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# FAST TRAINS AT LAST FOR OUR TOWN?

MAIDSTONE could be on track for a high-speed rail service linking the town to London next year.

Staff working on Southeastern's high-speed train, that currently misses Maidstone, have told passengers the county town will be served from next year.

But there is no official confirmation of the plans from the operators. It is understood the new service would come into effect in May, when timetables are to be changed.

The new high-speed trains would run from Maidstone West Station up to

## EXCLUSIVE

BY NICK AMES

Strood, to join the north Kent line for Ebbsfleet and Stratford before terminating at London's St Pancras.

Commuters in Maidstone who take more than an hour to get to London lost out a year ago to Ashford, which is now just 35 minutes from London aboard HS1.

Maidstone borough councillor Stephen Beerling said: "When I think what it could bring I don't even know where to start. But first the huge

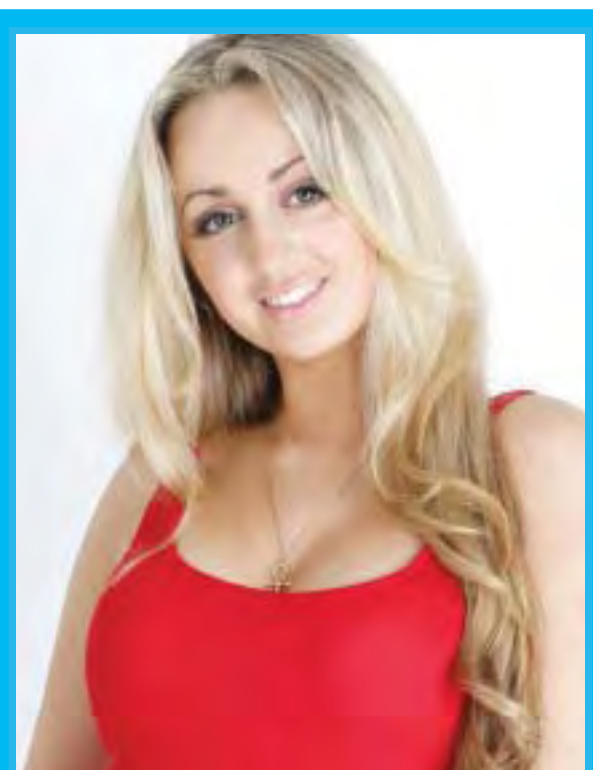
bonus it would bring for commuters. We are without doubt a commuter town and a cut in journey times would be great.

"Then there are the financial pluses, more visitors mean more money coming in. Even property prices would benefit as they would go up as the town becomes a more desirable place to live in."

Southeastern confirmed the high-speed Javelin service can run on any lines and say the network's timetable will be modified in May.

"We are always looking at ways to make travel by train more convenient and easier for passengers," said a

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## ELLIE'S EYES SET ON BEAUTY PRIZE

Stunning teenager Ellie Tillett has reached the final of the Miss England qualifying rounds.

The 17-year-old, from Maidstone, is one of just 30 beauties hoping to claim the tiara in the Miss Fresh Photographic contest. The winner takes home a £500 cash prize, but also a coveted spot in the Miss England contest.

Ellie, who has set up her own jewellery business, has already appeared as a grid girl for Formula One world champion Jenson Button at the Auto Sport show 2010.

The winner of Miss England can go on to compete for the Miss World crown and a \$100,000 cash prize.

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# Lashings set for further Zulqarnain contract talks

## CRICKET

BY DAVID PRITCHARD

LASHINGS will hold more talks with exiled Pakistan cricketer Zulqarnain Haider next month after making contact on Monday.

David Folb, chairman of the Maidstone-based club, spoke with the 24-year-old over the phone with a view to offering a contract.

The prospect of a deal remains up in the air, with no agreement reached before Folb flew to Abu Dhabi on Monday night. Instead both parties have agreed to meet shortly after his expected return, on December 3.

Zulqarnain fled to the UK earlier this month after claiming he had been threatened by an alleged match-fixing ring.

### Refuge

The club have a track record of signing players in search of refuge, with Rashid Latif and Henry Olonga joining in similar circumstances.

Lashings quickly went public to state they were attempting to contact him, which was widely reported around the world, but speaking before Monday's talks Folb insisted the move was only motivated in the player's interest.

He said: "Obviously he's over here in hiding like Henry Olonga was, we helped him out and this just seemed the right thing to do. I'm not sure we are bothered about the publicity. Years ago I think that might have been the case, but



Picture: GETTY IMAGES

**NEGOTIATIONS:** Lashings chairman David Folb has spoken over the phone with Pakistan exile Zulqarnain Haider

it doesn't affect us. We won't get any more bookings out of it.

"I don't think the ethos of the club has changed. We go around and the players enjoy what we do. We try where we possibly can to have guys with a good image. This sounds like a similar case to Henry.

"We are standing for everything that's good in cricket. We are trying to teach an example to others and until this match fixing business is stamped out it will be a scourge on the game."

The affair broke after Zulqarnain, who made his Test debut against England last summer,

claimed he and his family had received death threats following his refusal to throw Pakistan's fourth One-Day International with South Africa in Dubai.

Since claiming asylum he has been subjected to a barrage of criticism from former Pakistan internationals, including the 1992 World Cup winning captain Imran Khan and former Kent all-rounder Asif Iqbal.

There has been support from some, if not all, Pakistan fans and from Latif, an outspoken critic of match-fixing who was also ostracised by the Pakistan cricket establishment.

## RUGBY

# Battling double comeback leaves Brighton rocking

Maidstone 16 Brighton 14

MAIDSTONE are beginning to mount a serious London 2 South East title charge after coming from behind twice to record their third consecutive league win.

Brighton struck first on Saturday, after an incisive break engineered by their fly-half opened up the Maidstone defence.

The stand-off fed the prop-forward, who crashed over near the posts. But the conversion was missed, which was to prove costly at the end.

The Sussex side extended their lead on the half-hour with a penalty conceded by Neil Graves, who was shown a yellow card.



Picture: BOB HAYTON

**RISING:** Maidstone's title charge is shaping up after Saturday's hard-fought victory over Brighton

The visitors moved into an 11-point lead courtesy of another penalty, but the home side were given a boost at the start of the second-half when Brighton were reduced to 14 and Ben Smith opened Maidstone's account with a 35-metre penalty. Smith proved instrumental in the comeback, scoring a try shortly after to shift the momentum towards the home side.

Kiwi Tommy King scored another try five minutes later to push Maidstone into the lead. Brighton responded with a penalty to retake the lead as the game entered the final quarter. With ten minutes remaining a converted penalty put Maidstone back in front and, despite a nervous finish, they held on to the victory.



**AMBITIOUS:** Louise Cook is making quick progress

# Cook dreams of world stage

## MOTORSPORT

**PROMISING** rally driver Louise Cook has set herself the target of joining the World Rally Championship (WRC) Academy by 2012.

The Aylesford driver is beginning to attract attention after winning the British Rally Championship Challenge RC4 class title in her first full season in the sport.

Despite just one season behind the wheel, Cook is already looking to the future and has her eyes set on competing on the world stage in just over a year's time.

The WRC Academy is a one-make series for stars of the future and provides drivers up to

the age of 25 with a crucial first step on the world scene. The championship, which will see drivers compete in identical Ford Fiestas, is made up of six rallies across the world.

Cook said: "The launch of the new FIA WRC Academy is fantastic for young drivers like myself.

"It is probably the best opportunity to get on the WRC ladder and start the climb to being the first female world champion."

The 23-year-old is well under way with her preparations for next season, which includes a test in the Fiesta championship car.

She said: "The Fiesta R2 felt really nice. It would be great to have some experience in one for 2011, but it all comes down to finance."

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