

News Release

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Kent makes friends for business in Brussels

Kent tourism and inward investment chiefs were in Brussels yesterday (Tuesday 30 June) to tell key influencers in Europe why Kent is a great place to visit, invest and do business.

Kent County Council, Locate in Kent, Visit Kent and Produced in Kent were at the official residence of the British Ambassador to Belgium, Dr Rachel Aron, to demonstrate the opportunities that the County offers to investors, tourists and business people alike.

An afternoon garden party was hosted by Visit Kent and Produced in Kent, with the support of Eurostar and VisitBritain, providing a Kentish setting for European journalists, key tour operators and transport providers to be briefed on the new and exciting developments in Kent aimed at attracting overseas visitors to the county.

Guests at an evening networking reception hosted by Kent County Council and Locate in Kent were updated on plans to continue to increase the county's share of foreign direct investment. Despite the economic downturn, Kent has just enjoyed its best ever year in terms of inward investment, which contributed more than £125m to the local economy.

Produced in Kent, which champions food and drink from the county, attended in order to develop international links and trading opportunities and guests had the opportunity to try a selection of Kentish produce, including award-winning cheese and wines.

Kent's tourism industry, worth £2.5 billion to the local economy, welcomes an average of 45 million visitors each year. Kent visitor attractions have had a strong year to date with a 37% increase in visitors in April 2009 compared to April last year. Figures show an increase in visitors from mainland Europe, benefiting from current positive currency exchange rates and **Visit Kent** is targeting European visitors with a dedicated campaign aimed at the French, Dutch, Belgian and German markets.

Locate in Kent assisted 76 companies last year, creating nearly 3,000 new jobs, and currently has almost 300 projects in the pipeline – 22% from overseas. The level of interest from abroad is expected to increase following the full launch of domestic high-speed train services in December 2009, and the agency is looking to maximise these opportunities.

Kent County Council continues to strengthen Kent's international relationships as part of its support for local business. Kent's International Affairs Group is developing international links, raising the profile of the county and securing European funding for Kent projects.

Alex King, Deputy Leader, Kent County Council said:

“This event was again a valuable opportunity to bring together colleagues from inward investment, tourism and local government with the common aim of supporting Kent's economy. There are real opportunities for trade and inward investment despite current economic conditions and we intend to take full advantage of every opportunity.

I am particularly grateful to Her Excellency Dr Rachel Aron, Her Majesty's Ambassador to Belgium, for her support.”

Dr Aron said:

“I was delighted to host this event. Kent is very special to me as I was brought up there and now have a house there. It is both a wonderful place to visit as a tourist – wonderful countryside, castles, stately homes, gardens and coastline - but also an excellent place to do business, as the latest figures for businesses thinking of investing there show.”

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Notes to Editors:

- Image shows (L to R) **Alex King** Deputy Leader Kent County Council **Sir Brandon Gough**, Chairman Locate in Kent **Amanda Cottrell**, Chairman Visit Kent, **John Davies**, Chairman Kent County Council and **Dr Rachel Aron**, British Ambassador to Belgium.
- **Locate in Kent** offers companies a number of free corporate relocation services, including access to its comprehensive Commercial Property Search, giving businesses the opportunity to search for premises in every part of Kent and Medway. Established in 1997, Locate in Kent is funded and supported by [Kent County Council](#), [South East England Development Agency \(SEEDA\)](#), [East Kent Partnership](#), [Medway Council](#), [local councils](#), [the Kent Developers Group](#) and [partners](#) from the private sector. For more information about Locate in Kent, visit www.locateinkent.com
- **Visit Kent Limited** is a public/private sector partnership supported by Kent County Council, Medway Council, the district and borough councils, Tourism South East and the leading sector tourism businesses in Kent. Visit Kent champions Kent’s £2.5 billion tourism industry by targeting UK and overseas markets. For more information, visit www.visitkent.co.uk
- **Produced in Kent** is a not-for-profit organisation, which works with food, drink and craft producers within the county to promote fresh produce, local sourcing and a reduction in food miles. Its ethos also aims to reduce food packaging and protect the rural landscape of Kent. It is jointly funded by Kent County Council and Hadlow College. For more information, visit www.producedinkent.co.uk

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