

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

26th March 2011 Issue No.: 149

1. Visit of Minister For Business And Enterprise

Chamber member Salmestone Grange in Margate kindly provided the setting yesterday for the visit of Mark Prisk MP, Minister for Business and Enterprise. Chamber Co-Presidents Laura Sandys MP and Roger Gale MP opened the proceedings with a warm welcome to the Minister. Mark Prisk is widely viewed as being a rising star in the government. He sits alongside Vince Cable and David Willetts in making the key decisions that influence every company in the UK. Mark's particular brief includes the following sectors; small business, enterprise and access to finance, low carbon economy, low emission vehicles, electronics, cyber security, competitiveness and economic growth, deregulation and better regulation, regional and local economic development, Grants for Business Investment, business support, Olympic legacy and export licensing. As with visits from senior politicians of all parties, the details of the discussions over lunch must remain confidential but Chamber members will be pleased to know that their views were represented powerfully and at length. At this Chamber, we do not sit in the back bar of our local pub and complain. We talk to the people who can make a difference and tell them what our members say they need to make their businesses succeed and flourish.

2. Eric Pickles Responds To The Chamber On The BBC

The increasingly close liaison with Dover District Chamber of Commerce has given the Thanet & East Kent Chamber a loud voice on local, regional and national policy. This means that the shared views and interests of our members now have a wider audience and can reach the ears of those in a position to make the necessary changes. Thanks to our good friends at the BBC, last Thursday Eric Pickles joined a long list of senior politicians to listen to the views of our members that the East Kent coastal community is not like Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks. To hear the full interview and firstly some more details about Dover People's Port, click on http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00fg9nr/Julia_George_24_03_2011/ and fast forward to 2:32:20. You will note that at 2:42:30 Eric Pickles responds to the Chamber's comments by saying that Kent has "a very good chance" of being included in the next round of Enterprise Zones. The recording is available on-line for another five days.

3. Better Transport Links

The BBC was also the communication channel for our plea for better transport links. Yesterday, we were asked for our opinion on the temporary extension of the High Speed rail link to Sandwich to coincide with the Open Championship at Royal St George's Golf Club next July. We thought that a high speed service for a few days once every ten years does not meet our business needs. A timetable showing a 135 minute train journey from Sandwich to St Pancras does not inspire investment or encourage business expansion. This campaign issue is a crucial element in our appeal to government to include Thanet and Sandwich in the next round of Enterprise Zones. Members may be assured that the campaign will continue. To hear the interview, click on http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00fh1d8/Breakfast_with_John_Warnett_and_Clare_McDonnell_25_03_2011/ and fast forward to 1:42:40. This recording is available for the next six days.

4. Co-operative Community Funding

We are grateful to Cllr Clive Hart for drawing our attention to the funding available to voluntary groups and charities from the Co-operative Community Funding Website. Nominations should be received by 15th April 2011. Voting takes place in the period from 1st June to 31st July 2011. There is a total of £80,000 in the pot and winners can expect to receive a grant of £2,000. Successful candidates are likely to come from: "a club, community group or self-help group that carries out positive work in the community." The core values of the Cooperative Members are listed as A. Self-help, helping people to help themselves. B. Self-responsibility, taking responsibility for and answering to our own actions C. Equity, a way that is fair and unbiased and D. Solidarity, which requires no further explanation especially if you are Polish. Full details are available on the website at www.co-operative.coop/bigcommunityvote

5. Printing Success

Following the recent demise of one large printing company not a member of this Chamber, we are pleased to report the continuing success of all our members in the printing sector. That must mean something, mustn't it? This week we report on Lanes (South East) Ltd at Pysons Road Industrial Estate in Broadstairs. A well established company with a lithographic printing capacity up to B1, Lanes is pleased to remind readers that it has a design studio and a mailing house facility. Specialist finishing includes hot block foiling and spot UV. Lanes is FSC certified which readers will be relieved to know that in this case stands for the Forestry Stewardship Council and not a Fellow of the Society of Chiropractors, although you have to be pretty handy on your feet around the printing presses. For more details about how Lanes can help you, give Beverly Blackburn a call, tel: 01843 861314 or email beverly@lanesprinters.co.uk. Other printers in our membership include Media House UK of Margate tel: 01843 229111, Monster Marketing of Ramsgate tel: 01843 853311, Oyster Press of Whitstable tel: 01227 772605, R G Print of Whitstable tel: 01227 264663, Seaward Colour Copy of Broadstairs tel: 01843 602557 and Sharp Printing Services of Broadstairs tel: 01843b 600123.

6. News From Dover

A referendum on the Port of Dover took place last Wednesday. The turnout of 25% was comfortably above the previous figure at last December's elections. The result was a "Yes" vote for the Dover People's Port Trust's initiative with 97.8% in favour, a majority of which any democratically elected representative would have been proud. It seems that Dame Vera Lynn is not the only person in favour of the port remaining in British ownership. The government will doubtlessly reflect on the will of the people before announcing whether it will accept the current management's proposals to privatize the port and thus allow a sale to foreign buyers.

7. Haven't You Forgotten The Budget?

The problem is that last week, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber did not get to speak to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We apologize to our members for this gross dereliction of duty but content ourselves in the knowledge that the views of the Thanet & East Kent Chamber will be communicated to him. Among the comments on the budget that we have received from local businesses are: "The government is going in the right direction given the limited room for manoeuvre"; "Any measure that reduces the cost of fuel is beneficial to UK companies"; "These measures will help make the UK more attractive as a place to do business and should reduce delays in bringing development projects to fruition." Referring to East Kent not being included in an economic stimulus package, we heard: "We hope that this will change in the next round of Enterprise Zones". Guarded approval is probably a fair description of the reaction to date. There remains much concern over the rise in fuel prices in the last two years. Although a 1p a litre reduction is welcome, it will make little difference to the steep transport cost increases that almost every local business has faced.

8. What About Manufacturing?

The promotion of UK manufacturing will help those who get their hands dirty making things that you can see, touch, smell and sell rather than those who simply click keyboards in remote big city offices. Around 10% of Thanet's workforce depends on manufacturing. An advantageous exchange rate with the euro and some returning confidence from retailers may explain the many reports we are receiving from Human Resources departments and employment agencies that there has been a surge in demand for workers in local manufacturing companies. If the measures announced in the budget help to sustain the upturn in manufacturing, there will be few complaints in the East Kent coastal business community.

9. What About Business Prospects In General?

It is certainly worth reminding ourselves from time to time that the only money that the public sector has to spend is what it confiscates from the private sector. If we want top class public services, a proud NHS, armed services that keep us safe in our beds and the schools and colleges to educate our children, we must create the conditions for UK business to grow and we must remove the obstacles that stop them. The announcement in the budget of reduced regulations and simplified planning procedures will be music to the ears of local entrepreneurs who remember very well that the Heathrow Terminal 5 planning inquiry cost £80m, produced 100,000 pages of transcripts and took eight years from the first application to government approval, definitely not a recipe for economic renewal.

10. Why is East Kent Different?

One ward in Margate has an unemployment rate at six times the South East average. That is different. Few people in East Kent could have welcomed the announcement by Pfizer that it will leave its Sandwich site by December 2012, but in a curious way it has thrown a government spotlight on our corner of East Kent that could illuminate some problems and do some good in the longer term. The Dover and Thanet districts have a job to do in convincing the government that we are special. This means putting forward the right case to bring some much needed investment in our transport infrastructure. A Parkway Station at Manston, reducing the rail journey times to Dover, Deal, Sandwich and Margate and a solution to Operation Stack have now moved up the agenda. We trust that by the time of next year's budget, we will be reporting that the benefits bill in Thanet is below the current £180 million, Manston Airport is connected to a Northern European hub, construction of a Parkway station using local suppliers has begun and Operation Stack is just an unpleasant memory.

11. There's Cuts And There's Cuts

In this era of concentrated cost savings, we were pleased to hear from one Chamber member who recalled that as a teenager he had a discussion with his father which went something along the lines of the following: "Dad, look if the household budget is a little strained this week, don't worry about the bus fare into town. I'll walk. You can keep the money and get yourself a beer tonight." His father replied: "If you not taking the bus means I can have a beer, why don't you not take a taxi and then I can drink all evening?".

12. Our Sponsors

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David Foley
Chief Executive, Thanet & East Kent Chamber Limited
Tel: +44 (0) 1843 609289
Email: davidfoley@tekcc.co.uk
Mobile: +44 (0) 7967 284850

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

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