

*'While barred clouds bloom the soft dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;'*

To Autumn by John Keats

Let us know what you think, email us at edu@swale.gov.uk



Welcome to the **November 2015** edition of Rural Round-up which features the latest news, events and business opportunities for companies based in the rural communities of Swale.

LEADER to contribute to Government's Rural Productivity Plan

The Government has formally announced the details of the new LEADER scheme, which sets aside £138 million for new projects in rural communities which deliver local jobs and growth. The approach provides local communities with the power to support projects, building on the government's devolution commitments under its [Rural Productivity Plan](#).

Previous projects have included villages who received heritage funding to boost tourism, farmers who have diversified with farm shops, ice cream parlours and camping sites, and local food producers of cheese and meats were helped to expand their product lines. The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) manages the LEADER scheme nationally and will make payments to successful applicants.

The LEADER programmes in Kent are expected to go live shortly and the team are now looking for specific projects. For information about applying for a grant, contact the programme manager Huw Jarvis on huw.jarvis@kent.gov.uk or **03000 417 104**.

Get into export with free support and advice from the UKTI

The UK Government has recently announced that it has helped a record number of businesses to export British produce overseas. From October 2013 to October 2015, UKTI assisted over 4,000 UK Food and Drink companies resulting in £985m of business around the world – from selling cheddar cheese in China to exporting popcorn to the USA.

Food and Drink remain the biggest manufacturing sector in the UK, greater than cars and aerospace combined. The UK food chain contributes £103bn to the economy and employs one in eight people.

Indeed, export appears to be the current business watchword. Local business AbBaltis Ltd recently won the Queen's Award for Enterprise for their activities in the international market and UK Trade and Investment recently held the Kent event of their Export Week at the Swale Business Conference 2015.

UK Trade & Investment provide a free advice service for companies interested in export. The organisation can be contacted on **020 7215 5000** or applied for online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-trade-investment>.

Workplace Pensions – what do I need to know?

If you employ at least one person in your business you will shortly need to offer a workplace pension. All UK businesses will need to offer and contribute towards a workplace pension by 2018, in a process known as Auto-Enrolment.

Those eligible for the pension include all workers aged between 22 and State Pension Age (SPA) and earn more than £10,000 per annum, if they are not already enrolled on a qualifying pension scheme, and workers aged at least 16 and under 22, or between SPA and 75, who earn more than the minimum earnings threshold of £5,824 per annum. Although employees can 'opt out' of the scheme, employers must offer a scheme or they could be liable to a fine and potentially criminal prosecution.

When will I need to enrol my staff?

The reforms will be introduced over a number of years. These are known as staging dates and are based on the size of your business, as illustrated below:

Employer Size	Staging Date	
	From	To
New Employers	1 May 2017	1 February 2018
Less than 30 employees	1 January 2016	1 April 2017
30 to 49 employees	1 August 2015	1 October 2015
50 to 249 employees	1 April 2014	1 April 2015
250 or more employees	1 October 2012	February 2014

To find out more, get advice and find out what to consider, visit the Pension Regulator website: <http://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/employers/>.

Survey to help increase volunteer numbers

Many employers in Swale allow their staff time to volunteer or they volunteer themselves in the local community. Swale Borough Council is committed to increasing volunteering in the Borough, and we have recently launched a survey to capture the numbers volunteering and their motivation for getting involved. The survey will also help us to shape our future volunteering promotion.

Whether you volunteer or not we would really like to hear from you and/or your staff. To complete the survey visit: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CBJH6WL>.

The survey will close on **Monday 30th November 2015**. For more information or if you have any queries do not hesitate to contact Sophia Ramm on sophiaramm@swale.gov.uk or call **01795 417193**.

‘Water Efficient Sheppey’ to help local companies cut costs

Swale Borough Council and Southern Water are working in partnership to help small and medium sized businesses based on the Isle of Sheppey to cut costs and reduce wastage through becoming more water efficient.

A visit will take place by an experienced water expert who will assess your business through a detailed survey of water use and then prescribe a number of product retrofits that will be carried out there and then. The only qualifications to take part are a commitment to allow access for up to four hours and an interest in reducing your utility bills. All products that are fitted will work with existing taps, showers and toilets and alongside behaviour change advice will lead to ongoing savings where applicable.

To register an interest in being part of this programme please contact Ben Earl, Water Efficiency Manager at Southern Water on **01903 272829** or email Ben.Earl@southernwater.co.uk.

Contact Us

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