

The Real Story of UKIP Activism in East Kent

The political landscape of East Kent has never been a quiet one. For years, the area has been a focal point for debates around sovereignty, housing, and the relationship with the European Union. At the centre of that movement was a kind of grassroots energy that many people still talk about today. That energy was, and in some ways still is, the engine of UKIP activism in places like Thanet, Ramsgate, and Margate. It was never just about elections. It was about a feeling that local voices were being ignored by the people who made decisions far away.

I remember walking through Broadstairs on a grey Saturday morning in 2014. There were flyers on every car windscreen, people handing out leaflets about the EU and local planning. It felt personal. The message was simple: the UK Parliament and the European Union both seemed distant, and local issues like Manston Airport, housing development, and the condition of the Blue Flag beach were being pushed aside for bigger projects that nobody in the area had asked for. That kind of frustration does not disappear. It builds. And UKIP activism gave it a place to go.

A Movement Rooted in Local Grievance

For anyone who lived through those years in Thanet, the rise of the UK Independence Party was not a media invention. It was something you could see in the pubs, at the market in Ramsgate, at the Port of Ramsgate when the ferries were struggling. People wanted someone who would actually listen to them about the things that mattered day to day. Housing development was a big one. There was a sense that Thanet District Council was approving too many new homes without the infrastructure to support them. Roads were clogged. Schools were full. The hospital was under pressure. And yet, the building kept going.

Meanwhile, Manston Airport had become a symbol of everything wrong with how decisions were made. The airport had been a key part of East Kent's economy and identity. When it closed in 2014, it felt like a betrayal. Campaigners fought hard to save it, and many of those same people were deeply involved in [UKIP activism](#). They saw the closure as proof that the system was rigged against places like Thanet. The airport was not just a runway. It was a link to the continent, a way to bring business and tourism to the area. Losing it hit hard.



The Role of Nigel Farage and Leave.EU

Nigel Farage was the figurehead, no doubt about it. His appearances in Margate and Ramsgate drew big crowds. But the activism on the ground was not just about one man. It was about a network of people who were tired of being told that their concerns were not important. Leave.EU, the campaign group that Farage helped lead, was effective in turning that local energy into a national movement. But the real work was done by UKIP councillors and volunteers who knocked on doors in the rain, stood on street corners, and argued with their neighbours over the garden fence.

There is a misconception that UKIP activism was all about Brexit. And yes, leaving the European Union was the big goal. But on the ground, it was also about English nationalism, about wanting more control over local decisions. In Thanet, people talked about a local referendum on housing development. They wanted the right to say no to projects that did not fit the area. The idea of UK sovereignty was not an abstract thing. It meant being able to decide what got built on your street, what happened to your harbour, and whether your children would have a future in the town where they grew up.

Blue Flag Beaches and Built-Up Coastlines

One of the things that made East Kent special was the coastline. The Blue Flag beach at Margate was a source of pride. It drew visitors, it created jobs, it made the area feel like a place people wanted to be. But the pressure for more housing development meant that green spaces were disappearing. Infrastructure projects were announced, delayed, and then announced again. The Port of Ramsgate had potential, but it never got the investment it needed. People felt that London and Brussels were both happy to take the taxes but not to give back the support.



That is where UKIP activism found its strongest voice. It was not just about leaving the EU. It was about the kind of country people wanted to live in. And for many in Thanet, that meant a country where local councils actually listened to local people, where the environment was protected, and where big infrastructure projects were judged on their merits, not on political favours. The movement drew people from all backgrounds. Some were lifelong Labour voters who felt abandoned. Others were Conservatives who thought their party had lost its way. A few were people who had never voted before in their lives.

The Legacy of UKIP Councillors in Thanet

UKIP councillors in Thanet District Council had a tough job. They were often outnumbered, sometimes ridiculed, but they kept pushing. They asked the hard questions about housing development, about the future of Manston Airport, about why East Kent seemed to get less than its fair share. Some of them are still active today, even as the party itself has changed. The movement never fully disappeared. It evolved. The issues that drove it are still there. The housing is still being built. The infrastructure is still struggling. The feeling that decisions are made by people who do not know or care about Thanet is still strong.

Brexit was the big win, but it was never the end of the story. For the people who were involved in UKIP activism, it was always about more than that. It was about reclaiming a sense of control over their own communities. It was about saying that Ramsgate, Margate, Broadstairs, and the rest of East Kent mattered. It was about English nationalism in its most practical form: the belief that local people should have the final say on local matters.



Today, when I walk along the front at Margate, I see some of the same faces. They are older now. A few of them are still leafleting, still arguing, still trying to get people to care. The issues have shifted a bit, but the feeling has not. The European Union is no longer the main target, but the questions about sovereignty and local control are as urgent as ever. The housing development that was planned years ago is now built. The traffic is worse. The school places are still tight. And Manston Airport is still a subject of debate, with different plans coming and going.

There is a lesson in all of this. UKIP activism was not a flash in the pan. It was the expression of a deep and lasting frustration that many people in places like Thanet feel. It was a way of saying that politics needs to be closer to home. And whether you agree with the party or not, that is a sentiment that has not gone away. It is still there, under the surface, waiting for the next movement to pick it up.