

Pram push protest

Save Maidstone's Maternity Services



Darren Goldup, Charlie Hare, Paul Davison, Mel Streek, Darren Hoadley and Andrew Streek, who are supporting the campaign to keep maternity services in Maidstone

A PRAM will be pushed between Maidstone and Pembury on Sunday in a protest against a shake-up of maternity services.

Helen Grant, the prospective Conservative candidate for Maidstone and the Weald, has organised the 17-mile pram push as part of a campaign to keep a full maternity unit at Maidstone Hospital.

She will set off from Maidstone Hospital at 9am in an attempt to highlight the extra distance women in labour will be forced to travel when a consultant-led maternity unit is formed at the new Pembury Hospital in 2011, leaving a birthing unit staffed by midwives in Maidstone.

Former BBC TV presenter Geoff Clarke will compe the send-off from outside the hospital with a loud hailer.

Frank and Brenda Tilley, of Fant Lane, Barming, have donated a pram for Mrs Grant's protest,

after she knocked on their door while canvassing.

Dads are also lending their support to the campaign and members of the Marden Business Forum are also supporting her, by driving in a convoy on the route.

Andrew Streek, of Claygate Distribution, said: "Being in the road transport business we all know the treacherous route women in labour with complications would face in an emergency journey to Pembury. Our people drive it every day and it is just plain dangerous."

MARDEN BUSINESSMEN GET BEHIND HELEN'S MATERNITY CAMPAIGN

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Forum to state case for farming's future



Marden Business Forum's Chairman and co-organiser of Helen's Rural event Elaine Collins drawing raffle tickets with Shadow Minister Richard Benyon

FARMERS and the rural community will have an opportunity to state their case for the future of the countryside to a powerful line-up of decision-makers, writes Mike Bennett.

Shadow agriculture minister Richard Benyon MP, Hadlow College director of resources Mark Lumsden Taylor, and Kent County Council leader Cllr Paul Carter will outline their vision on the future of farming at a public meeting of the Weald Business Forum this month.

Mr Lumsden Taylor has been passionate about the industry and the promotion of UK-produced food during his seven years at Hadlow College. He is a board member of the Kent County Agricultural Society and the Rural Innovation Unit.

His mission is to educate people about the opportunities available in the rural industries and dispel the perception that farming has little to offer, especially after many years of massive food imports from nations with lower production costs.

He said: "Now we are seeing a reversal of the industry's fortunes. Concerns about future food security aligned to burgeoning population and climate change issues are resulting in greater public interest in where



COUNTRY WAYS: The Garden of England will benefit from agriculture's revival

and how food is produced."

He believes farming is in line to return to its former position as one of the most important industries and there is the need for bright, motivated people to take up the challenge.

"We don't have a choice - we have to produce more food," he said. "This is an exciting, rewarding, stimulating and challenging time for a career in agriculture."

"Demand for local, regional and UK produced food is growing on a daily basis."

The forum will be hosted by prospective parliamentary candidate Helen Grant, who will be contesting retiring MP Ann Widdecombe's Maidstone and the Weald seat at the general election this year.

She said: "The agricultural economy and our farming communities are a vital and natural part of this county. I want to bring something tangible to engage the rural business sector and am delighted we have such excellent speakers to head the event. I am sure people will not hold back in the question and answer session."

Brought up in a farming family in Cumbria, Ms Grant retains strong links with the land.

She said: "Country life is close to my heart and I feel an affinity with farmers and the rural aspects of this constituency."

Shadow minister Mr Benyon's family runs a 3,500 acre estate in Berkshire and he is a member of the Conservative team that formulates rural policy.

The meeting will be at the Weald of Kent Golf Hotel, Headcorn, starting at 9.30am on Tuesday, January 26. To book a place, contact elaine@nowwireless.com or write to Helen Grant's Rural Business Forum, c/o Gail Jessel, Little Pagehurst Oast, Pagehurst Road, Staplehurst, TN12 0JD.



Marden resident and Rural event co-organiser Gail Jessel with Richard Benyon MP

New beauty salon offers a tranquil sanctuary for pampering

TWO BUSINESSWOMEN from Marden have bucked the economic trend by opening a new beauty salon in the village. Maidstone Road resident Trudi Westthrop and Liz Stanley, of Albion Road, launched the venture, named The Green Door, with a drinks reception for 200 guests on February 7. Among those present at the new High Street

premises were the Mayor of Maidstone Cllr Denise Joy and the Conservative party's prospective parliamentary candidate for Maidstone and the Weald, Helen Grant. Mrs Grant said: "Liz and Trudi have created a beautiful, peaceful sanctuary where both men and women can be soothed and pampered. It is so refreshing to hear of a new business

starting up amid the current gloom of the wider economy. "I wish Liz, Trudi and the team every success in the future with their new venture." Marden resident Mary Sarah Davies added: "The atmosphere was warm and inviting - just what Marden needs right now."

NEW BUSINESS: From left with ribbon, Sarah Howard, reflexologist, Liz Stanley, business partner, Helen Grant, Trudi Westthrop, business partner and beauty therapist, and Kelly Hogan, beauty therapist, at a ribbon-cutting ceremony to launch The Green Door, a new beauty salon in Marden



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Victory for MASH....but the fight goes on



Helen with jubilant members of MASH and other campaigners upon hearing of victory outside Maidstone's County Hall

MASH chairman Dennis Fowle said the group was delighted by the decision and had offered assistance to KCC to present the case to the government.

He added: "MASH members working with the Maidstone BMA have been at the heart of this for about six years, which includes attending every trust and PCT board meeting in the past four years, and have built up a wealth of knowledge from many sources.

"The reasons the health ministers must think again include the powerful public opposition, transport, the transfer rate from birthing units, poor consultation in 2004 and that the current trend is away from maternity reconfigurations in other areas of the South East."

Helen Grant, Conservative's prospective parliamentary candidate for Maidstone and a member of MASH, said: "I am absolutely delighted with this decision and I congratulate the rest of our MASH team for their work in preparing and presenting our report for the committee to consider.

"The Secretary of State has executive powers and can review and overturn the trust's plans. He has the power to give the people of Maidstone what they need and deserve; let's hope he now does that."