

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

7th August 2010 Issue No.: 119

1. Business Rates

This is a reminder to all companies that pay rates on their business premises. Many Chamber members will recall that we have hosted two meetings with the key-decision-maker at the Valuation Office Agency who has responsibility for the business rates for all commercial premises in East Kent. The Thanet & East Kent Insider of 25th September 2009 gave an account of the basis of the calculation of rates. The VOA analyzed rental values on 1st April 2008 as a guide to fixing the new rates which have been effective since 1st April 2010. The revisions have covered the charges levied on offices, shops, warehouses, factories, storage facilities, garden centres, surgeries, beach huts, public toilets and all commercial premises. The new scale of charges will be used for the next five years. It is important therefore that every company receives a fair assessment. The good news that was announced at our meetings last year was that East Kent companies should on average be required to pay 5% less in 2010/11 than in 2009/10, providing that there have been no material changes to the property in the five-year period to 31 March 2008. In cooperation with the VOA, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber has produced a series of handy guides which are still available to Chamber members when requested by email to manager@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Business Rates Guides". It is only fair to note that the independent "Review of the Valuation Office Agency 2009" published on 10 June 2009 roundly praised its operations and listed a 93% satisfaction score for 2008/9, which comfortably outperformed most other government departments. In the majority of cases that are referred to the Thanet & East Kent Chamber, we look at all the relevant papers and can usually find the reason for any increases. However, in those cases that we do pursue on behalf of members, we can claim a 100% success rate in reducing the charges. Any members concerned that they might be paying too much are advised to email admin@tekc.co.uk and we will contact you promptly to arrange a meeting.

2. The Arts In Ramsgate

Eileen Richford, Technical Officer at Ramsgate Town Council, has contacted the Chamber with news of Ramsgate Arts's "A Summer Squall". This is a series of arts-related events running over the bank holiday weekend of 28th – 30th August 2010. Taking as its three themes Made in Thanet, Green Futures and Heritage, the events promise to bring a lively and commercially aware series of activities to Ramsgate during one of its busiest periods of the year. Many of the attractions are free and visitors, tourists and residents alike will welcome the 28 choices listed in the attractive brochure produced by the Ramsgate Arts voluntary group that has been preparing for the festival for more than a year. Full details are available on the website at <http://www.ramsgatearts.org>. As the Thanet & East Kent Insider has often remarked, history tells us that healthy arts and healthy business go together and we wish Ramsgate Arts every success with their weekend.

3. Water Water Everywhere, But Is It Safe To Drink?

Louise Askew of Thanet District Council has kindly drawn our attention to a workshop on 15th September 2010 at Pfizer Sports & Social Club which will examine the state of groundwater on the Isle of Thanet. Are you aware that the Environmental Agency has assessed the groundwater in Thanet as failing the EU Water Framework Directive due to the presence of hydrocarbons, solvents or nitrates? In its final submission on standards in June 2008, the UK Technical Advisory Group noted the obligation to monitor in freshwater and saltwater sites the presence of the following pollutants: 2,4-dichlorophenol, chromium, cypermethrin, diazinon, dimethoate, linuron, mecoprop, phenol and toluene. Techies who forsake all interest in pubs, sports, literature, films, social interaction and religion will know that 2,4-dichlorophenol is used in the preparation of herbicides. The Environment Agency report "River Basin Management Plan, South East River Basin District Annex A" of December 2009 showed the rivers in East Kent to be officially classified as Moderate or Poor. Even if you prefer watching East Enders to analyzing C₆H₄Cl₂O. 2,4-DCP, you might want to know more about how the polluted water in East Kent is made safe to drink and why we must improve the quality of our groundwater or face inordinately expensive processing costs. There will be presentations at 1015 hrs, 1230 hrs and 1430 hrs. In an exclusive interview with the Thanet & East Kent Insider, organiser Lisa Beeching said she welcomes delegates from the Thanet & East Kent Chamber, the largest business support agency in the area, but requests that interested parties should register by email to lisa.beeching@environmental-agency.gov.uk or by telephone direct to the Environmental Agency at West Malling on 01732 223191. The workshop opens at 0900 hrs and will close at 1600 hrs leaving you just sufficient time before dinner to scuttle home and put some chemical free organic fertilizer on your kitchen garden.

4. Planning & Property Profits

The national press often covers horror stories of planning blight. Councils insensitive to the needs of their local companies can stimulate copy for the media as the frustrations of those entrepreneurs most affected are driven to launching a full broadside attack on the intransigence of officialdom. All of this helps to sell newspapers and amuses those who consider themselves not directly involved. In fact, we are all involved when an enterprise is not allowed to be enterprising and when employment opportunities are reduced or abolished by those in a position to support companies in the best position to grow. With nine out of ten companies in the East Kent coastal business community employing fewer than 25 workers, backing the expansion plans of start up companies probably offers one of the quickest routes to boosting the economy and thereby reducing unemployment. It is refreshing therefore to find that at Thanet District Council we have a regeneration department that communicates regularly with the Thanet & East Kent Chamber, the largest business support agency in Thanet, and is happy to listen to problems that the Chamber raises. Reasonable solutions follow from reasoned arguments. Whereas some planning authorities charge over £1,000 for pre-application planning advice, the Chamber is often able to obtain some guidance at no cost or at a reduced cost to members. Where specialised technical information is required, we are also fortunate in our area to be able to direct enquirers towards property professionals who have the skills and experience to assist in commercial and residential transactions including maintenance, preservation and tenant references. We are pleased to list the following: CJ Maintenance (S.E.) Ltd of Hersden tel: 01227 711500; Cliftonville Tile Centre of Cliftonville tel: 01843 296603; Cooke & Co Estate Agents of Cliftonville tel: 01843 231833; The Door & Window Company Ltd of Broadstairs tel : 01843 864307; Eurocell Buildings Plastics Ltd of Ramsgate tel: 01843 589686; FLS Tenant Referencing Services Ltd of Hersden tel : 01227 719898 ; Fox's Removals & Transport of Margate tel: 01843 294422; Hemispheres Property Consultants of Ramsgate tel: 01843 596663; L & G Mortgage Solutions of Birchington tel: 01843 845600; Margate Harbour Arm Ltd of Margate tel: 07968 209047; Meadowside Chartered Building Consultancy of Birchington tel: 01843 841055; MPG Properties of Ramsgate tel: 01843 596224; Oakwood Homes Estate Agencies Ltd of Margate tel: 01843 221133; OFP Ltd of Sandwich tel: 01304 613298; Pescon (Kent) Ltd of Canterbury tel: 01227 463248; TCB Property Maintenance of Margate tel: 01843 228484; Terence Painter Properties of Broadstairs tel: 01843 866866 and W W Martin (Thanet Ltd) of Ramsgate tel: 01843 591584.

5. US Navy On A Collision Course

Following our recent report of a first class evening spent with the Royal Navy Presentation Team, one Chamber member has sent us an account involving the US Navy exercising off the coast of Newfoundland. We have our doubts about this story but we leave it to our readers to make their own judgment. According to our Chamber member, the following is a transcript of a radio conversation between a ship of the US Navy and the Canadian authorities which was allegedly released into the public domain on 10th October 1995.

“Change your direction 15 degrees to the North to avoid a collision.”

“Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.”

“This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.”

“Any I say again, you divert YOUR course.”

“This is the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Enterprise of 93,284 tons. Divert YOUR course now.”

“And this is a Canadian lighthouse. Your call.”

6. Silly Season

In some Western European countries, certain factories and commercial operations close down entirely for two weeks in August. In many of the 27 members of the European Union, the pace of business is limited as national economies focus on tourism and employees enjoy their annual holiday. Traditionally, the press in this country, local regional and national, produce spurious and sometimes obviously concocted stories in an effort to retain their readership and to maintain the interest of their advertisers. Being a serious publication reporting on business issues of importance, the Thanet & East Kent Insider naturally rises above such behaviour. Readers will be relieved to know that the Loch Ness Monster has not been sighted in the River Stour at Pluck's Gutter nor has a psychic octopus called Paul been found at Quex Park predicting the results of the opening weekend of the Premier League. What has provoked a reaction among the 2,500 key-decision-makers who read the Insider is the item in last week's edition about the pointless, portable and expensive electronic signs on the verges of our local motorways which display edifying messages such as “TAKE EXTRA CARE WHILE TOWING”. We asked for any suggestions to supplement the meagre vocabulary of the Highways Agency. We were not disappointed by the results. Les Posniak of NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent offers the witty: “DO NOT BE DISTRACTED BY IRRELEVANT ROADSIGNS”. Rob Prince of China Gateway International has sent four examples including a photograph of a sign outside one of the buildings at Northampton General Hospital which reads: “Family Planning Advice: Use rear entrance”. Another well-travelled reader recalls visiting India just after Mrs Gandhi had left office. He saw a large hoarding in Madras which

displayed in characters one metre high “Honesty is the Best Policy” and underneath in text of a similar size: “Especially In Income Tax Matters.” Whereas not everyone will follow the instructions at Northampton General Hospital, readers will surely now take extra care with their taxes, even if they already do the same with their caravans.

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