

***** Welcome to the Thanet & East Kent Insider *****

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

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30th October 2008

1. When Your Local is No Longer Local

Further to last week's item about the record rate of pub closures, many members were shocked to learn that UK pubs are now closing at the rate of 35 a week. A few people asked the Chamber if the switch to supermarket sales from pubs was in fact boosting government revenue. We are grateful to the Beer & Pub Association for setting us straight on this question. Every pint of beer sold in a pub generates 91p for the exchequer. Every pint sold in a supermarket produces just 51p. Pint for pint, beer sales in pubs create six times more jobs than beer sales from a supermarket or off-licence. It is worth noting also that the average pub buys local products and services to the value of £85,000 a year. When your local pub closes, the butcher, the baker and the candlestick-maker all suffer. This Chamber supports the pubs in Thanet and East Kent and we will campaign on their behalf. After all, when your local is no longer local, the recession becomes a depression. For a detailed 12-page report on the economic trends in the beer and pub sector, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Pub Report".

2. Thanet & East Kent and the Government

Following a positive exchange with the Government Office of the South East (GOSE), this Chamber has invited "a senior cabinet member" of the government to visit this part of the world to meet Small and Medium Enterprises. We are delighted to announce that GOSE has accepted the invitation. With the active support of our good friends at the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and with the advice of the Thanet & East Kent Chamber SME Committee, we look forward to giving the minister concerned a friendly welcome and a genuine opportunity to learn of the challenges and successes of local SMEs. We expect the trading conditions faced by pubs and the new business rates legislation to feature in the discussions.

3. Hello Mum

Have you ever had the desire to appear on television and say, "Hello Mum, it's me". Now you might have a chance. If your company is privately owned and has a turnover of at least £500,000, posterity calls. Channel 4 has commissioned a new series filming the trouble-shooter, Sir Gerry Robinson, as he seeks to advise businesses on how to survive and prosper. Channel 4 is particularly interested in companies facing difficulties that could benefit from a little magic dust in the form of guidance and practical help from a latter day John Harvey Jones. If you think you qualify or can nominate someone who does, call Tessa or Becky, tel: 020 8233 2952.

4. Names and Politics

In the past, the Thanet & East Kent Insider has analysed the issue of company names and the relative benefits of a descriptive name such as Birchington Building Services as against an imaginative title such as Purple Shark Ltd. Our conclusion was that an imaginative name can be successful but generally requires a lot of capital spend to build brand values and gain public recognition. That is fine for large companies such as France Télécom, owners of Orange, or Norwich Union, seeking to rebrand as Aviva; but for small companies with a local market, a descriptive name is generally preferable. With the US elections imminent, we now look at the relative popularity of some first names. John McCain can take some encouragement from ex-pat Americans voting in the UK where John was the 74th most popular name for new-born boys registered in 2007. Barack, as in Barack Obama, does not feature at all. This may change if the democratic candidate wins. The name Leona was three times more popular in 2007 than in the previous year, undoubtedly due to the winner of the X-Factor, Leona Lewis. Interestingly, Gordon has not figured in the list of 100 most popular names for boys in the last five years. David has declined from 49th in 2003 to 64th in 2007 and Cameron has declined from 23rd to 33rd in the same period. Rather than struggle in dreaming up populist policies, perhaps UK political parties should choose their leaders according to the names that are already in favour. The Office of National Statistics tells us that the most popular names of the moment are Jack and Grace. On this basis, the retired Jamaican athlete, Grace Jackson, born in 1961, would surely win hands down if she ever stood for parliament in the UK. With a best time for 200m of 21.7 seconds, she would surely be well equipped to escape the attention of reporters – a vital asset for any MP.

5. Business rates

The Thanet & East Kent Chamber's campaign against the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 has received powerful backing. Ian Coull is the Managing Director of Segro, Europe's largest commercial developer with property assets of over £5bn. In an email to the Chamber, he explained why Segro was demolishing older properties rather than pay the newly imposed business rates. Far from meeting the government's target of raising over £1bn in tax, this new legislation is resulting in the wholesale demolition of commercial property in England and Wales. Maintaining older empty commercial buildings is no longer a viable proposition, As Ian Coull puts it, "It simply makes more economic sense to demolish these buildings altogether". Supporters of this Chamber's campaign include Roger Gale MP, Stephen Ladyman MP and Laura Sandys prospective parliamentary candidate for South Thanet, Also on board are MPG Properties, PolarKold, Ramac Holdings, Evans Easyspace, Gora Developments, Ramsgate Estates, Margate Harbour Arm, Thorley Taverns, CP Simons, Central Restaurants & Catering and Ferry Speed Ltd. We can now add Thanet District Council to the list. TDC accepted the wording of this

Chamber's motion calling for the abolition of the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007, put it before a meeting of the full council and passed it without a vote against. To our knowledge, TDC is the first council in England to do this. It's happening now. It's happening in Thanet.

6. Thanet College

We are grateful to Tracy Parker, Research Manager at Visit Kent, for informing us that Thanet College is not the only Further Education College in Kent moving to a brand new campus. Tracy tells us that Mid Kent College is also moving house to Chatham Maritime. Thanks Tracy, your research skills are very welcome.

7. Local Radio in Thanet

Plans are at an advanced stage to launch a local radio station based at the Marlowe Academy. Blessed with the working title of Academy FM, the station will cover most of Thanet. If the first application to Ofcom is successful, the station could be up and running before summer 2009. Included in the planning is the provision that schools in the area should play a full part in all aspects of its operations. This Chamber looks forward to playing an active part in the establishment and community strategy of Academy FM and fully supports ideas for programmes such as Job of the Week where local companies and employment agencies can enjoy free coverage of job vacancies.

8. Sandi, Lawyers, a Computer and a Dog

Girlings Solicitors who sponsor the Thanet & East Kent Insider also sponsored the appearance of Sandi Toksvig at the Gulbekien Theatre last Friday on the penultimate evening of the Canterbury Festival. Sandi Toksvig explained to a full auditorium that her name was spelt "Sandi" because in her secondary school class there were seven girls who had been christened "Sandra". She explained that the eldest had been allowed to retain Sandra, the second was allocated Sandy and she was left with Sandi. We presume that resources were stretched for the seventh Sandra. Is this where Zondra come from? In the audience that evening was Sandy Ezekiel, distinguished leader of Thanet District Council. We await his comments. Ms Toksvig gave a superlative performance full of human interest and classic anecdotes. However, the best story of the evening was told by the festival Chairman, David Pentin, at the reception provided by Girlings in Keynes College before the show began. Recalling the words of Tony Girling, David speculated that the law firm of the future might consist of three elements, a computer, a dog and a lawyer. The computer will do the legal work, the dog will be there to keep the lawyer away from the computer and the lawyer will be there to feed the dog. Tony Girling was President of the Law Society, so he should know.

9. Sponsors

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

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