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PM's promise for new future at site



TRIBUTE: David Cameron

By Rebecca Smith Rebecca.Smith@Krnmedia.Co.Uk

PRIME Minister [David Cameron](#) has pledged to secure a new future for [Pfizer's](#) site in Sandwich after the drug

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company revealed it is to close the site by 2013.

Mr Cameron said he had spoken to bosses at the US pharmaceutical giant and committed the Government to getting new investment. The first meeting between Government ministers and local politicians took place in Whitehall on Wednesday.

Speaking on Wednesday Mr Cameron paid tribute to Pfizer staff, describing them as "brilliant employees doing great work".

The "taskforce" includes county council leader [Paul Carter](#) and Thanet council leader [Bob Bayford](#) as well as Thanet South MP [Laura Sandys](#). They met with business ministers David Willet and [Vince Cable](#).



Mrs Sandys, who was due to meet with Pfizer bosses yesterday (Thursday) to discuss the future for the 340-acre site, said Mr Cameron's talks with Pfizer had been "positive", adding: "We are committed to marketing the huge strategic benefits of the facility. It is a purpose-built research facility with impressive buildings, superb infrastructure, and it's close to [Europe](#)."

"In addition we have some superb expertise and skills in Sandwich that are attractive to any investor.

"And some of the highest calibre research scientists in the country."

It is understood that the [University of Kent](#) could start a bio-technology centre on part of the site and smaller, new, research companies could also take on lab space.

Pfizer announced on Tuesday that it will close its base just outside Thanet in 18 to 24 months with the loss of 2,400 research and development jobs, mainly through redundancy.

Pfizer says several hundred staff could be transferred to its other sites or to other "partners". The company says a new Pain and Sensory Disorders Unit will now be based in [Cambridge](#).

Some commentators believe the true figure of job losses at Sandwich will be nearer 4,000 when contractors are included. The loss of income to the east Kent economy could top £120 million a year, with an estimated 40 per cent of Pfizer staff living in the area.

Pfizer says the closure is "part of a global programme of changes to accelerate Pfizer's long term research and development strategy".

The move is expected to reduce the company's global R&D budget by between \$1.5 and \$2 billion by 2012.

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A spokesman said: "This is not solely a savings exercise. Like the rest of the industry Pfizer is facing productivity challenges. We need to create a more focused and sustainable engine for high quality innovation, which can deliver the medicines and vaccines that matter most to the people we serve.

"This decision is about looking at our business and ensuring our R&D operations can meet the challenges that the pharmaceutical industry faces."

National officer for Unite Linda McCulloch was quick to condemn the closure. She said: "The staff at this site are at the cutting edge of developing life-saving drugs. These are exactly the sort of jobs we need to keep in this country. Unite will be doing everything possible to save these jobs and seek alternatives to closure."



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