

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

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1. Life After Pfizer

Bookings are pouring into the Chamber for our Business Networking Breakfast scheduled for Friday, 11th March 2011 from 0730 to 0900 hrs at Pfizer Sports & Social Club. A series of five-minute talks from senior figures in the East Kent economy will address the opportunities for business with the overriding theme of "Life After Pfizer". Thanet District Council Leader, Cllr Bob Bayford, will be joined by key decision-makers in the private sector who will advise delegates of commercial opportunities in the East Kent coastal business community. Bookings can be made by email to manager@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Life After Pfizer Breakfast". The event is being organised jointly by the two largest business support organisations in the two districts most affected by the closure of Pfizer in Sandwich, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber and the Dover District Chamber of Commerce.

2. Maritime Sales Opportunity

Following our recent meeting with senior officials from Finland, we have been approached by a Finnish company looking to establish agency arrangements in the UK. Any Chamber member interested in promoting sales of Ballast Water Treatment Systems might like to consider a new opportunity in a market that is expected to increase significantly as new legislation comes into effect. We are advised that the ideal agent will have "good contacts to shipyards and ship owners, will know how to do technical sales/assess suitability and have good references, i.e. represent well recognised brands." The company has built an excellent reputation for its products over the last 30 years and has strong ties to Man Diesel, Rolls Royce, Yanmar and Wärtsilä as well as good links in South Korea and China. Any Chamber member "experienced in mechanical marine components" who would like to know more should email manager@tekc.co.uk copied to admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Finland Agency Enquiry".

3. What's All This About Finland And Ships?

Regular readers will know that it was a Finnish shipyard that built the world's two largest cruise ships, Allure of the Seas and Oasis of the Seas, both listed at 225,282 Gross Tonnage (GT). To give a point of reference as to how big these ships are, it is worth noting that the QE2 is listed at 70,327 GT. A report from November 2010 by the University of Turku shows 500,000 people working "in the sphere of the employment effects of the Finnish Maritime Cluster". Out of a working population of under 2.5 million this is a significant element in the economy of the country. Employment prospects in East Kent would benefit significantly from a greater emphasis on the development of our ports and exploiting our coastline heritage.

4. Fairtrade

"No man is an island entire of itself" wrote John Donne nearly 400 years ago, but then he did not live in Thanet. Although no longer a geographical island, Thanet is a Fairtrade Island and in many respects has led the way in the UK in presenting the case for Fairtrade goods from the undeveloped world. Under the spirited direction of the ever-enthusiastic Tammy Stewart-Jones, Thanet Fairtrade has made remarkable progress since it opened for business in 2005. The support of Thanet District Council and local schools has raised the profile of the organisation in East Kent to the extent that it is expecting a large turnout for its annual tea party next month. Scheduled to begin at 2.00 pm on Sunday, 6th March visitors and supporters will be treated to a Japanese Tea Ceremony and a variety of activities including a Cake Competition. If you are wondering if the Fairtrade bell is tolling for you, go along to Northdown House in Cliftonville on the first Sunday in March. Entrance is free.

5. Travel & Leisure Show

We are grateful to Paul Spree of Canterbury City Council for reminding the Chamber of KoS Media's third Travel and Leisure Show 2011 which is due to take place at Dover Cruise Terminal on Sunday 13th March 2011. Visit

Kent will be out in force and will many Chamber members such as Carol Peters Travel, one of the stars of last year's event. Details are available on the website at <http://www.kentexpo.co.uk/thetravelandleisureshow?req=91>.

6. How Are We Doing?

In previous editions of the Thanet & East Kent Insider, we have reported extensively on unemployment figures. Our view has been consistent. We have advocated the need to look at the annual trend rather than the month-to-month figures which have a tendency to give a misleading impression of the state of our economy at a local, regional and national level. However, we admit to some concern at the figures released last week which show a monthly increase in Thanet unemployment of 5.2%. The annual reduction in the jobless for the district has now fallen to a worryingly modest 2.0%. This compares unfavourably with improvements in Tonbridge & Malling where a 19.9% fall puts this central Kent area just ahead of Sevenoaks which has registered a reduction of 18.0% since January 2010. Of the wards in Thanet, Garlinge residents may have the best justification for increasing their mortgages as the place again tops the improvement statistics in Thanet with an annual fall in unemployment of 16.4%. What worries this Chamber is that Cliftonville West and Margate Central show more monthly increases with unemployment rates of 15.1% and 13.9% respectively; just 3 out of 20 Thanet wards show a monthly fall in unemployment. The figures for East Kent appear below.

	January 2011		Change since January 2010	
	Unemployed	% of workforce	Number	%
Ashford	1,903	2.7%	-120	-5.9%
Canterbury	2,173	2.2%	-383	-15.0%
Dover	2,275	3.5%	-251	-9.9%
Maidstone	2,265	2.4%	-381	-14.4%
Shepway	2,562	4.2%	-189	-6.9%
Swale	3,138	3.7%	-270	-7.9%
Thanet	4,284	5.5%	-88	-2.0%
Kent	33,094	3.1%	-4,234	-11.3%
South East	135,259	2.5%	-27,336	-16.8%
Great Britain	1,445,379	3.7%	-152,476	-9.5%

7. What Can We Do About The Jobless Figures?

We might borrow an epitaph from one social activist more celebrated in North Korea than in Western Europe: "The Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways - The point however is to change it". It is indeed one thing to write about unemployment data, it is quite another to do something about it. One happy circumstance that has arisen from the announcement by Pfizer of the closure of its Sandwich site is a new collective determination to improve transport links to East Kent. Readers will recall that the "Growth Without Gridlock" plan launched by Kent County Council on 1st December 2010 envisioned a Manston Parkway Station to bring our largest regional airport in Kent within a magic 'golden hour' of London. This would require a new line from Ashford. It also makes sense to extend the current high speed link from London St Pancras-Dover to Deal and Sandwich in the expectation that the current average speeds on this track will increase. For HSI to stop at two stations in Folkestone within one mile of each other is wholly unacceptable to residents and business further down the line.

8. What Else Can We Do?

Established Chamber members will know that the Thanet & East Kent Insider reported on the first Maritime Energy Summit which took place in November 2009, see Thanet & East Kent Insider edition no. 84 of 13th November 2009. Organiser Laura Sandys, now MP for South Thanet, said at the time: "It was really important today to show-case Thanet as an area of the country at the cutting edge of wind energy development. We have so much to offer in terms of further developing the sector." This remains just as true today now that Thanet Offshore Windfarm is established and construction of the London Array is under way. A boost to the maritime sector can be expected following any changes in the ownership of the Port of Dover. The Dover People's Port Trust is bidding to purchase Dover Harbour. Championed by local MP, Charlie Elphicke, the business plan envisages considerable support for local business. In an article in the Independent on 9th February 2011 under the headline "Big Society: innovation or slogan?", Phillip Blond makes the case for change and quotes the dividend that local companies could expect. "For example, the business plan provides for £100m to be invested in the port

over the next five years with some £50m directed into local regeneration – something no wholly private bidder would offer.” Ramsgate and Whitstable could be natural candidates to follow suit if a successful template can be established in Dover.

9. What About the Empty Rates Campaign?

Recent discussions with property specialists in East Kent confirm that the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 remains a serious disincentive to inward investment. The Thanet & East Kent Chamber is continuing its campaign to have this pernicious law repealed in its entirety. Often described as ‘the empty rates legislation’, the Act was introduced in April 2008 and was roundly condemned at the time by senior figures in East Kent of all political parties. Here is a selection of the texts we received at the Chamber following its introduction: *“Empty rates make it too costly to continue to provide cheaper older property - it simply makes more economic sense to demolish these buildings altogether, thereby actually reducing the amount of lower cost space available to businesses - the reverse of what was supposedly intended”* Ian Coull, Chief Executive, SEGRO. Note: SEGRO develops and managed £5.1 billion of property assets, encompassing around five million sq m of business space in ten countries. *“This has stopped us developing new centres in England & Wales”* Tom Stokes, Managing Director, Evans Easyspace. Note: Evans Easyspace is the UK’s leading provider of new, quality small business units specifically catering for the small and medium sized enterprise (SME) market. The company owns 32 units at Lakesview, Hersden. *“Unless they have a pre-arranged tenant, private property developers are shelving plans to build or refurbish the offices, warehouses and factories that the country sorely needs”* Alan Caldicott, Group Property Manager, PolarKold Ltd. Note: PolarKold is part of a group with extensive property interests that include areas of Margate Industrial Estate. *“Now if a building were to go beyond the 6 month period and have empty rates put on them we would demolish it immediately”* Sarah London, Manager, Ramac Holdings. We have many more such declarations. One potential investor informed the Chamber last week that he would love to invest in Thanet, but as long as the empty rates legislation remains, Estonia is a much more attractive proposition as no such law exists there.

10. Cat Or Catastrophe

Of the most popular five stories on the BBC News website last Wednesday, two concerned the new cat installed at 10 Downing Street. We learned that Larry, the latest in a line of unelected incumbents, is “a good ratter” and a worthy successor to Wilberforce, Humphrey and Sybil. At a time when Egypt has just experienced a revolution, Libyans are challenging the rule of Colonel Gaddafi and large areas of the Middle East, on which the oil hungry West depends, are facing unprecedented threats to their stability, it is perhaps comforting to note that as a nation we find the domestic cat to be of such prime importance in the life of our nation. Perhaps if Pfizer researched medicines for cats rather than for humans, we locals might take to the streets in protest. As it is, we confine ourselves to law-abiding dialogue through the media and our local politicians. Makes you think, doesn’t it?

11. No Entry Without A Tie

If, as is believed in some quarters in Westminster, an increase in tourism is the main answer to boosting employment in the East Kent coastal business community, then of course providing a warm welcome should be very much part of every local citizen’s duty. One Chamber member reports that his staff did their very best with one late night reveller who appeared at the door of the company’s night club. As our good-natured Chamber member put it in a call to the Chamber last week: “They were only doing what I told them. All our bouncers know that we are a quality establishment. No blokes are admitted without a tie. They had one problem with a local solicitor. We know him well and he is a bit of lad, but the staff called me down to see him. It doesn’t pay to fall out with the legals, if you see what I mean. Anyway, he were at the door and obviously on a bender, but no tie. I says to him. ‘Sorry, but rules is rules.’ He says: “No worries, I’ve got something in the car.’ He comes back five minutes later with a pair of jump leads around his neck. I’m not kidding, a pair of jump leads with bright brass clamps. He says: ‘Go on. You know me. Let me in.’ I says, ‘Ok just this once, but don’t start anything.’” We have our doubts about this story, but readers must judge for themselves.

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

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

Thanet & East Kent Chamber Limited

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