

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

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

27th November 2008

1. Post Offices

Roger Gale MP has contacted the Chamber expressing his concerns about the post office network in Thanet. He points out that the population of Minnis Bay no longer has a dedicated sub post office which means that elderly residents without their own transport are obliged to walk up the steep hill to Station Road, Birchington. Roger welcomes the government's announcement that it will keep the contract for the Post Office Card Account (POCA) with Post Office Ltd. According to the MP for Thanet North, 3.8 million people now use POCAs with 12,500 new POCAs opening every month. Each POCA customer makes an average of seven visits a month to the sub post office and spends around £6.00 on each visit. The £400 per month received can make the difference between a viable commercial enterprise and a failing shop.

2. Goodbye Sandy

Earlier today, a memorial service for Lord Sandy Bruce-Lockhart was held at Canterbury Cathedral. The former leader of Kent County Council and Chairman of the Local Government Association, Sandy passed away on 14 August this year in office as chairman of English Heritage. His life-long friend, Chris Gosling, described Sandy as "the best of friends, the nicest of men and in the proper meaning of the word, a true gentleman". A packed congregation also heard Michael Howard QC MP speak of Sandy's love for Kent and his sparkling sense of humour. He recalled how Sandy cherished a key fob given to him by his wife. On one side was written "The problem with political jokes is ..." and on the other side, "... they get elected." At the reception afterwards at Canterbury Christ Church University, friends and erstwhile colleagues spoke of Sandy's devotion to Kent, his love of the countryside and his far-sighted reforms of KCC. All of us who live and work Kent know that this county is a far better place because of the extraordinary contribution of one Alexander John Bruce-Lockhart.

3. New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Thanet & East Kent Chamber: Lavender Blue Media at Sittingbourne, tel: 01795 424252; Want To Learn at Dover, tel: 01304 366829; the Fire Strategy Company at Manston, 07809 412749; BSW Timber Systems Ltd at Ramsgate, tel: 01843 590777; Able Structural Glazing Ltd at Broadstairs, tel: 01843 851266 and Ford-IT Spares Ltd at Ramsgate, tel: 01843 593888.

4. Pre-Budget Report

Last Monday, the Chancellor presented his Pre-Budget Report. In brief the changes promised show tax reductions now to be followed by tax increases in 2010 and 2011. Small businesses will be allowed to spread their tax payments and there is a new 3 year carry-back rule for losses up to £50,000. National insurance contributions are scheduled to rise after the next general election by 0.5% for both employees and employers. People earning over £100,000 p.a. will have their personal allowances cut and those generating a salary of over £140,000 p.a. will have the allowances taken away completely. The government has reduced VAT from the 17.5% rate to 15%, sending out a clear message that it wants consumers to consume rather than save. One trader has informed this Chamber that re-pricing his goods and catalogues will incur a cost of over £70,000. As most retailers have faced sharp rises in operating costs this year, it may be that the effect on prices of goods in the shops will be negligible. David Kern of our professional association, the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), puts this bluntly as, "The direct benefits of a VAT cut are very uncertain". For a detailed BCC report email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "BCC PBR Report 24 Nov 2008".

5. Business Rates and the PBR

The opportunity to repeal the business rates legislation on empty properties has not been taken and the sad demolition of commercial premises is set to continue. Setting a threshold of just £15,000 rateable value fails to offset the effects of the vicious new tax introduced last April which has proved so damaging to the commercial infrastructure of the East Kent Coastal business community. The largest provider of office space for Small and Medium Enterprises in the UK is Chamber member, Evans EasySpace. In an exclusive interview with the Thanet & East Kent Insider, Managing Director, Tom Stokes, declared, "I urge the government to conduct a proper review that will throw up how much damage has been done to the property sector and the unintended consequences of the Act". Dr Fiona Sherriff of Ramsgate Estates goes one stage further when she describes the limited measure taken by the Chancellor. "This is very short-sighted, blatantly political and highly damaging in my opinion." Mick German of MPG Properties adds, "The Chancellor's claim to support SMEs takes the form of confirming a heavy new tax on companies landing another heavy blow to business confidence at a time when exactly the opposite is required." For a Thanet & East Kent Chamber reaction, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Empty Rates Statement TEKC".

6. Predict, Prevent and Prosper

The Chamber hosted a business breakfast at the Oak Hotel, Ramsgate last Wednesday. Giving the presentation, "Predict, Prevent and Prosper" was Chris Argent. As befits one of the most senior serving Territorial Army officers, Chris gave a brilliant account of how to "Overcome the Enemy Forces of Recession". Marshalling his arguments with true military precision, Chris outlined the battleground that the current economic downturn presents and stressed the importance of being ready for the challenge ahead. He described the enemy forces as reduced demand, increased costs and changing tastes. He stressed that the bank manager should be kept fully informed of progress and never viewed as the opposition. The friendly forces include your products and services, your staff, your business plan, your management skills and your ability to communicate with every member of your team. The mission was put simply as surviving the recession, but doing so through beating the competition, increasing profits and launching new products. Critical to success is the Business Plan and the ability to finance, test and change the plan as the year progresses. Giving the example of the Russian army on the borders of Western Europe, Chris emphasized that success should be reinforced and failure discontinued with equal dispatch. Administration was not ignored and companies were urged to examine their cost base and pay particular attention to credit control, taking every fiscal advantage possible. The final briefing centred on the need to co-ordinate instructions. It is critical for your team to understand your plan. Chris advocated employing outside professionals when required as "their costs are less than your mistakes". As Partnership Director of Girlings Solicitors overseeing six offices in East Kent, Chris was guaranteed rapt attention throughout. Frank Thorley of Thorley Taverns led the sustained applause afterwards and said that he thought every business in Thanet, large and small, would have benefited from hearing Chris speak. All the Thanet & East Kent Chamber members present agreed. For details of Girlings Services, telephone 01843 220274, as listed below.

7. Change at Barclays

Barclays Commercial has informed this Chamber that it is replacing its 'All About Business' website with a new initiative called 'Think Insight, Think Ahead'. Billed as a new resource centre, the bank tells us that the website at <http://www.barclayscommercial.com/thinkinsight> "will be integral to the Barclays Commercial Bank website and offer up-to-date and relevant resources at your fingertips."

8. Master Chef – Just Like That

Last week, this Chamber was invited to Thanet College to a meeting of Industrial Professors. Discussions centred on the provision, promotion and expansion of Thanet College courses. At a meal afterwards in the College restaurant, guests around the table were treated to insights from that well-known presenter of BBC's Master Chef, Gregg Wallace. Impressed beyond measure by the quality of the meal produced by the College students, Gregg entertained guests with a near perfect impression of Tommy Cooper. Among the gems to delight his fellow professors were: "A man walked into the doctor's. He said 'I've hurt my arm in several places'. The doctor said 'well don't go there any more'" followed by "I went to buy some camouflage trousers the other day but I couldn't find any." Not everyone can impersonate Tommy Cooper successfully. Anthony Hopkins is one who can and so is Gregg Wallace.

9. Final thought on Sandy

A man of immense good humour, the late Sandy Bruce-Lockhart would have appreciated the distorted speech that one distinguished lady guest heard at Canterbury Cathedral during his memorial service. In the eulogy from Chris Gosling, Sandy was described as “A man of impeccable taste except in the matter of wines”. He famously often failed to recommend the most appropriate wine with meals. Such are the acoustics in the mother church of Anglicanism that the sounds that bounce off the high roof can sound somewhat different to anyone seated at the rear of the nave. Thus it was for this mystified guest who misheard the words as “A man of impeccable taste except in the matter of wives”. Sandy had one wife, Lady Tess Bruce-Lockhart, née Pressland, and his taste in this was indeed impeccable.

10. Sponsors

We are grateful to Adecco Recruitment, tel: 01843 609292; Girlings Solicitors, tel: 01843 220274 and Evans EasySpace, tel: 0800 039 3900 & 07753 799 333 for sponsoring this edition of the Thanet & East Kent Insider.



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