hear how Thanet College can help you, tel: 01843 605036. Mark Hurdman, a partner at Levicks Accountants, was behind his company's stand at the Thanet Business Exhibition to answer questions on tax, national insurance, pensions and a wide variety of financial needs. Offices in Broadstairs, Canterbury and Maidstone ensure that an expert chartered accountant is available to companies throughout East Kent. For details, call Mark at the Broadstairs office, tel: 01843 862716. Quex Park has often featured in these columns, sometimes for its world class collections at the Powell-Cotton Museum, sometimes for the products from its extensive agricultural and farming interests such as the recently launched Quex Rapeseed Oil, "Ideal for Roasting, Stir Fries, Marinades and Dressings" What is not in doubt is that enterprise is at the heart of this fast-moving business which Managing Director, Anthony Curwen, is transforming into a major force in the East Kent business community. For more information on how the 2,000 acres of Quex Park can be of use to you, click on the website at <http://www.quexpark.co.uk> and be surprised at what Jungle Jims, the Falconry Centre, Quex Foods, the Hannah Dining Suite and the many departments of Quex Park can supply.

12. Manston, Flybe & Banana

Our friends at Flybe have received a warm reception from companies following the introduction of daily low cost flights to Edinburgh from Kent International Airport from 27th May 2010. One Chamber member who recently returned from a two-day stay commented on how much easier and more convenient it is to check in at Manston. Whether his reason for visiting Edinburgh was purely for business or for purposes connected to the sampling of single malt whiskies is open to question. We have no reason to doubt his sobriety. We do wonder about his anecdote but we leave it to readers to judge for themselves. "As we took off from Edinburgh, I noticed that the man sitting on my right had a banana in his left ear. I said to him, 'Excuse me, I hope you don't mind me mentioning it but you have a banana in your ear'. He didn't seem to notice and so I said again a little louder, 'Hey, you've got a banana in your ear'. There was still no reaction. By now some other passengers were beginning to take an interest. Not

wishing to be seen to be giving up easily, I breathed in deeply and shouted at the top of my voice, 'Oi mate, you've got a banana in your ear'. There were vague stirrings from my neighbour. After a few seconds and with the whole of the cabin looking on in expectation, he turned around slowly with a benign smile on his face and said mildly, "I'm sorry, you'll have to speak up. I've got a banana in my ear".

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It's happening now, it's happening in Thanet & East Kent. For details of membership, email admin@tekc.co.uk

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