

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

21st May 2009

1. Elected Mayors

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) represents over 100,000 companies and 5m workers. In its policy report of May 2009, the BCC makes a clear statement in favour of the principle of elected mayors “as a means of providing the strong leadership necessary to raise the performance of a local area”. The BCC believes that improved Local Authority performance “requires a focus on outputs rather than targets”. Businesses in East Kent may be mindful of London Mayor Boris Johnson’s misconceived support for a new airport in the Thames estuary even though Manston provides a ready-made solution to overcrowding at Heathrow and Gatwick. We know from the presentations by Jonathan Oliver of London Ashford Airport at Lydd that every job created on site at a European airport leads on average to another ten jobs off-site. Bearing in mind the current economic climate, see item 3 below “How Are We Doing?”, any future candidates for the position of elected mayor in this area would surely receive support from the vast majority of local businesses if they make an unambiguous statement in favour of the development of Kent International Airport at Manston. With 35% of workers in Thanet employed by the public sector, there has never been a greater need for the voice of the private sector to be at the heart of local decision-making. As the largest business support organisation in the area, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber is ready, willing and able to make that voice heard. We listen and we act.

2. Trade Credit Insurance

Nick Parker of Barclays Commercial Banking, East Kent, tel: 07 775 541 345, has drawn our attention to the Government Trade Credit Insurance top-up scheme administered by the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR). This initiative is available to all businesses trading in the UK of any size in any sector which currently hold a whole turnover trade credit insurance policy. The scheme is open to new applicants from 1 May 2009 until 31 December 2009. For details, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line “Trade Credit Insurance” and we will send you promptly the five pages of guidance.

3. How Are We Doing?

We are grateful to the ever excellent KCC Research & Intelligence Team for sending the latest unemployment figures for April 2009 which we can compare with the same period last year. Thanet, Shepway, Dover, Medway and Gravesham (not listed below) again share the title of “least worst annual increases”; all being below the Kent average which has now crossed the 100% threshold. This means that the latest official figures show that unemployment in Kent has doubled over the past 12 months. Sevenoaks has been particularly badly hit with a yearly increase of nearly 200%. The monthly change from March to April 2009 is 3.7% and, as every accountant knows, compound interest can inflate figures to a surprising degree. What this means in practical terms is that Sevenoaks bankers will no longer be changing the car when the ashtrays are full. At ward level, small unit changes can produce misleading data. The highest registered yearly increase in a Kent ward is a mind-boggling 700% at Lympe and Stanford. But, a close analysis of the figures reveals that this equates to just 21 job losses. Sad though it is for the people now without employment on Romney Marsh, Kent is still faring slightly better than the South East and 0.6% better than Great Britain.

	April 2009		Change since April 2008	
	Unemployed	% of workforce	Number	%
Ashford	2,025	3.0%	1,231	155.0%
Canterbury	2,432	2.7%	1,246	105.1%
Dover	2,311	3.7%	1,069	86.1%
Maidstone	2,413	2.7%	1,445	149.3%
Sevenoaks	1,498	2.2%	995	197.8%
Shepway	2,453	4.3%	1,023	71.5%
Thanet	4,058	5.6%	1,841	83.0%
Tunbridge Wells	1,433	2.3%	854	147.5%
Kent	34,732	3.5%	17,673	103.6%
South East	435,758	3.6%	203,517	87.6%
Great Britain	1,510,759	4.1%	700,342	86.4%

4. Art and Business

On 16th April 2009, the famed French artist, Allain Renoux, visited Broadstairs to view the works of East Kent artists on display at the Sarah Thorne Theatre Club in Broadstairs. Organised by the Thanet & East Kent Chamber of Commerce, the event had been designed to promote links between business and the arts and to allow Mr Renoux the opportunity to select artists to exhibit at his prestigious Biennale D’Art Figuratif festival, which is actively supported by over 30 companies including the Crédit Mutuel conglomerate, see

<http://www.roml.fr/biennaleart/index.php>. Mr Renoux confessed to much difficulty in finding just two artists to be invited as guests to exhibit and sell their works in France next year. This was no surprise to Chamber member Caroline Lovely of Lovely's Gallery (tel: 01843 292757) who manages many of the artists involved. "There is an enormous wealth of serious professional artists in East Kent and I am sure that the painters selected will find a ready market in France." These sentiments were echoed by fellow Chamber member Michael Wheatley-Ward of the Sarah Thorne Theatre Club (tel: 01843 580389) who added, "The works on display reveal the tremendous depth of international talent in the area." Exhibiting for the evening were Shane McCoubrey, Lisa Hawkins, Irina Pavlova-McGahan, Vicky Brand, Graham Clarke, Nagib Karsan, Karen Wallis, Louise Braithwaite and Martin Aynscombe Harris. After spending over an hour viewing the show and discussing individual works with the artists, Allain announced that he was overwhelmed by the quality on display. Much to the delight of all those present, he said that he had decided to invite four of the artists to exhibit next year. Those selected will be notified within two weeks. The Thanet & East Kent Chamber believes implicitly in promoting close links between the arts and business and looks forward to strengthening ties with overseas buyers for the benefit of all Chamber members.

5. Government Money to Support Your Business

Last week, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber in cooperation with its official partner, the Channel Chamber of Commerce, joined our friends at the Dover Chamber for a Grants Workshop to follow the recent successful event in Broadstairs. To a packed room, Jim Miller of South East Grants Advisory Services outlined the financial support available to companies wishing to expand their operations. Sandwich, Eastry, Whitfield and Thanet are designated Tier 2 areas which attract public grants of 35% for qualifying projects. The rest of the Dover District is classified as a Tier 3 area where the lower rate of 20% applies. Applications should be for a minimum project cost of £50,000. One recent successful application for £1.5m gives an idea of the level of support available for innovative cases that meet the required criteria. The five key areas favoured in the guidance from BERR are purchases of major equipment and technology, investment from overseas, export initiatives, environmental projects and diversification into new markets. A key component of all successful applications is the requirement that the target customer base must extend beyond the local area. Ideally the expected market should be national or international, but in every case it must include a sales area that extends to at least the Greater South East. No grant may be claimed retrospectively. It is therefore incumbent on companies to make a preliminary application before any formal agreements are made or any purchases undertaken. It can take as little as a week to receive an initial response from the grant-awarding body. Chamber members can rely on the support of the Chamber with their applications. BERR considers that companies in the printing, double-glazing and logistics sectors do not qualify as "predominantly high-growth businesses" and any applications from them are unlikely to be accepted. New Chamber member, Vincent Gudynas, said afterwards: "This is just what I was looking for and will be of great assistance in planning my business".

6. Reducing Your Costs

A few days before the Grants Workshop, the Chamber again worked with our friends in Dover to host an IT workshop featuring Ian Stuart and Chris Maflin of Cariss (tel: 01843 835791) who briefed Chamber members on the savings to be made from using Open Source Software (OSS). At a previous workshop at Chamber HQ in Broadstairs, Ian had surprised one local company by showing how OSS could produce an annual saving of £272,000. The French national police force estimates that it has saved over 50m euros since moving to OSS from proprietary software. Serious stuff, indeed. Delegates wedded to the traditional Microsoft Office/Windows/Vista packages were encouraged to learn that OSS Linux powers 80% of the Internet and a significant share of all UK servers. Full compatibility with Microsoft Office means that free OSS programmes such as OpenOffice.org require no new skills and only a brief session to familiarise users with different terminology. Ian's advice is for start-up companies to use OSS from the very beginning. Established businesses with a developed IT network might wish to change to OSS over an extended period as the annual licensing fees or upgrades become due. Chamber member Cariss is the only major OSS specialist in East Kent. Ian and Chris would be pleased to answer questions from readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider about any aspect of their computing needs. Email info@cariss.co.uk for a speedy response. Help with IT is also available from the following established Chamber members 5-Star Computer Systems tel: 01843 844000; Apex Networks tel: 01843 3303141; Coastal Data Systems tel: 01843 846935; Deltace International Limited tel: 01843 861888; I.P Computer Consultants tel: 07971316738; Mach Associates tel: 0870 3219986; Sota Solutions tel: 01795 413500 and Web Dandy tel: 01843 582502

7. The Venerable Elvis Speaks Out

In deepest Thanet resides the celebrated hermit, the Venerable Elvis. A recluse by nature and taciturn by choice, he rarely ventures beyond his cave which is located in the hinterland between the abandoned power station in Sandwich and the disused quarry in Manston. He has no electrical appliances of any description, his hovel is his sole residence and he is not surrounded by a moat that requires cleaning. In other words, he would find it impossible to make a claim for parliamentary expenses. Given the current fevered climate at Westminster, the Thanet & East Kent Insider thought it might be instructive to seek the views of the area's spiritual leader to see if his renowned wisdom could offer a solution to the current crisis of confidence in the House of Commons. Given that our reporter has exclusive access to the Venerable Elvis, a distinction similar to that enjoyed by Lois Lane of Superman fame, it is with a heavy sense of civic responsibility that we sent our member of staff to penetrate the early morning Thanet mists to meet the great man. Avid readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider will recall that in the edition of 19th February 2009, we recorded his advice to bankers about to appear before a parliamentary commission as "Always be sincere, even if you don't mean it". Thus, we know that for all his unworldly solitude, the Venerable Elvis has a practical view of the world, full as it is of imperfections, frustrations and Arsenal supporters. When asked about the report of one MP claiming for a 'duck island', the Venerable Elvis stroked his long, grey beard in silent contemplation and then offered the following advice: "There is a mallardy at the heart of government". We are indeed blessed to have such a sage in our midst.

8. 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