

Press Release

The latest unemployment figures paint a sorry picture for four districts of East Kent. In Thanet (6.2%), Shepway (4.6%), Dover (4.2%) and Canterbury (2.6%), only the Cathedral city area registers a percentage of unemployment benefit claimants below the national average. All of the districts show double digit percentage increases since January 2011, Dover revealing the sharpest rise in claimants at 20.2% with Canterbury not far behind at 18.8%.

The jobless figure for 18-24 year olds is most worrying in Thanet (14.4%), Shepway (10.6%) and Dover (10.5%). Canterbury (3.3%) is relatively comfortable at less than half the national average (8.1%).

Given the Bank of England's recent zigzag report predicting a slowdown in annual growth to around 1%, is there any reason we should be optimistic? The answer is that there is.

The expansion of Manston Airport promises a rich harvest for local suppliers. If the current consultation produces a result favourable to the owners, up to 3,000 new employees could have good reason to be thankful to the planning authorities. Similarly, if the Port of Dover is passed into the hands of the community-based DPPTL, a focus on benefiting local residents and suppliers is one of the guarantees offered by this Big Society initiative.

Chamber Chief Executive David Foley said: "The former Pfizer site in Sandwich has already experienced its first sale. The 17 acres of the former Pfizer Sports & Social Club is about to emerge as The BayPoint Club. This upgraded facility will help to attract companies to the main site where London & Metropolitan seems to be in the final stages of an agreement to purchase."

The government's Regional Growth Fund will become operative later this year giving East Kent companies the opportunity to bid for £40 million of grants, creating jobs and bringing a new cohort of customers to local retailers and service providers.

When we add to the equation the new Enterprise Zone and the continuing advantages of the High Speed rail services, for most of our seaside towns the outlook offers some promise.

Information

Thanet & East Kent Chamber provides business support to firms in Ramsgate, Margate, Deal, Broadstairs, Manston, Sandwich, Birchington, Hersden and nearby towns and villages.

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Dover District Chamber of Commerce was established in 1850 and offers business support services to the private and voluntary sector in Dover, Deal, Sandwich and the villages in the district.

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