

# Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

## Thanet & East Kent Insider

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### 1. Local Enterprise Partnerships

Last week, Business Secretary Vince Cable announced that the government had approved 24 Local Enterprise Partnerships including one for Kent, Greater Essex and East Sussex. The Department for Business Innovation & Skills maintains that the objective in replacing Regional Development Agencies such as SEEDA with LEPs is all about “Shifting power to local communities and businesses, by creating dynamic local enterprise partnerships”, see <http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/topstories/2010/Oct/local-growth> It is fair to note that Chamber members have not expressed any great enthusiasm for the new organisation, despite the news that before 21 January 2011 LEPs can bid for £1.4 billion of Regional Growth Fund.

### 2. Why The Lethargy?

The East Kent coastal business community has seen a large number of quasi non-governmental organisations appear in the past. Almost inevitably, they are directed by well-meaning senior figures on the public payroll. East Kent is distinct from Mid and West Kent and local companies, particularly the smaller ones, have often claimed that they are underrepresented. While it can be legitimately argued that if the owners of East Kent SMEs would speak up at public meetings, they would feel more involved, the fact is that those who create the wealth are too busy doing it to talk about it to public officials. The two largest business support bodies in the Thanet and Dover districts, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber and the Dover District Chamber of Commerce shout wherever and whenever they can on behalf of the private sector which may be one reason why they are not usually invited to the East Kent LSP or the Kent Economic Board. Is it important? Well, it is if East Kent companies are to get a fair crack of the whip and if public investment is to address directly the concerns of the private sector in East Kent. Some of the issues that members have said need addressing are listed below at items 3 to 6.

### 3. Skills

Just 42.1% of the workforce in Thanet is qualified to NVQ Level 3, two A-levels and above, against 52.6% of the workforce of the South East and 49.3% in the Great Britain. The figure for the Dover District is 43.0%. There are differences in the north and south of the district. The parliamentary constituency of North Thanet can claim a figure of 41.7%. Since 1954, South Thanet has benefited from the presence of what is now the world's second largest pharmaceutical company by revenue, Pfizer. Even so, employees at NVQ Level 3 here are nearly 5% below the South East average at 47.8%. The Dover constituency fares even worse at 40.3%. [Data from NOMIS December 2009 reproduced under the terms of the Click-use License no. C2010000980. All rights reserved]. The solution is surely to support our schools and our training establishments, both public and private. The business engagement initiative of Thanet College must surely pave the way for other public sector bodies to follow suit. Why buy business cards from Northampton when we have some excellent printers and designers around the corner? The success of Profile Development & Training, St John Ambulance, The Fire Strategy Company, TNG Avanta Enterprises, YMCA Training and, more recently, the Turner Contemporary has shown what can be achieved when trainers work closely with local businesses.

### 4. Public Sector

The government informs us that our new LEP should “particularly support communities currently dependent on the public sector”. North Thanet has a whopping 44.4% of its workforce paid directly by government; the figure for the whole district of Thanet is still over one third of all employees at 35.3%. The Dover District fares a little better with 30.3% of its workers on the government payroll in public administration, education and health. The South East average is 25.6%. [NOMIS 2008]. East Kent companies will not take kindly to any public official from Sevenoaks dictating the agenda in the comfortable knowledge that just 20.3% of the workforce around his or her house is suffering directly from public sector budget cuts. The solution is surely for the new Kent, Greater Essex and East Sussex LEP to follow government policy in meeting the challenge presented on its Eastern borders. We are on the periphery, but we are not peripheral. The voice of Thanet & East Kent Chamber members needs to be heard if the LEP is to have credibility in this part of the county.

## 5. Retail

Media reports about Thanet often refer to the depressed retail sector in Margate and trot out the latest figures about empty shops in the High Street. This conveniently ignores the undoubted success of Westwood Cross in retaining some of the retail spend in Thanet. The bigger question that needs to be answered for the East Kent coastal business community as a whole is: "Why do shoppers prefer a round trip of around 100 miles to a former chalk quarry in Greenhithe, rather than pop down the road to their local store?" The ever excellent Analysis and Information Team at Kent County Council informs us that 9% of the floor space in Kent for comparison goods, i.e. clothes, DIY, electrical, toys and so on is located at Bluewater. The solution is surely to revitalise our shops so that they sell the goods shoppers want, at a price they are prepared to pay and with the service that meets or beats the competition. We can learn from the competition and the purveyors of best practice.. The Thanet & East Kent Chamber recently hosted a visitor from this country's most successful retail organisation which justly claims the highest density retail sales in the world. We shall be passing on the advice of our visitor to Chamber members in the retail trade. Hint: It's all about brands.

## 6. On Your Bike For Charity

Once again we are pleased to publicise the success of Robin Evans of Boys & Maughan Solicitors for his efforts in raising an impressive £1,518.70 following his London to Paris cycle ride last September. We add our congratulations to those he has received from the Everyman team at The Institute of Cancer Research. Robin would like us to thank all those who backed him. As he puts it: "A huge thank you from me on behalf of everyone who kindly supported me."

## 7. The World's Focus on Sandwich

New Chamber member Princes Golf Club informs that it will once again host the Final Qualifying for The Open Championship when the world's premier golf tournament returns in 2011 to Prince's near neighbours at the Royal St Georges Golf Club. David Holder, in charge of Sales and Marketing at this prestigious venue, wrote to the Thanet & East Kent Insider with the news that: "It will be a very busy year for Prince's, not only on the Golf course but also with the imminent opening of The Lodge. The Lodge and two adjoining Dormy Houses are idyllically set in Sandwich Bay and offer views across fairways of both Royal St Georges and Princes. The Lodge will be able to sleep up to 80 people in comfort and quality and will be available to Golfers, Local Businesses and Corporate Clients. Local Businesses wishing to book during this important year for Prince's should direct all enquiries to Michael Lovett, General Manager or David Holder, Sales and Marketing Manager. Princes will be pleased to offer all Chamber members preferential rates for bookings in 2011." We can assure David Holder that Chamber members are always happy to be offered a discount. For details, contact David direct, tel: 01304 611118.

## 8. News From Dover

Dame Vera Lynn was the guest earlier this afternoon of the Dover People's Port Trust Limited, see <http://www.peoplesport.org.uk>. She was there to lend her name to the plan to support the purchase of the port for the benefit of the local community. She was quoted as saying: "The port of Dover belongs to us. We want to look after it and we don't want anyone else looking after it or telling us what to do with it." The initiative has important implications for other parts of East Kent. If the Secretary of State for Transport, Philip Hammond, and his department give the £400 million proposal the green light, it could provide a template for other Big Society moves at Ramsgate and Whitstable where the ports are also in public ownership. The current management at Dover Harbour Board is making a vigorous defence of its own proposals which could entail foreign ownership, see <http://www.doverport.co.uk/?page=Media>.

## 9. Healthy Workplace

Our good friends at the NHS have contacted the Thanet & East Kent Insider with news of a free helpline available to companies. We agree with the words that: "Along with the pressures of running a small business, managers or owners are often thrown into the role of dealing with a range of complex health issues, such as coping with an employee who is off work for a long period of time with back pain, or someone who frequently takes days off sick, or trying to support a staff member who wants to keep working but has physical or mental ill health concerns." Aimed solely at small and medium businesses, the free NHS Health for Work Adviceline has been designed very much with the employer in mind. Rather than directing employees straight to their GP, employers and managers can call the adviceline by telephone to 0800 077 88 44 and receive immediate and confidential advice from NHS occupational health professionals on all physical and mental ill-health issues. Companies wishing to take review their health policies might also like to contact the Spencer Wing in Margate, tel: 01843 234555, where experienced professionals are available to offer guidance on a corporate plan that meets the operational needs of your business.

## 10. More About Vera Lynn

Dame Vera Lynn had a No. 1 album last year, ousting the Arctic Monkeys and the re-launched Beatles offerings. She remains hugely popular throughout Britain and the Commonwealth. Beset by delays in France, one Chamber member from Ramsgate telephoned the Thanet & East Kent Insider. After berating the strikers in France, he expressed his regret that he had not been able to return to East Kent in time to see the Forces' Sweetheart as he had hoped and planned. He said that he had met her on two previous occasions and much admired her vitality and close interest in current affairs. He added: "I don't know where and I don't know when but I'm sure we'll meet again some sunny day". We trust that he finally manages to return to Ramsgate on Sunday and will be able to sleep in his own little room again.

## 11. Our Sponsors

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**It's happening now, it's happening in Thanet & East Kent.**  
**For details of membership, email [admin@tekc.co.uk](mailto:admin@tekc.co.uk)**

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