

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

4th June 2009

1. Locate In Kent

The Chamber maintains good relations with Locate in Kent, the inward investment agency which has its headquarters in West Malling, Kent. On a visit to the Chamber last week, Locate in Kent Chief Executive, Paul Wookey, and the Director of Business Development, Peter Symons, emphasized the importance of Thanet and East Kent in the portfolio of opportunities that can be presented to prospective companies from outside the area. Since 2005, Locate in Kent has brought 29 companies to Thanet of which 17 started life here with fewer than 10 workers. There are currently 65 Thanet-based projects under consideration, some of which will probably use one or more of the 70 commercial properties currently featured on the Locate in Kent website. In a recent benchmarking report of investment promotion agencies by GDP Global Development, Locate in Kent won the accolade of Best Regional Agency Worldwide and was second in the list of Overall World Leading & World Class Performances. We congratulate Paul Wookey and his team for this stellar performance and look forward to working closely with Locate in Kent to ensure that Chamber members are able to benefit to the maximum from this award-winning service.

2. Thanet Off-Shore Wind Farm

It's an ill wind that blows no-one any good and some good has arrived in Thanet. A presentation of the £800m Thanet Off-shore Wind Farm will be the main feature of the Chamber business breakfast scheduled for Tuesday 23rd June 2009 in Ramsgate. From 2010, 100 Vestas V90 wind turbines will feed 300MW into the national grid, sufficient to meet the electricity needs of 240,000 homes. An area of 35km² off the coast of Ramsgate will contain 10 rows of 10 wind turbines making this project the largest operational wind farm in the world. The first foundation pile was driven into the sea bed on 20th March this year and the floating Sea Jack has become a familiar site to residents and regular visitors to Ramsgate as it ferries back and forth from the harbour. The parent company, Vattenfall, expects to employ over 200 workers in the assembly and construction. With a projected life span of 40 years, the wind farm will also generate long-term employment for a maintenance team. The economic benefits for the East Kent coastal business community are significant. This Chamber is delighted that the Project Director, Ole Bigum Nielsen, has accepted our invitation to outline the progress to date and the opportunities for local suppliers. All delegates to the business networking breakfast at the Kent International Hotel Ramsgate will have the opportunity to promote their products and services as well as to enjoy a cooked breakfast in the convivial company of like-minded professionals. For details and to book, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Thanet Off-Shore Wind Farm Presentation".

3. Empty Rates Again

This Chamber's campaign seeking the full repeal of the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 has been well documented in these pages and has featured extensively on television and in the press at local, regional and national level. The East Kent coastal business community has been severely depressed by this pernicious legislation. Every serious politician in Thanet has subscribed to this Chamber's campaign. We have escorted the Minister for the South East, the Chairman of SEEDA and other key decision-makers on personal tours of buildings under threat and our voice has been heard in cabinet at Westminster. Last October, Thanet District Council became the first local authority in England to make an official plea for a change in the law. The issue was debated in full council and the motion calling for a complete repeal was passed without a dissenting voice. This Chamber was quoted last year as predicting: "The Empty Rates legislation promises to achieve what the mighty Luftwaffe did not manage in WWII, the wholesale destruction of commercial property in England and Wales". Sadly, figures released by the British Property Federation confirm the accuracy of this prediction. Largely as a result of the Act which came into force on 1 April 2008, industrial buildings covering 15m sq ft have been demolished in the last year. Alarming, a recent report entitled Empty Property Rates Survey by Lambton Smith Hampton and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors expects the rate of demolitions to rise still further. The report concludes that "This is going to have a significant negative impact on the ability of central and local government agencies to pursue property-led urban regeneration strategies." Too true. For a copy of this report, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Empty Rates Report".

4. Art & Business

At the invitation of this Chamber, the celebrated French artist and festival director, Allain Renoux, visited Broadstairs last month to review the works of professional artists resident in Kent. His intention was to invite two artists to exhibit at his prestigious Biennale D'Art Figuratif exhibition scheduled for 24th – 27th June 2010 when the successful candidates will have the opportunity to sell their works to a discerning clientele that traditionally favours high quality canvases in the price range 500 – 2,500 Euros. All accommodation and meals are included in the sponsorship and the artists selected will feature in the festival brochure which has become a collector's item in itself. The winning artists can now be revealed as Graham Clarke, Lisa Hawkins, Martin Harris and Nagib Karsan. On hearing the announcement, Lisa Hawkins of Cliftonville declared to the Thanet & East Kent Insider: "This is a wonderful opportunity for Kent artists to raise their profile in Europe and I am enormously grateful to the Thanet & East Kent Chamber, to Caroline Lovely of Lovelys Gallery and to Michael Wheatley-Ward of the Sarah Thorne Theatre Club for this superb initiative. Many people talk about supporting the Arts, these people do something about it." We offer our congratulations to all the artists selected who prove once again that art and business can work happily together.

5. Change Is Inevitable, Progress Is Optional

The 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin is celebrated this year. With the traditional industries in our economy under considerable strain, it is not surprising that one of the most frequently quoted sentences from the great man is: "It isn't the strongest of the species that will survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." Perhaps mindful of this advice, Karen Simmons of Ramsgate Yacht Sales has taken change to heart with the launch of a local branch of Medics on the Move, a national letting, relocation and home search service which began life sourcing accommodation for the medical profession but quickly expanded to cover the needs of all professionals. Karen has a range of domestic and commercial properties available for rent. Readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider are invited to call her direct to her mobile, tel: 07809 736 327. Other Chamber members who can advise you on property issues include Oakwood Homes Estate Agencies Ltd tel: 01843 221133; Terence Painter Properties tel: 01843 866866; Let Direct tel: 01843 224808; Right Location Lettings tel: 01843 599666; Cockett Henderson tel: 01843 861964; Commercial Group Properties tel: 01843 860866; The Door & Window Company tel: 01843 864307; Gora Developments tel: 0207 6374565; Hemispheres Property Consultants tel: 01843 596663; MPG Properties tel: 01843 596224; South East Surveys tel: 01843 603325; TCB Property Maintenance tel: 01843 228484 and Urban Surveying & Design tel: 01843 867507.

6. Job Centre Plus

A visit earlier this week to Job Centre Plus revealed a series of practical measures and cash incentives available to employers that offer a major step forward from what might have once been expected from the blighted Unemployment Exchanges of old. Much greater engagement with employers and a more realistic approach to the needs of companies needs ensure that our local centres in East Kent have an enviable track record in matching candidates to jobs. Richard Hitchen tel: 07971 994014, Welfare Reform Manager in Maidstone, Jayne Wheatley tel: 01304 866100, Account Manager in Dover and Penny Dadds tel: 01843 258150 in Ramsgate are keen to speak to established employment agencies and Chamber members to discuss their particular needs. Richard runs a tight ship and his account managers are all eager to adopt best practice with local companies.

7. SEEDA

Jim Braithwaite, Chairman of SEEDA, is a familiar figure to many Chamber members who took advantage of the SEEDA symposium organized earlier this year when a lively discussion focused on the inward investment needs of Thanet & East Kent and the role of SEEDA in coordinating and informing government policy. We have arranged another meeting with Jim on 29th June when the points raised earlier will be reviewed. Katie Lloyd, SEEDA Area Manager for Kent & Medway, will be visiting the Chamber the following day. We will be pleased to hear of any points that have arisen more recently or any infrastructure issues that members feel deserve special attention. Please email your comments to admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "SEEDA Comments".

8. An Office With A View

Further to item 6 above on East Kent's Job Centre Plus, the civil service has not always been viewed as providing the same ferocious efficiency exemplified by Richard Hitchen and his team. One government employee spoke to the chamber recently about the advice she had received on her arrival at work some 20 years ago when she first became a government employee. A senior colleague, seasoned by long term exposure to the prevailing cultural climate, took her to one side and offered this treasured nugget: "Don't look out of the window in the morning or you will have nothing to do in the afternoon".

9. 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.
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