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from **Kent and Sussex Courier**
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Pfizer site to shut within two years

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By Kathy Bailes

A TASK force has been set up by the Government and [Kent County Council](#) following news that pharmaceutical giant [Pfizer](#) will axe its Sandwich site by 2013.

More than 2,400 jobs will be lost at the research and development centre, most through redundancy over the next 18 months to two years, although the firm says several hundred employees may be transferred to other sites or external partners.

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Pfizer, which is one of the area's main employers, says the closure is "part of a global programme of changes to accelerate Pfizer's long term research and development (R&D) strategy".

Secretary of State for Business [Vince Cable](#) has called the decision "extremely disappointing". He is meeting Pfizer bosses, other companies, representatives from the new [Local Enterprise Partnership](#), MPs and councillors "as a matter of urgency" to look at ideas to continue research at the site.



The closure was branded "devastating" by [Dover District Council](#) leader [Paul Watkins](#).

He said: "This has a massive impact on the Dover district and east Kent economy. The economy will be badly hit by the effects of this news, and those local families who have relations employed at the site will be particularly distressed and concerned at the moment. Pfizer is a high income business and the social and economic effects cannot be underestimated. We will do what we can as a local authority to engage with government and the county council, Pfizer and local partners, in an attempt to find solutions for the future of the site, and how best we can be supportive of local employees and families."

Sandwich and Thanet South MP [Laura Sandys](#), who called the announcement "a body blow to east Kent," has already spoken to Business and Research Minister David Willets and senior staff at the global firm.

She said: "I am pleased we are establishing a taskforce with ministers, Kent County Council and Pfizer to put together a dynamic transitional plan to attract new businesses to the Sandwich site.

"We have 24 months to put in place a programme of re-investment and to ensure this prime location becomes the home of new businesses into the future."

Dr Ruth McKernan, Senior Vice President and Site Head for Pfizer, said: "It is with a deep sense of sadness that we announce our proposal to exit our site in Sandwich. It has played an important role in the discovery and development of medicines and has brought many life-saving treatments to patients."

The company, which closed its manufacturing operations in Sandwich in 2007 and shed another 240 jobs in 2009, says a new Pain and Sensory Disorders Unit will now be based in [Cambridge](#).



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