



Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

6th August 2011 Issue No.: 167

1. Star of Sandwich

Not all readers will know about Warmcell 500 and perhaps even fewer will identify a genuine Open Web Joist System. If you recognise what the following acronyms stand for: PEFC, BBA, TRADA, UKTFA, CHAS and FSC, you can call yourself a true construction industry expert, just like OFP Limited. This innovative building company in Sandwich is accredited to all the aforementioned national bodies and many more besides. A specialist in timber framed homes, OFP has attracted the attention of national television and will feature in next Tuesday evening's DIY SOS programme on BBC 1. Presenter Nick Knowles and his team transform the home of single mum Louise and her son Thomas who has been diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. With just nine days to add an extension and change the garden, can the team do it in time? Find out by tuning in at 2100 hrs on BBC 1 on 9th August 2011. Clients of OFP will be quietly confident that this firm will not be found wanting. Among the hundreds of satisfied buyers in the last few years is developer Keith Beavers who was quoted recently as stating: "Over the last 4 years we have successfully completed more than a dozen schemes with OFP ranging from 2 to 50 units in size. In my dealings with OFP Ltd it is very clear that they have a passion for their business that emanates from the very top of the Company." To check if you were right about PEFC or BBA, see the website at <http://www.ofptimberframe.com>. This is a company that cares for its clients, cares for the environment and cares for its local community. Before you ask, OFP is of course a member of the Thanet & East Kent Chamber.

2. Sandwich & Deal Happy

Last Monday, Southeastern Railway Company made a public announcement of details of new high speed services from Sandwich and Deal to London St Pancras to start from 5th September 2011. Journey times will be slashed to 90 minutes from Sandwich and 84 minutes from Deal. Three weekday early morning trains will operate leaving Sandwich at 05:50, 06:18 and 06:50. There are two high speed return trains scheduled to leave St Pancras at 17:40 and 18:40. Additional high speed trains at weekends from Faversham, Margate and Dover mean that train passengers can content themselves with some good news about our rail links. Kent County Council will be funding the new timetable for a year as part of its support programme for the East Kent economy.

3. Chamber Praises Rail Company

Southeastern Railway Company was the subject of congratulations last Monday from a variety of quarters. The Chamber Co-President, Laura Sandys MP warmly welcomed the new high speed services and emphasised the incentive provided to start up companies. As she put it: "Businesses considering setting up in the region – particularly on the Pfizer site – will realise that East Kent is not only a superb place for their employees to live, it is accessible and within easy commuting distance from London". Building on our links with our good friends at the BBC, we also added our support on Radio Kent, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/console/p00j8frl> fast forward to 0:51:40, available for the next four days.

4. Business Networking Breakfast

Our next Business Networking Breakfast is scheduled for Friday, 9th September 2011. Details will follow in future editions of the Thanet & East Kent Insider.

5. Hartsdown Highlights

We have just received at the Chamber copies of the Hartsdown Flyer of September 2010 and Spring 2011. What amazing magazines. Published by Hartsdown Technical College, the pages are full of lively articles of interest to the casual reader as well as to dyed-in-the-wool educationalists. Did you know about the end of school prom last year which saw school leavers arriving at Hartsdown in apparel which would have graced the Oscars? You would have done if you had seen the BBC South East's Inside Out programme which featured four of the Hartsdown students preparing for the big night, all beautifully pictured in the Hartsdown Flyer. Some of the vehicles that brought the students to the prom would have brought envious glances from the presenters of Top Gear, especially the Ferrari, Rolls Royce and Aston Martin. Now that is class. The magazine's pages reveal a wide range of visitors during the term such as X-Factor finalist Ben Mills and Chamber Co-President Roger Gale MP as well as Kent Police Chief, Ian Learmonth and Margate's Police Community Support Officer, Tony Morris. News about IT Teacher Nicki Maddams winning £36,000 of computer technology from Microsoft sits alongside stories of students visiting, Italy, France and Kenya. Margate Mayor Cllr Mick Tomlinson appears as often as anyone, proving again what a dedicated and hard working front man he is for Margate. It is easy to see why the government places Hartsdown Technology School on its list as one of the fastest improving schools in the country. One of the keys to this success is involvement with the community, as evidenced by the solid support for the Dreamland Trust and the New Year Parade. Principal Andy Somers writes: "Everything we do has one central goal – to raise our students' aspirations, to help them get the most out of their education and their lives." Like the Marlowe Academy, St Lawrence College, Dover Girls Grammar School and Canterbury Christ Church University, Hartsdown is one of a growing number of educational establishments seeking to work ever more closely with the East Kent coastal business community. That's what local companies want to hear, want to see and want to read. We wish all these Chamber members continuing success in the future.

6. Saving Fuel Costs

Regular readers will acknowledge that this Chamber has consistently highlighted the sharp rises in gas, electricity and petrol prices. Since the launch of our Broadstairs Petrol Index in 2008, we have also raised awareness of the Thanet Surcharge, a grossly unfair addition to the financial burdens on our firms and residents. Last Thursday, motorists in Thanet buying a litre of unleaded petrol at Tesco Extra or Sainsbury in Broadstairs were obliged to pay 2.2p a litre more than customers at Asda in Canterbury. We have found no valid reason for the Thanet Surcharge which varies from 2p to 4p a litre. There may be some good news on the horizon for companies looking to reduce their fuel costs. We are grateful to Martyn Young of Atlantic Business Resources and our friends at the Federation of Small Businesses for the latest updates on a grant of up to £1,000 available to businesses which seek to cut travel costs by adopting new initiatives. Unless a franchisee of a national chain, SMEs trading in East Kent can take advantage of the funding provided by the European Regional Development Fund through the South East ERDF Competitiveness Programme 2007-2013. Grants will only be approved for activities that will have a significant impact on CO2. To see if you qualify, fill out the application form to be found at <http://www.sustainableroutes.co.uk/apply> or have a quiet word with Martyn Young, tel: 0781 353 7456 who will be pleased to advise. Information on how to reduce your gas and electricity costs is also

available from Chamber members David Batten, tel: 01843 581322 and Jeremy Bailey, tel: 01843 588776. The price of one telephone call could you save you a packet and bring that dream of a Morgan Plus 4 a little closer.

7. Review Or Repent

Reports from Bradstowe Chartered Surveyors of Broadstairs suggest that many local companies have not reviewed their commercial insurance cover in the last few years leaving them open to significant risks in the event of a fire or serious damage to their property. Rising reinstatement costs and inadequate insurance make for a dangerous combination for established businesses as well as for start ups and successful companies moving to new leased premises. In an exclusive email to the Chamber, Bradstowe's Jeremy Parkin writes: "If Chamber Members rent or lease premises, or intend to, they should ensure they do not pick up liabilities for repairs from previous tenants or occupiers. They can achieve this by having a condition report prepared, which can then be attached to the lease, and will cover the tenants in the event that the landlord or his surveyor prepares a schedule of dilapidations. Although the benefits are not immediately apparent financially, at the end of the lease, such a report could save thousands of pounds." We could not agree more and we are happy to recommend the services of Jeremy who can be contacted by telephone to 01843 603325. All types of insurance cover are available from the Chamber's own insurers, Millards Insurance. Phil or David in the Sandwich office would also welcome your call by telephone to 01304 613072.

8. More On Planning

Since we reported on the rejection of the proposed hi-tech, all seasons Golf Academy at Manston by the planning committee of Thanet District Council, we have been besieged by emails and telephone calls on other planning matters. We regret that we cannot support or comment on issues raised by companies which are not members of the Chamber. We are nonetheless happy to have received a copy of the speech made by the Leader of the Ashford Borough Council, Cllr Peter Wood on 9th June 2011. His words are reproduced verbatim: "In terms of tools, the Council's planning policies, and the Council's attitude towards planning issues, are of critical importance – especially so given the harsh economic climate that we currently face. Consequently, I declare here and now that while planning may be regarded as an esoteric art form in some Council, were it ever so in Ashford, then that is certainly no longer the case. Henceforth, in Ashford planning and planning policies are merely tools that serve the prosperity of Ashford Borough and the wellbeing of its residents. To that end we will adopt flexible, pragmatic and, above all, sane policies that serve that objective." We like the phrase "merely tools that serve the prosperity of Ashford" and note that more start up companies survive five years in the Ashford district than in any other area of Kent.

9. Business Advice Clinics

The Chamber's free Business Advice Clinics continue to attract companies of all sizes including start ups. It is a condition of the sessions that all discussions and advice remains confidential to the parties involved, but we are delighted with the progress to date. Over 50 sessions have covered nearly every aspect of commercial operations. Recent visitors have benefited from free legal advice from a senior lawyer, frank comments from a PLC Chief Executive "Whatever you do, don't do that", cash flow guidance from a seasoned high street bank manager and sales leads into domestic and international markets. To make a booking, email manager@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Business Advice Clinic". Sessions take place on the first Friday of the month in Broadstairs and the first Wednesday of the month in Dover.

10. Make Money From Disability

Companies that ignore the spending power of disabled citizens may be missing out on a potentially lucrative market. Preliminary research by this Chamber finds that in one sector alone, the disability equipment market, UK sales in 2008 amounted to just under £1.6 billion, up from £1.43 billion in 2004. This accounts for 0.5% of total UK retail sales in 2008, see Equipment for the Disabled Market Report, Executive Summary, Key Note 2009. Key Note also predicts that: "The UK market for equipment for the disabled is likely to grow at well above the pace of inflation over the next 5 years". Local activist Lynne Sutton has drawn our attention to the number of disabled people in the UK, just under 10 million according to the Employers' Forum on Disability. There are clearly advantages to many companies in having registered disabled in their workforce. Certainly, E.On Energy Solutions, part of the E.On group that is backing

Chamber member the London Array, has a well defined strategy summarised by its HR Director, Sue LaVerne who writes in the Department for Work and Pensions press release of 27th July 2011: "At E.ON each of our employees - whether they are disabled or not – brings enthusiasm and dedication to the role they do, so we see no reason why our disabled employees should not have the same opportunities and career progression as their non-disabled colleagues." Such statements must be music to the ears of the Minister for Disabled People, Maria Miller and James Partridge, Chair of the DWP Disability Employer Engagement Steering Group. James Partridge is quoted as saying: ""We, as employers, should not judge a person's suitability for a role based on their disability. We should instead look at each individual's ability and focus on what they can bring to our organisations if we provide the support, which in most cases is just about being flexible." The Thanet & East Kent Chamber will continue to monitor and report on the opportunities for companies to work with disabled people.

11. Jobs Fair

We are grateful to Penny Dadds of Job Centre Plus for informing us of a Jobs Fair at Margate Gateway on 7th September 2011. Open to the public from 1000 hrs to 1500 hrs, the event is free to stand holders who are invited to email Penny for more details, penny-dadds@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk. All stand holders qualify for entry into a prize draw for a magnificent luxury food hamper containing local produce. Penny also welcomes calls from Chamber members to her mobile telephone number 07500 106 182.

12. Holiday Time

Due to staff holidays, there will be no edition of the Thanet & East Kent Insider next week. Any vital news or important messages will be sent to members by email as a Newsflash.

13. News From Dover

The prospect of Dover People's Port Trust acquiring control of the Port of Dover moved a step closer last Monday with the publication of the Secretary of State for Transport's revised criteria applicable to the sale of a trust port under the Ports Act 1991. The first element in the new guidelines is Community Participation. The very first paragraph of the 'Essential Criteria' begins with the words: "The Secretary of State will not approve an application for the sale of a trust port under the 1991 Act unless the sale is considered likely to deliver an enduring and significant level of community participation in the port". We interpret that to mean that selling off the UK's busiest passenger port to any overseas investor with a few bob in his pocket is not an option. We also interpret the statement to mean that the DPPTL plan backed by 97.5% of voting local residents, the main union, all the major ferry operators and the majority of the local business community might have a chance. What do you think?

14. More About Getting It Right

Knowing of our interest in getting it right first time, one overseas reader of the Thanet & East Kent Insider chastises us gently for insisting on correct spelling. We all make mistakes, of course we do, but we do want them printed on our letterheads, websites and business cards? He writes that grammar is much more important than spelling and insists that the odd spelling mistake is not important. Recently returned to France from the USA, his email declares: "For example the sign I saw in a lift in my Hotel in America: 'Don't use elevator in case of fire' means the lift is highly dangerous and liable to burst into flames. 'Dont use the ellavater if theirs a fire' would have been much better." He's probably right about that. But we think: 'Don't use the elevator if there's a fire' is better still.

15. Hungry & Forlorn

A Chamber member of some distinction contacted our news desk last week with an account about a wealthy friend of his. We have our doubts about this story, but we leave it to readers to judge for themselves. As our esteemed member put it: "He made his money in the housing boom of the 70s did our Jack and he's lived the life of luxury ever since. Anyway, around 18 months ago, at the height of the recession, Jack was driving through one of the poorer, rural areas of Kent. As you know the downturn in farming and the increasing use of technology has left traditional farm labourers hard-pressed. Those without the skills to transfer were finding it difficult to keep heart and soul together. Not that that bothered our Jack, he bought a new Rolls Royce every four years and barely noticed the dent in his wallet. Anyway, as

he was motoring serenely at the wheel of his latest pride and joy, he saw a man ahead next to a lay by grabbing a handful of grass and appearing to eat it. Intrigued by this, he stopped his limousine, got out and said: 'Are you really eating grass? What's this all about?'. The rather bedraggled rustic said: 'Times is hard sir. Since we was made redundant from the farm, that's all we has to eat, grass. You gets used to it. We all do.' 'Not to worry', said Jack, 'Get in the roller and I'll take you to my place just down the road and you can really tuck in to a good meal'. 'That's very kind of you, sir, but I has my wife and three children down the road and I can't leave, them can I.' 'Of course not,' said Jack. 'The more the merrier. Bring them along'. In double quick time, the hungry family eagerly piled into the back of the gleaming Rolls-Royce and within a few minutes they arrived at the imposing gateway that marked the beginning of Jack's mansion driveway. Jack stopped the car and pointing to the lawn in front of his house, he said; 'As you can see, the grass here is three feet high. That should keep you going for weeks. Bye'''.

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16. Our Sponsors

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

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