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FREE

Enterprise Zone hope thwarted in Budget

CHANCELLOR IGNORES COUNTY DESPITE PFIZER CLOSURE PLAN

HOPES the Government would create a Kent Enterprise Zone to help fuel jobs growth and attract new business in the wake of Pfizer's planned departure have been dashed.

In his spring Budget, Chancellor George Osborne named 11 new Enterprise Zones, mainly in the north, that will benefit from business discount rates, lenient planning rules, and super-fast broadband.

He ignored east Kent, despite the devastating blow to the local economy with the looming departure of Pfizer in 2012 and loss of more than 5,000 jobs.

South Thanet Tory MP Laura Sandys pressed science minister David Willetts two weeks ago to consider east Kent as one of Government's new zones.

After the Budget announcement, she vowed to continue her fight to see the area selected as one of the next 10 designated zones, due to be revealed later this year.

Ms Sandys said: "I'm pleased Enterprise Zones are being introduced

By **MARIJKE COX**

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and have some strong support from the Treasury and other departments to try to secure this for Thanet and Sandwich.

"While last year's Budget was intended to put the country's finances on a stable footing, this Budget is about listening to the needs of local people, driving growth and creating jobs."

Tory colleague Roger Gale, the MP for North Thanet, said he and Ms Sandys would seize the opportunity to make a case for a zone in east Kent.

The Government has asked Local Enterprise Partnerships to nominate sites based on economic rationale and potential for growth. Others supporting

Continued on page two



KENTISH 'BLISS' FOR TAYLOR

For full story see inside

Jobs threatened in airport review

A MAJOR review is under way at Manston Airport – and it may eventually mean some of the 100 staff are made redundant.

Bosses say the purpose of the three-month review is not specifically to cut people from the payroll, but is a bid to remain competitive.

This month, budget airline Flybe announced it was scrapping its Manston route to Manchester and flying to Belfast instead.

The airport said it had formally launched a staff consultation process to consider changes in the working patterns and conditions of all employees.

New Zealand-based owner Infratil said the consultation would last at least 90 days, in line with the legal requirements for such a move.

FULL STORY - PAGE 3

Not in party mood

KENT has yet to be gripped by Royal wedding fever, if street party figures are anything to go by.

With just days to go before the deadline for road closure applications, only 54 have been approved by the county council, despite saying it would waive charges for those wishing to host street parties to celebrate on April 29.

Ashford and Swale showed least interest with one application each, and Canterbury had just two – with one of those for the village of Littlebourne.

Sevenoaks had three applications; Thanet, Dartford and Gravesham four; Shepway five; Dover seven; and Maidstone 10. Tunbridge Wells, which was granted Royal status in 1909 by King Edward VII, had just six applications.

FULL STORY - SEE PAGE 5

Hess still hopeful

GILLINGHAM travel to Cheltenham Town on Sunday on the back of seven successive away draws, knowing results elsewhere may knock them out of the play-offs before a ball is kicked.

Manager Andy Hessenthaler remains bullish about his side's chances of gaining automatic promotion from League Two, though, insisting a top-three finish is still achievable.

FULL STORY - SEE SPORT

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THE INTERVIEW



BY ED HILL

Louise driving for the top

LOUISE COOK never imagined when she was a young girl driving around in her toy buggy that it would lead to a career in motorsport.

But then the 23-year-old from Maidstone stepped into a rally car in a competition to be a female rally driver.

She said: "I'm not from a motorsport background, but my dad used to take me to car shows and to Brands Hatch, so I think he passed on his passion to me.

"There was a competition to get more ladies into rallying and the prize was the organisers paying for a season's rallying.

"I didn't win, but I came second out of 1,000 entries and that gave me the confidence to get my rallying licence. I then spent my student loan on my first rally."

Louise managed to come 51st out of 105 entries in that first event.

She said: "It was doing so well with so little experience that led to me catching the bug."

Taking part in one race may have been easy, but putting together a campaign for a full season is a more difficult prospect. Rallying is an expensive business, and if you want to be competitive there is a constant hunt for sponsorship.

Louise said: "I came up with the idea of getting 500 companies to give me £50 each, for a chance of getting sponsorship on the car. That paid for most of my first year."

In her first season, Louise achieved her goal of finishing in the top 10 of the British Rally Championship Challenge.

She has now stepped up a category, meaning she can reconnoitre courses before the rally and prepare her own pace notes. The preparation means faster times, but harder battles with other drivers.

Louise competes in the N class category. Her Ford Fiesta is relatively close to the road car that most of us might drive, although she has rebuilt the engine to improve its performance.

She said: "I am really excited about competing this season. The main difficulty is getting the money, because it is about double the budget compared with last year.



AMBITION: Louise Cook, pictured above and left in action, is aiming to be the first woman world rally champion

Picture: JAKOB EBREY

"I have to do it so I can make it to the World Rally Championship Academy, which is the junior world championship for under-25s."

The former council receptionist knows she has to improve to get to the top, and spends some of the winter in Sweden, driving on ice to improve her skills.

"You can refine everything," she said. "My car control has massively improved. Any little mistake and the car reacts and punishes you, because there is hardly any grip."

She is not fazed by being one of the very few women who have tried to make it in the male-dominated world of motorsport: "You have to be thick-skinned if you are going to put yourself in a situation where you stand out, but it is such a competitive sport that I would have to put up with stick anyway.

"All the guys take the mick out of each other and play psychological games. They treat me no different, and it's not like tennis, where you win less prize money as a female."

Louise is well aware that being a woman

driver does help her to get noticed.

"It is a selling point, and people know I am going to get more media attention, but it's still a struggle," she said. "I would like to find one big sponsor."

She is determined to achieve her ambition of being the first woman world rally champion, and her next race is the Bulldog Rally in Wales on Saturday, April 2.

She said: "I never thought I would be in the British Rally Championship in my second season. It has been a fast learning curve."

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