

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

23rd April 2009

1. Thanet College

Despite the sharp reduction in funding announced by the government in the wake of the Foster Report and allegations of incompetence at the Learning & Skills Council, this Chamber remains confident that Thanet College will shortly receive the green light to go ahead with the next stage of its relocation to a new site. Buying the land adjoining Tesco in Millennium Way, Westwood will pave the way to keeping the project on course for construction to start in August 2009 with a view to completion in September 2011. This will be good news for local companies as Thanet College has secured written agreement from the preferred main contractor and second stage tender bidder to use "locally sourced labour and materials wherever possible". The plans for the 21,130m² site feature external football pitches and recreational facilities which will be available for community use in time for the 2012 Olympics. For details of how to register your company to bid for work from the main contractor, Chamber members are invited to email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Thanet College & Wates".

2. A New Pub

Geminex, the company behind the successful transformation of the former Prospect Inn at Minster into the Express By Holiday Inn, has had planning permission referred to a full committee for a new-build Mitchell & Butlers Vintage Inn on an adjoining site. This Chamber is working with Geminex and Thanet District Council to find a solution to satisfy all parties. Responsible inward investors prepared to support the local economy deserve our full backing. This week's budget contained more bleak news for the licensed trade and East Kent pubs. Last year's 18% rise in beer tax contributed sharply to the closure of more than 2,200 pubs in the last 12 months with the loss of 22,000 jobs. The Chancellor's announcement that from today the average pint of beer sold in a pub will cost an additional 5p will be the last straw for many pubs in the East Kent coastal business community. The trend away from responsible supervised drinking in licensed premises towards purchases of cut-price offerings from major supermarkets will add to social problems and increase the loss to the Treasury of £242m in tax revenues through pub closures. The British Beer & Pub Association can claim some high profile supporters for its Axe The Tax campaign including Al Murray, 'The Pub Landlord' who offers this sobering thought: "One third of a pint is taxed, so it's not until you're nearly halfway through your pint that you stop drinking for the government and start drinking for yourself."

3. Special Offer

Sharp Printing Services in Broadstairs is offering Chamber members a 5% discount on its published printing prices. Proprietor, Lionel Hawkins, is the latest to join this Chamber's Business-To-Business Discount Scheme. For details contact Lionel direct on tel: 01843 600123. To add your offer to the scheme, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Chamber B2B Discount Scheme".

4. How are we doing?

We are grateful to the ever excellent KCC Research & Intelligence Team for sending the latest unemployment figures for March 2009 which we can compare with the same period last year. Thanet, Shepway, Dover and Gravesham (not listed below) share the title of "least worst annual increases" all being below the Kent average of just under 97%. It is a frightening thought that there is a modicum of satisfaction to be gained when unemployment has not doubled. At ward level, the biggest annual increase in unemployment is at Rolvenden & Tenterden West which has experienced a rise of 380%. The only ward in Kent to have gained jobs in the last year is Kingsgate in Thanet which can lay to a claim to an improvement of 20%, but the good citizens of Kingsgate will know better than anyone else that moving from 10 unemployed to 8 is not going to solve the recession in East Kent. Thanet remains the district with the highest number of adults claiming Job Seekers Allowance but the effects of inward investment strategies and large projects such as Thanet Earth, the New Turner Contemporary Gallery and Thanet Off-shore Windfarm are boosting confidence and narrowing the gap with other areas.

	March 2009		Change since March 2008	
	Unemployed	% of workforce	Number	%
Ashford	1,978	2.9%	1,167	143.9%
Canterbury	2,390	2.6%	1,206	101.9%
Dover	2,298	3.7%	1,084	89.3%
Maidstone	2,313	2.6%	1,295	127.2%
Shepway	2,447	4.2%	1,029	72.6%
Thanet	3,993	5.5%	1,827	84.3%
Tunbridge Wells	1,383	2.2%	802	138.0%
Kent	34,192	3.4%	16,820	96.8%
South East	422,107	3.5%	187,627	80.0%
Great Britain	1,478,196	4.0%	659,901	80.6%

5. Cars, cars and more cars

Readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider are invited to consider three transport options involving cars. The first one on the menu is Car Hire. If you thinking of taking a driving holiday or just want to impress your friends with a new motor one weekend, Enterprise Cars of Ramsgate has the answer. The company operates 30,000 vehicles from 300 locations in the UK and provides a free pick-up service. To find our more, give Mike Budd a call, tel: 01843 583800. If you are looking for a chauffeur driven solution, Portcullis Executive Travel has the answer. Whether you want to go to the airport on holiday or treat your loved one to a dinner date in style, you should ring Mark Evans first, tel: 01843 808026. Believe me, your meal tastes better when you step out of a Mercedes S Class and you do not have to worry about the drink and drive laws. Finally, if you are looking to lease or purchase a vehicle, you can rely on expert advice from David Faulkener at St Georges Volkswagen, tel: 01843 230300; James at Westbrook Cars, tel: 01227 710685; Mark Spray at Invicta Motors Westwood, tel: 01843 853555 and Stafford Cox at Palm Bay Renault, tel: 01843 220919.

6. Free Training

Our partners at the Channel Chamber are organising a free business breakfast on Tuesday 12th May at the Marlowe Academy, Broadstairs, starting at 7.30am. The main topic will be the Leadership & Management grant of up to £1000 available to companies with 5-250 staff. This funding has been designed to help owners, managers and company directors develop their business leadership skills. To register for your free place, telephone 01303 270022 or email sezen.zeki@shepwaybc.co.uk

7. Business Rates

The Chancellor has failed to amend the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 which has had such a deleterious effect on the economy. We learned this week that the government's own Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is obliged to pay nearly £1.3m in empty rates charges. Buildings unoccupied by the Office of National Statistics are costing taxpayers £620,165. The list of public bodies forced to pay these iniquitous costs imposed since April last year even includes HM Courts Service which is obliged to pay £349,570. Many private landlords without recourse to public funds have been obliged to demolish their industrial units as the only means of staying solvent. This Chamber's campaign has received the fulsome support of all established local politicians as well as Thanet District Council, which was the first district council in England to pass a motion calling for the repeal of this pernicious legislation. We will continue to highlight the damage to our commercial infrastructure by this self-defeating law which was summed up neatly at the beginning of the week by BPF Chief Executive, Liz Peace, who said: "Pressing on with empty rates will cost the government a lot more in the long term than it will raise in the short term. Firms demolishing property, laying off staff or closing down is bad news and empty rates will draw out the downturn for many. Taxing something making no money is like making the unemployed pay income tax."

8. Budget Summary

If you have had no access to a television, your transistor radio has no batteries and you have avoided reading any newspapers this week, then it is just possible that you may have missed the main points of the budget. James Galbraith of County Financial Services, tel: 01843 825608, has kindly provided a short summary for those of you returning from your camping holiday in Siberia.

A new 50% rate of income tax on income over £150,000 from 2010/11.
The phasing out of personal allowances for those with income over £100,000, again from 2010/11.
Restrictions on higher rate income tax relief for pension contributions for people with income over £150,000.
A temporary 40% first year capital allowance for businesses.
An increase in the ISA contribution limit to £10,200.

For a full account of how the budget impacts on your company and personal finances, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Budget 2009 Report" and we will send you some bedtime reading. You should have no difficulty in falling asleep.

9. Green Ears

One long-standing Chamber member has enlivened the gloom of the current recession by relating the story of his recent visit to the casualty department of the QEOM hospital in Margate. While awaiting news of a friend's minor accident, he witnessed a curious exchange between a reluctant patient and a visiting consultant. Much to the annoyance of his subject, the doctor held the patient's ear and pronounced in authoritative tones, "There is no doubt that this little bit of greenery I am holding sticking out of your ear is a lettuce leaf, *sativa* of the genus *lactuca*". Humbled by the ferocious use of Latin, the patient responded meekly, "Really, doctor? Is it serious?" The doctor rose to his full height imbuing his response with a glorious majesty befitting his senior status and muttered meaningfully, "I'm afraid it is, but this is just the tip of the iceberg."

10. Sponsors

We are grateful to Adecco Recruitment, tel: 01843 609292; Girlings Solicitors, tel: 01843 220274 and Express By Holiday Inn tel: 01843 820250 for sponsoring this edition of the Thanet & East Kent Insider.



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