



Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

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1. Preparing For Profit

The Chamber Business Networking Breakfast last Thursday brought together five enlightened speakers who represented all that is best in forward looking policy in the public sector. On a day when many public sector workers stayed at home due to an industrial dispute with the government, our speakers proved their business-sensitive credentials with inspiring accounts of the how their organisations were working with local companies in support of the East Kent economy. The speakers received a warm and heartfelt welcome from the packed house which had gathered in the delightful setting of the Walpole Bay Hotel at 7.30 am to hear Penelope Kimber, head of business relations at Thanet College; Mathew Bartlett, head of Dover Grammar School for Girls; Ian Johnson, Head of the Marlowe Academy; Andy Somers, head of Hartsdown Technology College and Cllr Simon Moores, cabinet member at Thanet District Council. The breakfast meeting was organised by the Thanet & East Kent Chamber and the Dover District Chambers of Commerce, the leading business support bodies in the East Kent coastal business community.

2. What Did Penelope Kimber Say?

Following a series of meeting between the Chamber and senior management at Thanet College, Penelope confirmed the change of policy that in the last three consecutive quarters had seen a switch towards local suppliers of non-salary discretionary spending amounting to £700,000. This was greeted with a spontaneous round of applause from Chamber members who were delighted that the local economy has received such a significant boost and even more delighted that their own company is a potential supplier of goods and services. Penelope reminded delegates that since the arrival of a new Principal in 2010, Thanet College had responded directly to the training problems of the business community. In May this year, Thanet College opened a purpose-built business centre at Manston, the new home of the training division now known as Training Solutions. Penelope also took advantage of the presence of the cream of local industry to launch the 2011 Apprenticeship programme which is jointly branded with the Chamber. Following the award of £60,000, Thanet College is offering 30 companies the opportunity to have a 50% subsidy towards the wages of an apprentice. In practical terms, the cost of accepting a qualifying apprentice from Thanet College would be around £50 per week, plus a training fee of £500 which would be reduced to £350 if the company commits before the end of July 2011. For details of this and all other business courses at Thanet College, email training.solutions@thanet.ac.uk or telephone 01843 821580.

3. What Did Mathew Bartlett Say?

Pre-conceived ideas about headmasters of the past who live in a dream world divorced from commercial realities where a fixation on who gives out the pencils on Monday morning takes precedence over commercial realities were firmly despatched by the head of Dover Grammar School for Girls. Delivering a presentation that owed more to Bill Gates than to Mr Chips, our Mathew gave a first class account of what a business-like approach to education should be with clear objectives, a shared vision and ambitious planning. But then, Mathew Bartlett started out in life as an accountant at Price Waterhouse and so does know a thing or two about how to run a company and inspire a workforce. He said that reconciling best business practice with best

educational practice means being unafraid to think of pupils as customers. He is very much in favour of a relentless focus on the customer. Accompanying his upbeat message was a diamond-hard refusal to succumb to a passive acceptance of deprivation and low achievement. Whatever the economic statistics declare, Mathew said that at his school “We do not accept that we are deprived”. He and his staff promote “an aspiration agenda” where every pupil is encouraged to aim high. He sees this as a “moral imperative”. Raising the self-esteem of his pupils has promoted academic success, innovation and a happy, more positive atmosphere in and out of school. As Mathew put it: “We are proud of our community and our community is proud of us”. He invited any chamber members or interested parties to visit the school on its Open Day on 18th July 2011. More details are available from the website at <http://dggs.kent.sch.uk/#/open-house-at-dggs/4551566674>

4. What Did Ian Johnson Say?

In a beautifully crafted speech delivered without hesitation, deviation or repetition, Ian Johnson gave an account of his own experiences at school and how he has seen education “from both sides of the fence”. He noted that in many aspects of our educational system “we are getting it badly wrong”. Although successful academically as a schoolboy himself, he recognised that his schooling did not prepare him for the outside world. Ian may have had in mind what Adam Smith wrote in 1776, “The greater part of what is taught in schools and universities, however, does not seem to be the most proper preparation for that business”. Ian remembers his first vacation job as a sixth former on a wobbly bicycle delivering letters. He also worked in a garage. Doubtlessly showing the same drive that propelled him to the top of his profession at the Marlowe Academy, he was soon organising the payroll and looking after part-time staff. He asked himself the question: “Did my schooling prepare me for these jobs?” His answer was: “Not really”. The sports programme certainly met his needs, but the academic work did not adequately prepare him for the adult world which he declared “is about other things”. At the Marlowe Academy, he and his staff have taken these lessons to heart. He is keen to consider at all times the future needs and careers of his students including “those who do not have a family background”. He has introduced breakfast clubs, abolished school bells and established a working day from 0830 hrs to 1700 hrs. The Marlowe Academy now offers a 21st century preparation for career-minded students who may not always benefit from a stable family background. Living proof that the Marlowe Academy is business-friendly is the presence next door of the Marlowe Innovation Centre, a breeding ground for start-up companies and the venue of the Thanet & East Kent Chamber’s July Business Advice Clinic. Sharing premises on site with the students is 107.8 Academy FM, the community radio station that broadcasts 24 hrs a day to Thanet, providing the perfect professional training ground for the next generation of Tony Blackburns and Blue Peter presenters. All Marlowe Academy staff and tenants are offered a free lunch which ensures that students learn the social graces required to be at ease in the company of their seniors. We suspect that the adult diners learn a thing or two about communicating as well. More details about the Marlowe Academy can be found on the website at www.marloweacademy.co.uk.

5. What Did Andy Somers Say?

Arriving in Thanet for his interview five years previously, Andy had been struck by the beauty of the Thanet shore line which he said “filled me with inspiration”. Less inspiring were the initial downbeat comments of his pupils and many others in and around Hartsdown who mumbled: “It used to be good but ...” followed by a litany of criticisms and complaints. In true entrepreneurship style, Andy set about changing the perceptions of his product. Through a series of partnerships and collaborations, he focused on the positives. He introduced a board game, jointly developed with Paramount Education, which focused the attention of students on how a school functions. Before long, the school and the community were starting to notice the rise in expectations. What had once been problems areas were now sources of pride that eventually became unique sales points for the school. Having previously worked in London with students from Harringay and Camden, Andy was familiar with the difficulties associated with multi-ethnic schooling. He addressed the root causes of many problems through a programme of enlightenment that called on pioneering methods and an innovative response to the challenges. Rather than treat the multitude of Roma students simply as under-performing native-speakers, he had another idea. Many of them came from backgrounds where musicianship was highly prized and taught within the family from an early age. The Roma band is now an established feature of Hartsdown and receives rave reviews for its public performances. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Production and quality control data that would bring a big smile to even the dourest Managing Director have shown that Andy and his team have been astoundingly successful. In 2008, the government established a threshold that set a target in 2011 for 30% of secondary school students to obtain a minimum of 5 GCSEs which must include Maths and English. The improvements at Hartsdown ensured that it passed with 32% in 2009 and 43% in 2010. Andy Somers expects the sharp rise to continue this year, a remarkable record for a school that is not blessed with new buildings or facilities, but can justly claim to be “Kent’s most improved school”.

6. What Did Cllr Simon Moores Say?

Simon Moores was introduced as a high flier, an apt description for this Thanet District Councillor who combines his duties as Managing Director of Zentelligence with his work as a pilot and a director of an aerial advertising firm. He outlined some of the recent changes at Thanet District Council. A new, slim cabinet of five senior decision-makers should accelerate the processing of business issues. He recalled with affection his boyhood days at the Charles Dickens school and is happy to be a Thanet boy. He forecast a bright future for the district. He emphasized the importance of embracing new technology and took great satisfaction from the recent announcement by BT that it was locating a superfast broadband hub at Westgate. He declared that broadband is an “innovation multiplier” and that its arrival could “pave the way for a Google or a Microsoft” to set up shop in Thanet. Although he carries many responsibilities in cabinet including Allotments, Asset Disposal, Commercial Property, Planning Applications and Waste and Recycling, Simon admitted that “Technology is my portfolio”. Simon understands the importance of education and skills training and also recognises that the council must work closely with business, tourism promoters and foreign contacts if we are to make the most of the opportunities to boost the economy in Thanet.

7. Bank of England at University of Kent

Kent Business School at the University of Kent was the setting for a speech yesterday lunchtime by Spencer Dale, Chief Economist and Executive Director at the Bank of England. On such occasions the content of the speech and subsequent dialogue remain confidential. Such is the authority that the BoE carries with the world's financial institutions that a misplaced quotation or a betrayal of confidence could have a multiplier effect on our own economy or that of an overseas neighbour. Thus it was that with no microphones present and luxuriating in the absence of any professional journalists, a small band of business leaders heard the latest thinking on inflation, interest rates, household spending, commodity prices, oil futures and the performance of the UK's competitors. Readers will be aware that bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on which Spencer Dale sits is tasked with reducing CPI inflation to 2%. The latest published BoE Inflation Report of May 2011 stated that inflation is likely to rise further before the end of the year. Large elements in the rises are energy costs, commodity price increases and the effect of a rise in VAT last January. The official Inflation Report states: "Inflation is likely to fall through 2012 into 2013 as the impact of external price pressures and the increase in VAT dissipates and some downward pressure from a spare capacity persists. But the timing and extent of that decline in inflation are both highly uncertain". Businesses like certainty and it seems that this commodity is also in short supply. With our sister Chamber in Dover, we will shortly be meeting a senior official from the Bank of England. We will use the occasion to highlight particular issues that members have raised about our local economy, as detailed in last week's edition of the Thanet & East Kent Insider.

8. Business Advice Clinic

Last Friday's Business Advice Clinic was held at the Marlowe Innovation Centre where the Chamber's senior team received a warm welcome. Wi-Fi access with hotspots covering all the meeting rooms makes this venue a comfortable location for formal business meetings. As with previous sessions, the Chamber welcomed a mixture of start-ups and established companies in a series of short consultations which began at 0900 hrs and finished in the middle of the afternoon. Several of the start-up companies were looking for finance. Although access to loans is undoubtedly getting a little easier, there are thresholds above which personal guarantees from the company's directors are usually required. One of our advisors is a former high street bank manager who is able to give chapter and verse on current lending policy guidelines. Following recent discussions with Lloyds TSB, we are looking to establish a fast track scheme for local companies of all sizes. The Chamber is assisting many former and about to be former Pfizer staff who are forming new companies to be based in Thanet. We are confident that some Chamber members will be receiving enquiries from them shortly for their products and services. Business Advice Clinics are offered free of charge and take place on the first Friday of the month in Broadstairs and the first Wednesday of the month in Dover. Bookings can be made by email to manager@tekc.co.uk or by telephone to 01843 609289.

9. Enterprise Zone Risk To Thanet

We can report further evidence of established companies not renewing their leases for property in Thanet pending the government's announcement regarding the next round of Enterprise Zones. Should it be announced that an EZ will be confined to the former Pfizer site in the Dover District, whatever the regulations might intend, there is inevitably a risk that some established Thanet companies will gravitate out of the district towards the incentivised site. The owners of business premises in Thanet and in the deprived wards in the Dover District would also find it almost impossible to match the central government's bag of goodies being assembled to attract start-ups to the newly named Discovery Park.. A further depression on Kent's most deprived areas could result. Much will depend on the extent of any EZ boundaries

10. Wine In Thanet

Delegates at the Chamber's Business Networking breakfast last Thursday were invited to return to the Walpole Bay Hotel for a wine tasting the following afternoon. The Thanet & East Kent Chamber had arranged a visit by Jean-Luc Longère of Domaine Longère who brought to the session bottles of his own, red, white, rosé and sparkling wines as well as those of two of his neighbouring vineyards from the heart of the Beaujolais country near Lyon. Jean-Luc explained that his rosé is an ideal summer drink. With an alcohol content of just 8%, it is popular with adult drinkers of all ages who appreciate the light and slightly sweet taste. Explaining the details of the wine-making process, he said that in the Beaujolais vines are picked by hand with no use of machines for harvesting. This is partly because of the steep slopes on the hills around Le Perréon and Vaux, but it also helps to preserve the traditional qualities of the wine; something about which Jean-Luc is only too aware. He represents the sixth generation of his family to make Beaujolais, which was described by the famous French chef Paul Bocuse as: "the king of small wines". There was nothing small about the red wines on offer which have a full fruity flavour typical of the gamay grape. Jean-Luc also produces a chardonnay and in cooperation with his neighbour, a sparkling rosé in the champagne style that retails at a fraction of the cost of its more celebrated competitor. Jean-Luc explained that decreasing the length of time the grapes are kept in the vat reduces the tannin in the wine and thus gives a lighter flavour. Jean Luc produces about 40,000 bottles in total each year. Mick Curtis, proprietor of the rapidly expanding Drinks Warehouse UK Ltd of Westwood Business Park, noted that rosé is increasing in popularity. He also said that in East Kent sales of alcoholic drinks peak at Easter time. Subject to satisfactory negotiations, Mick is keen to include Jean-Luc's wines in his new catalogue to be published shortly. He also envisages visiting the vineyard himself to ensure his customers have the best possible price/quality combination. Jane Bishop, proprietor of the Walpole Bay Hotel, was much taken with the labelling of the bottles. Her keen eye for marketing saw the potential in the attractive modern labelling on all of the bottles except three. Both Mick and Jane are considering the possibilities of their own labels. Afterwards, the visitors enjoyed a tour of the Walpole Bay Hotel's unique collection of artefacts and decorated napkins which now include a contribution from Tracy Emin. The Chamber looks forward to further visits from French companies and will keep members fully informed as we promote more cross-channel trading with our nearest continental neighbours.

11. Oh Goody, The Train's Late

There may not be unconfined joy when a train is late, but now we have a delay-repay system in operation on Southeastern that might reduce anxiety for some about delays on our rail network and perhaps even persuade the odd scrooge to hope that it happens. A 29-minute delay will help neither man nor beast. But, from yesterday, a simple compensation special has entered our stations. If your train is late by a minimum of 30 minutes, you can expect to receive repayment of 50% of your ticket cost. If the delay is an hour or more, the whole price of your ticket is refunded. Southeastern has faced considerable criticism from commuters in the past year. Publishing a punctuality rate of 82.04% for 2010 train services did not endear the rail operator to its many season ticket holders in East Kent as a figure below 85% would have triggered compensation payments. Our own Chamber Co-President, Roger Gale MP, is quoted in the influential TrainWatch forum as saying: "This scheme is worse than useless. They are talking about a delay of half an hour on a journey of one-and-half-hours. That's a huge percentage of the journey." Roger has made a good point. We also understand that repayments are in the form of vouchers which may be used to purchase train and season tickets. That's hardly sufficient for the extra gin and tonic you might feel you need and deserve after your long wait at the station.

12. Turkish Governors

Any company wishing to establish commercial links with Turkey would have been delighted to attend last Thursday's Preparing For Profit breakfast, as detailed above. Among the delegates were eleven trainee Turkish governors. After their stay in East Kent, they will return to Turkey to take up key posts throughout the country as the provincial heads of civil administrations. This Chamber is organising a Meet East Kent Business tour at the end of the month and we will be arranging for the future governors to see a selection of local firms which will then be in prime position to promote their exports. A reform of the Turkish currency in 2005 brought inflation under control. Privatizations and a rapidly expanding tourism sector have fuelled growth and the expectations of the population of 75 million. Opportunities for export are increasing as Turkey modernises quickly in preparation for entry to the European Union. Outdated perceptions of Turkey still bedevil their international trading links. It is worth noting that in the Corruptions Perception Index published by Transparency International, Turkey has improved its rating among world nations from 77th in 2003 to 56th in 2010. In the same period, the UK fell from 11th to 20th.

13. Stuffy Lecturer Gets His Desserts

In this edition, we have highlighted splendid contributions to our local economy by consummate professionals at some of our most forward-looking educational institutions. Not all schools are managed by enlightened experts or indeed staffed by consummate teachers. One Chamber member, whom we shall call Jones, recounts this narrative from his days at Law School. We have our doubts about this story, but we leave it to readers to judge for themselves. "As law students, we were encouraged to challenge authority and quite often to support an argument that we did not necessarily credit or support. This was excellent training for the bar. There is no doubt that most of our lecturers were skilled lawyers themselves who knew what they were talking about. But, there was one odious junior lecturer who was just too sure of himself. He used to pick on some of the quieter female students and deliberately embarrass them in class. One day, he strolled into the lecture room, five minutes late, with the customary superior smile on his face. He rocked back on his heels as if he were Rumpole addressing a High Court judge at the Old Bailey. We just sat there and watched him. After a few moments he said: "Right stand up if you are stupid. Go on, anyone stand up if you are stupid." Pointing directly at a timid girl in the front row, he said: "What about you, Wilson, you got a C in your last essay, why don't you stand up?" Knowing that this was a prelude to the unfortunate girl being reduced to tears, I stood up and faced him. He then turned to the room and repeated: "Go on stand up if you are stupid." After a pause, I thought "Now's the time to put a stop to this." I then stood up and faced him at last. "Ah Jones. I see you have got to your feet. You admit it then. You are stupid. You are standing up and you are therefore stupid. "No, sir, I'm not, sir." I replied with feigned respect, "It's just that I felt sorry for you standing there all on your own." Jones informed us that the class received no more trouble with the lecturer after that and the bully left the teaching profession shortly afterwards.

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