

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

16th October 2009

1. Postal Strike

Companies in East Kent are concerned about the effect of a postal strike on their business. The Royal Mail publishes regular updates which can be viewed by clicking on the 'Latest Service Information for Customers' on the website at www.royalmail.com. One simple way around the problem is to use a private courier service. Manston Express Transport offers just such a solution. Director Ian File offers a variety of options for East Kent companies including "Sameday Express" to all parts of the UK and most of Europe as well as an economy option for less urgent mail. As an example, if you have an important client waiting for a package in Luxembourg, Jim can get it there signed and timed within six hours from Manston. Give Ian a call, tel: 01843 823030, or email your enquiry to mail@met24-7.co.uk. If you are the sort of person who insists on ample research before purchase, more details of Manston Express Transport are available at www.met24-7.co.uk. The website address gives a clue as to the operating hours. Does this man ever sleep? Probably not, for the next few weeks.

2. How Are We Doing?

We are grateful to the ever excellent Research & Intelligence team at Kent County Council for the latest unemployment figures which show a heartening month-on-month improvement for Thanet. Although a fall in the jobless figure of 1.0% is not a cause for street parties throughout the district, it is an encouraging sign. The total number of unemployed remains nearly 60% ahead of this time last year, but if the decline has bottomed out and a recovery is on the way, these are the sort of figures we should be expecting. At ward level in Thanet, the monthly data showed an improvement in Birchington, Bradstowe, Cliftonville West, East Cliff, Nethercourt, Newington, Northwood, St Peters, Salmestone, Thanet Villages and Westgate-on-Sea. To justify increasing stocks of party streamers and celebratory balloons, we need to see an impact on the yearly data, but there is some comfort to be drawn from Thanet's decline over twelve months being below the county and regional measures, as the following table shows:

	September 2009		Change since September 2008	
	Unemployed	% of workforce	Number	%
Cliftonville West	593	12.8%	122	25.9%
Margate Central	402	13.8%	168	71.8%
Thanet	4,095	5.6%	1,521	59.1%
Kent	35,023	3.5%	15,830	82.5%
South East	155,202	3.0%	74,572	92.5%

3. Dreamland

According to one Thanet District Councillor quoted in The Times in February 2003, "One fifth of all visitors to Thanet come for Dreamland". When the amusement park closed that year, it had a dramatic effect on the tourist trade and wider economy of Thanet. The Thanet & East Kent Insider has kept readers informed of the tremendous work of The Dreamland Trust and its recent successes in attracting funding. With a target opening date for the Dreamland Heritage Theme Park of Easter 2011, this much loved central feature of Margate should soon sparkle again. The many committed fans of the Ghost Train, the Water Chute and the Whip can revive memories of Dreamland in its heyday and perhaps glimpse its promising future by reading Dreamland Remembered; an updated version of Nick Evans's seminal book. It is 90 years since John Henry Iles purchased the site for £40,000. Dreamland can trace its origins to the much earlier date of 1863 when Spiers and Pond opened a restaurant and dance hall in a redundant railway terminus on the Mere Causeway in Margate. To find out more, order your copy from Joyland Books via the website at www.joylandbooks.com.

4. Insurance & Finance

We are grateful to Chamber member HSBC for informing us that Fortis has revealed plans to compete with AXA and Aviva in the commercial insurance market. According to the insurer's managing director, Mark Cliff, the business is presently made up of 90% personal and 10% commercial insurance. However, he expects this to move to a 65% and 35% split in the future. We also

learn this week that the Financial Services Authority has written to more than 5,000 financial firms to warn that it will actively intervene to ensure they only hire staff deemed to be 'fit and proper'. The regulator said it intends to be more intrusive in firms' recruitment processes, including interviewing and vetting appointments, as well as other 'significant functions'. Is this a case of regulating the conditions for closure of the stable door after the horse has bolted? We think so.

5. Swine Flu

Recent increases in the incidence of Swine Flu have caused many local companies to review their operational procedures in order to reduce the impact of an outbreak among their workforce and to consider measures to reduce the risk of infection while at work. This Chamber is grateful to Christine Whitmore of NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent for drawing our attention to the latest government advice which can be found at http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_097138.pdf. It includes handy check lists on pages 22 and 23.

6. The National Picture

The Quarterly Economic Survey conducted by the British Chambers of Commerce is the UK's largest private quarterly survey of business. It describes and predicts national trends and is watched closely by the Treasury, the Bank of England and serious media organisations. The Q3 2009 results show improvements in all the key national balances, for both manufacturing and services. The results support the view that the decline in commercial activity is ending. But the economy is still frail and a sustainable recovery cannot be guaranteed. Some key balances notably in employment, investment in plant and machinery and cash flow are still negative. There is cause for concern over the ability of businesses to invest and export which are clearly necessary to support a sustainable recovery. The official summary concludes that 'Britain's credit rating depends critically on the adoption of a credible multi-year plan for improving our public finances without damaging wealth-creating businesses.'

7. Leadership In Question

The Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, David Frost, had some harsh words earlier this week regarding the threatened postal strike. 'The announcement today will be a serious knock to business confidence. The run up to Christmas is a vital trading period for firms and if this strike goes ahead orders will be lost and the fragile recovery will be undermined. It is about time those involved in the industry showed some much needed leadership and brought an end to this disruption.' Chamber members will no doubt echo these thoughts. The Chief Executive of the London Chamber of Commerce said to the BBC last Wednesday that the striking Royal Mail workers were 'shooting themselves in the foot' which suggests that after the strikes have ended a return to normal working practices will be delayed as workers hobble about their duties.

8. The Venerable Elvis Speaks

The Consumer Price Index inflation figure for September 2009 has been announced by the Office for National Statistics as being 1.1%. If that is a true figure, why does almost everything except bananas seem to be so expensive? In the past few months, Chamber members have remarked on the rising cost of trading and the increasing price of their household purchases. Is a higher power at work here? When this Chamber discovers that its practical approach to life is found wanting, we turn to Thanet's spiritual leader, the Venerable Elvis, for guidance. This distinguished hermit of indeterminate age lives in the hinterland between the disused power station at Sandwich and the abandoned quarry at Manston. The Thanet & East Kent Insider has exclusive access to the great man. Our reporter braved the early morning mists earlier this week to seek an explanation for the apparent contradiction of high prices and low inflation. Despite his isolated and humble existence, we know from previous pronouncements that the Venerable Elvis is fully aware of the compromises required for an economy to flourish. Who can forget his words in the edition of 19th February 2009 when he commented on the position of bankers about to appear before a parliamentary commission, "Always be sincere, even if you don't mean it". We therefore awaited his words on the current anomaly with great eagerness. As he always does, Thanet's own sage stroked his long grey beard before declaring, "Despite the cost of living, it is worth it". We are indeed blessed to have such a wise man in our midst.

9. Our Sponsors

The Thanet & East Kent Insider is grateful for the support and sponsorship provided by Girlings, Express By Holiday Inn and Adecco. Girlings Solicitors has been managing the managing the legal affairs of commercial and private clients for over a century. Twenty-six partners and one hundred and twenty members of staff ensure a comprehensive range of services from the local offices in Ashford, Canterbury, Folkestone, Herne Bay and Margate. Offices in France and Spain complement specialist departments for charities, individuals and companies. For details, telephone 01843 220274. Express By Holiday took on the daunting task of restoring the former Prospect Inn at Minster. The result is a spectacular hotel that combines the best of Oliver

Hill's 1930s design with ultra modern facilities and technological support. Conveniently located for business guests and holiday makers in East Kent, the meeting rooms and 105 bedrooms are available at competitive prices throughout the year. For details, telephone 01843 820250. Adecco is the world's largest HR solutions company offering a comprehensive service of temporary and contract staffing, permanent recruitment, outsourcing, outplacement, career services, training and consulting. Officially designated as a 2009 British Superbrand, Adecco is represented in Thanet and Dover by its Broadstairs office, tel: 01843 609292.



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