

As a regular visitor to small businesses across my constituency I am always extremely impressed with the enthusiasm and dedication I see from all the staff involved. I find the attitude and hard work of people running small businesses infectious and feel it must be celebrated and encouraged.

I was therefore delighted to find out that eight retail centres in Tonbridge and Malling are set to benefit from grant funding of up to £7,500 each as part of a new scheme aimed at boosting trade in the borough. The scheme is to be launched this Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> December, to coincide with 'Small Business Saturday' - a Government-backed national initiative, to help promote small businesses including independent traders in shopping centres.

Small Business Saturday is a day to celebrate the UK's fantastic small businesses and encourage communities to support them. It is a great chance for small businesses to promote themselves and generate trade. In the US, small business Saturday, which has taken place for the last three years has become a national event and has resulted in an increase in spending in small businesses as well as leading to long-term increase in customers.

In this time of economic austerity it is vital that we help local small businesses network and champion their vital role in our local communities. Where would we be without the local chip shop, pub, hairdressers or butchers?

Let's help encourage the young and old by creating a real buzz about entrepreneurship and the power they have to get on and do well.

So this Christmas time as you head out to do your pressie shopping and dining with friends and family, please show support for the small businesses in our community and pop in to see what they have on offer...