

Press Release

We are grateful to the many Chamber members who have expressed their views on the current negotiations regarding the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union. Although there are clear differences of emphasis, there is widespread agreement among our ambitious companies on some key aspects.

Infrastructure

Whatever the outcome of the current discussions at Westminster and in Brussels, we welcome the recently announced new investment in our infrastructure. East Kent already benefits from the UK's fastest train service, High Speed 1, but we have not always been blessed with the best trunk roads.

A cursory examination of the Dover Chamber's archives reveals that since the year 1850 there have been many pleas for an improved thoroughfare between London and Dover. We are told by our many members in the logistics sector that they can drive from the outskirts of Glasgow to Dover in around 8 hours. But if they take the A2 route, the only time they encounter a red traffic light or a single carriageway is on the approaches to Dover. The news that funding for road-widening of the A2 between Lydden and Dover has finally been given the green light suggests that the stimulus of Brexit has had at least one benign effect on our transport network.

Before we get too self-satisfied, we should look at the incentive to economic development produced by the A16 that links Dunkerque to Abbeville by way of Calais, Boulogne-sur-Mer and Le Touquet. The road link between the French Channel Ports is in sharp contrast to the country roads along our Southern coastal route.

Of course, we have the advantage of being free to admire the picturesque Romney Hythe & Dymchurch Railway as we trundle behind farm wagons; although it can be disconcerting to a hard-working HGV driver, harassed by the twin dictates of a seasoned transport manager and a heartless tachometer, to be overtaken by the side of the road by a ninety-year old third-size steam locomotive travelling at 25 mph.

Plans for a Folkestone to Honiton Highway, first mooted in the 1950s, have been postponed by successive governments. Hansard reveals that plans for a Hythe bypass were recorded in 1985 as "suspended pending further review".

FOLKESTONE-HONITON: ROAD IMPROVEMENT

A259 New Romney, Dymchurch, St. Mary's Bay and Hythe bypasses, Kent

To remain suspended pending further review

Historic Hansard 5 July 1985. vol 465 cc1468-70WA

Media Watch

In the last year, the Chamber has been approached by media organisations at home and abroad for comments on our local economy. Not all of them are hoping for forecasts of doom and gloom to enliven their bulletins. All of the organisations that come to East Kent to talk to us have the distinction of wanting to hear the truth about East Kent business and not the manufactured accounts

by metropolitan, office-bound experts from outside the area who seemingly have the remarkable talent of knowing what East Kent business owners think without ever having talked to them.

We are particularly grateful to the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, Sir Jon Cunliffe, for the meeting in Dover when in roundtable discussions with local hauliers and transport professionals he took back to government a fully informed view. As we noted at the time: “Sir Jon was treated to an insight into the economic factors determining success in East Kent and the vital role that Chamber members play in supporting employment and business growth.”

Norway

In September this year, we addressed the concerns of our trading relations with Norway. In a series of interviews, the Chamber was asked to comment on potential disruption at our ports.

Jesper Nordahl Finsveen of Dagbladet, Norway’s leading newspaper, declared that half of the fresh salmon eaten in Britain is imported from Norway and serious delays could be ruinous to the trade.

Chamber Director Tony Thompson (right) and Chief Executive David Foley (left) pointed to the contingencies measures in place and the key role of East Kent in feeding the UK’s industry and commerce.

They could find no recent record of British workers or companies blocking the traffic at Dover. It was agreed that it is not in the interests of French or Norwegian companies to prevent their UK trading partners from buying their products



Our East Kent Community

There is not a Chamber member in our network who does not help a community organisation in one way or another. Pilgrims Hospice, East Kent Mencap, The Bay Trust and Dover Counselling Centre may get the highest profile, but they are not the only charities supported.



Some of our Chamber members are foster carers and willing volunteers at their neighbourhood centres. Others give their time freely to their local hospitals, health trusts and various helplines.

We were asked by Sky News about business sentiment regarding the number of migrants arriving on our East Kent coast this Summer. We acknowledged that the prime duty of a government is to protect its citizens and to safeguard its borders, but we also emphasised this country’s honourable history as a safe home for genuine refugees from any area of the world where their lives are in jeopardy.

The Chamber cannot accept every invitation to comment on East Kent business issues, but we are mindful that our members have every right to expect that their views will be represented at every level of government.

Tourism

We are grateful to our Chamber Presidents, Sir Roger Gale, MP, Craig Mackinlay MP and Charlie Elphicke MP for their prompt response to the threat to East Kent tourism from the M2 closure at

junctions 7 to 5 in July and August this year. We accept that some disturbance is inevitable if our roads are to be improved and renewed.

Our objection was to the short notice and the timing at the start of the summer holiday period. As we put in our letter to Highways England: "You do not need a Nobel Prize in Economics to assess the damage the proposed closures will cause the Thanet resorts of Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs at the height of the tourist season". We are pleased to report that the intervention of our Presidents and the recognition of the importance of seasonal tourism to our East Kent economy helped to mitigate the worst effects of the closures and will assist in encouraging greater liaison between the Highways Agency and our Chamber members in the future.

BBC & ITV

The BBC and ITV currently have a sharpened interest in our corner of the UK as it is closest to mainland Europe. In speaking to our national media outlets, we are aware that potential inward investors and some key clients of our members could be deterred from business ventures by alarmist predictions about East Kent's future which are not based on solid evidence.



"17% of the UK's goods pass through Dover"

We are keen to present a balanced picture that reflects the good news about East Kent as well as outlining the challenges. Disaster scenarios that will probably never happen do not brighten our day, but can still present some commercial opportunities for an enterprising business. Michael Caine used to say that he had been in some very bad films, but had lived in some very nice houses. Thus, we were pleased to quote to ITV News the Port of Dover's claim that 17% of the UK's goods by value pass through the Port of Dover and that the companies that nourish East Kent are worthy of the government's best attention.

East Kent and China

On 14th October 2019, the Chamber was delighted to welcome a delegation from the Yunnan Design Institute (YDI) to our research office in Sandwich. Founded in 1951, YDI has 1,700 staff dedicated to working on civil and industrial projects. Organised in harmony with the UK's Institute of Construction Management (ICM), discussions centred on how ICM's Competence Registry™® project could be adapted and extended for suitability on Beijing's multi-billion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which is targeted at investing a minimum of £750 billion in establishing a 21st century silk road linking 71 countries. The "Belt" refers to the overland network and the "Road" describes the maritime routes. As the projected investment could rise to over £6 trillion, we can forgive any temporary confusion over names and look forward to supporting our good friends at ICM in their efforts to establish a global headquarters in East Kent from where the register can be administered.



Hard at work at Discovery Park

New Members

We have been delighted to welcome so many new members to the Chamber this year. Property, training, transport and healthcare have been noticeable growth sectors. It is always gratifying to be associated with large successful companies such as Nissan, Marks & Spencer and Stagecoach as well as with well-established enterprises like George Hammond PLC and Dover Marina Hotel which have all supported so many jobs and suppliers in East Kent.

LifeCells



Danielle Vernes of LifeCells describes the “miraculous resilience of neonates”.

Healthcare has shown particularly sharp growth. New members Kent Cardio and Wren Healthcare are already known to many members from their activities earlier in the year. Less familiar is LifeCells which had its official launch at Discovery Park Sandwich two weeks ago. You do not have to understand what LifeCell’s Dr Stephen Brown means by the “miraculous resilience of neonates” to understand that there might be something interesting in stem cell technology. LifeCells stores and preserves cord blood and tissue from new born babies for later use in treating life-threatening diseases. Of interest to any prospective parent, Lifecells capacity to preserve a child’s future through stem cell banking is worth investigating. If any members of your family are expecting to hear the pitter patter of tiny feet, you can either email Managing Director Jeffrey Vernes direct to jvernes@lifecells.co.uk or if the noise is from a mouse, get a cat.

Information

Thanet & East Kent and Dover District Chambers of Commerce provide professional business support to the East Kent coastal business community.

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