

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

18th December 2009

1. Paul Carter Business Breakfast

Last Thursday, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber joined its associates at TEKBA to host a business breakfast featuring Paul Carter. Introducing the Kent County Council Leader, the Chamber Chief Executive recognised that Paul had come to the post with a difficult job; to follow Sandy Bruce Lockhart. It is never easy to succeed a brilliant manager. Anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of football will know the problems of succession that followed Matt Busby's departure from Manchester United. Sandy Bruce Lockhart was the Matt Busby of local government. The fact that Paul has continued the extremely high standards set by Sandy is a great tribute to his skills, abilities and fortitude. As the leader of the upper tier of local government in Kent, Paul has to oversee directly 84 councillors and deal with 12 district councils, around 300 town or parish councils and 17 MPs. That might be enough for most people, but as Chairman of South East England Councils, he now has 74 additional elected bodies which turn to him for guidance. When asked later which of these groups he found most difficult to manage, there was a suspicion that he might have mouthed 'MPs'. Paul had some stern words for bankers who he claimed had stifled the credit available to companies. He also admonished a creeping bureaucracy which delays development. Whereas twenty-five years ago, just two permissions were required to build a house, planning permission and a building certificate, there is now a requirement to seek a minimum of twenty-two separate authorisations before building work can begin. The KCC leader outlined a plan to construct a third Thames crossing to relieve pressure on the M25. In what little free time remains to him, Paul takes pleasure in restoring pre-war cars. We look forward to supporting his efforts to restoring East Kent. As often stated in these columns, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber and its associates will always work with our elected representatives in support of the East Kent coastal business community and we were delighted when Paul accepted an invitation to return to Thanet to speak again in the New Year.

2. Friends & Associates

Christmas time is all about cherishing family, friends and associates. We are particularly grateful to the Dover District Chamber of Commerce for its backing and its recent board decision to work closely with the Thanet & East Kent Chamber thus creating the largest and most powerful grouping representing business in the East Kent coastal business community. Dover Chamber President, Cameron Macsween said at a recent meeting, "We have chosen to ally ourselves to the Thanet & East Kent Chamber since we know we can trust them to have the best interests of the business community at heart. Together we will bring real and sustainable benefits to our members right across the districts." Thank you, Cameron. We feel the same. We recognise that the Dover Chamber, established in 1850, will be a powerful friend. With the prospect of increasing traffic through our ports of entry in Dover, Ramsgate and Manston, we look forward to Chamber members getting an increasing share of business-to-business trade and inward investment.

3. Skanska

This company is the 10th largest construction company in the world and yet wears its green credentials with a becoming modesty. Ranked fourth in the Sunday Times 2009 Green Companies Awards behind Forster, The National Magazine Company and the Wilmott Dixon Group, Skanska goes to extraordinary lengths to ensure it takes account of environmental concerns in every aspect of its operations. For instance, the company plants trees to offset the business air miles travelled by its UK staff. The Thanet & East Kent Chamber will be working with Skanska to ensure that local companies are given the best opportunity to participate in construction projects in East Kent.

4. What About Wind Farms?

In the last month, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber has enjoyed a series of meetings with the key decision-makers at Vattenfall and the London Array. All registered Chamber members are on a list of potential suppliers. In addition, members who have expressed a particular interest will be invited to meet buyers so that East Kent benefits to the maximum extent from the inward investment. With a budget of £2.2 billion, the London Array project represents a huge opportunity for local companies and the Thanet & East Kent Chamber will be battling hard for its members.

5. Thorley Taverns

The Paul Carter business breakfast mentioned at item 1 above also featured a tribute to Frank Thorley of Thorley Taverns. Visiting Thanet on holiday for the first time in 1946, Frank can recall the arrangements at many boarding houses in Margate and Ramsgate at the time. Resident families would welcome their summer guests by vacating the whole house and moving into the garage or garden shed for the summer period. With only one bathroom in the boarding house, this cannot have been a comfortable experience for anyone involved. No doubt this caused the young Frank to consider how matters could be improved. After building a chain of five pubs in London, Frank returned to Thanet in 1975 to acquire his first East Kent property, the Charles Dickens pub. To put it simply, he put his hand in his pocket, he did it up and he turned it round. Any pub landlord will appreciate that selling 1,400 beer barrels a year requires sales and marketing skills of a high order. Investment and refurbishment have featured strongly in Frank's approach to business. The Fayreess Hotel in Broadstairs and Ramsgate's Oak Hotel and Pegwell Bay Hotel have all been added to the portfolio

which now also numbers twenty-two pubs and numerous clubs, function rooms and restaurants. What is the secret of his success? You might like to ask him yourself as you can often find Frank in one of his establishments at the weekend making sure that his customers are happy. But one explanation might stem from the care and attention he gives to his staff. As Frank once put it, "Nobody works for us, they work with us".

6. Public Contracts

This is a reminder for any company owners not yet registered at www.supply2.gov.uk who wish to compete for public contracts in Kent with a value below £100,000. Since August of this year, registration has been free. The process is relatively simple and involves completing an on-line form which should lead to you receiving your password by email. Invitations are regularly posted each month and there is a good chance of finding an interesting opportunity in many sectors. It is not all about building schools and roads.

7. Beware of Imitations

Some Chamber members have reported being pestered by organisations claiming to represent this chamber of commerce. Please note that there is only one Thanet & East Kent Chamber. We work happily with town Chambers, TEKBA, the Dover District Chamber of Commerce, KCC, SEEDA, Locate in Kent, district councils and democratically elected bodies throughout the country. However, we lay claim to being the largest business support agency in our area and we ask members to keep us informed of any approaches from organisations purporting to represent this Chamber. We will then be able to take the appropriate action. All the major local legal firms are members of this Chamber. Their advice and guidance is not ignored.

8. High Speed Link

Readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider have been treated to regular updates on HSI, the high speed rail link that had its full service launch on 13th December. Locate In Kent has kindly sent the Chamber an update on reactions to the new schedule. It quotes Jo Shockley of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors who said, "This service makes it possible for people working in Central London to live in the rural idyll of East Kent and to enjoy a very high quality of life there. Instead of a long commute, the office will be just minutes away. We hope that this opens up a prosperous and successful future for Kent and makes a real difference to its relationship with London."

9. Something Different

Anyone with some free time over the holiday period might venture to the Stonelees Golf Centre near Ramsgate, tel: 01843 823133. From Friday to Monday, the Stonelees driving range is offering unlimited driving range balls for just £3.00. We have not heard of a better offer this month. For beginners or seasoned professionals, there must be much satisfaction to be gained by bashing a golf ball a long distance and then to see someone else having to go and collect it. If like the editor of the Thanet & East Kent Insider, you find that your golf balls have a magnetic attraction to water, you will be pleased to find that you will not have to take your shoes and socks off to locate the lost objects; unlike Jean Van de Velde on the last hole of the final round of the 1999 Open Championship at Carnoustie. To the amazement of the watching millions, keen golfers will remember that this excitable Frenchman went for a paddle in the Barry Burn at Carnoustie when leading the tournament by three shots. He subsequently lost a three-way play off. It was suggested afterwards that Jean's rush of blood to the head was somehow related to years of eating a lot of garlic and driving on the right. We have no proof of this, but we welcome advice from readers.

10. Archbishop of Canterbury, Spoons And VICs

Further to the unwarranted slur on our cross channel neighbour in item 9 above, even the Archbishop of Canterbury has had cause to be worried by visitors from France. We refer of course to Archbishop Matthew Parker (1504 – 1575). When Elizabeth I asked him to entertain the French Ambassador at his Bekesbourne residence, he reluctantly accepted but is reported to have counted the spoons afterwards. We have improved our hospitality much since then. French visitors to East Kent can expect to find a warm welcome and free access to cutlery. They may have difficulty finding our Visitor Information Centres. Ramsgate VIC is cunningly hidden away from the tourist routes so as not to disturb reception unduly. French tourists in Dover have to find their way to the building next to the public toilets, but you can always find a seat at the Dover VIC. This Chamber will be playing its part in cementing good relations with our nearest continental neighbours. In May 2010, we will be organising an Arts Day complete with a famous French artist, a wine demonstration and some French musicians. We promise that there will be no requirement for anyone to remove their shoes and socks; but we do know how many spoons we possess.

11. Northdown House In the Snow

We thank Cllr Hart for drawing our attention to some lovely photograph of Northdown House in the snow. These can be seen at <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=3111664&id=610346129&l=81e36da131>. We wish all our readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

12. Our Sponsors

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