



MICHELLE RUNNING BACK TO ENDERS

Babe's boost for soap

EXCLUSIVE

EASTENDERS babe Michelle Ryan is returning to the soap – five years after quitting to tackle other acting challenges.

Michelle, 25, who played Zoe Slater in nearly 500 episodes, vowed never to go back to the show that helped make her name. But soap bosses persuaded the star – out running near her London home last week – to return.

Michelle has agreed to appear in the BBC1 show for at least a month around Christmas. Auditions have already been held to find her character a hunky new love interest.

Zoe's mum Kat (Jessie Wallace) and Kat's husband Alfie Moon (Shane Richie) will also return as producers try to boost viewing figures. Michelle left EastEnders in 2005. She landed roles in the

movies *I Want Candy* and *Cashback*. Michelle also played Jaime Sommers in the American TV series *Bionic Woman*.

She appeared in the 2008 BBC TV series *Merlin* and was in a *Doctor Who* special last year.

Michelle first appeared in EastEnders in 2000. Zoe found that Kat – who she thought was her sister – was her mother.

She became entangled with *Dirty Den* (Leslie Grantham) and bashed his wife Chrissie (Tracy-Ann Oberman).



BOP: Zoe clouts Chrissie

Speculation over old favourites returning mounted yesterday when it emerged six characters – Charlie Slater, Minty Peterson, Libby Fox, Danny Mitchell, Adam Best and Liz

Turner – are to be axed.

A BBC spokeswoman said: "We have not approached Michelle

"Speculation is rife about returning characters but this is not true. However, as with all characters, we would never say never."

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NAT OFFERS JOHN GODFATHER ROLE

EXCLUSIVE

FORMER EastEnders star Natalie Cassidy has asked Wendy Richard's widower to be godfather to her unborn child.

Four-months-pregnant Natalie, 26, who played Sonia Fowler, was delighted when John Burns, 47, agreed.

John – long-term partner of Wendy, 65, who died a year ago – comforted

Natalie when her mum died eight years ago. A source said: "She sees John as a father-figure who has always been there for her. She couldn't wait to ask him when she found out she was pregnant and was delighted when he said 'yes' straight away."

Natalie met her baby's dad, transport boss Adam Cottrell, 30, at the Isle of Wight Festival only nine months ago.

The actress has also asked former Albert Square co-star Patsy Palmer, 37, to be godmother.



COMFORT: John and Natalie

PICTURE EXCLUSIVE