

Borough low in prosperity rankings

A think tank has published a list ranking the 'most prosperous' places in the country, with no areas in Kent coming in the top 50.

Factors considered in Legatum Institute's UK Prosperity Index 2021 included the safety and security of communities, residents' physical and mental health, living conditions and investment in the environment on top of the financial stability of local economies.

In Kent, Sevenoaks placed highest at 59th, while Thanet was deemed least prosperous at 309th out of 379 boroughs. Swale came 230th, the third lowest in Kent.

Wokingham received the highest overall rank and Blackpool the lowest.

Professor Matthew Goodwin, director of the institute, said: "Genuine prosperity is about far more than building a strong economy. The index shows we also need to invest in areas such as safety and security, health, enterprise conditions, and family and community life if we are to see citizens, neighbourhoods, and communities reach their full potential."



Representatives from Diversity House project. The charity faced an uncertain time last year after it became homeless after losing its base, but funding and a new office has safeguarded its future

Cash sees charity able to focus on issues again

By Chloe Holmwood
 cholmwood@thekmgroup.co.uk
 @chloeholmwoodKM

The CEO of a charity that was left homeless last year says she is "absolutely delighted" to have been given three years' worth of funding to continue its services.

Christine Locke, of Sittingbourne's Diversity House, said the charity was in a "dangerous" position at the end of last year after trustees of Swale Community Centres (SCC), the charitable company set up to manage Phoenix House, in Central Avenue, said they had decided not to reopen the centre due to the coronavirus crisis.

The charity had been at Phoenix House for 14 years.

However, after finding a new home at ISP House in Church Street in December, Kent Community Foundation has awarded core funding to Diversity House, which promotes community integration, re-integration, social inclusion and cohesion.

The foundation established a new fund earlier this year, as part of its 20th anniversary celebrations, to provide funding to one charitable organisation

Money is vital lifeline after trustees lost their base last year

from each of the county's districts.

The 13 groups whose applications were successful – including Diversity House – received £12,000 in April. They will then get a second grant of £9,600 next April and a third of £6,000 in April 2023, all of which will go towards their core costs including utilities, rent and staffing.

Christine said: "I am absolutely delighted, this means we can continue to provide the much-needed services for our various communities."

She added: "The idea is that we address social inequalities we have in our societies such as mental health issues, disabilities, relationship crises and unemployment."

"We are a charity for human beings and we are open and willing to work with anyone to address whatever issue they bring to us."

■ More about the charity at www.diversityhouse.org.uk

Objections to plans for 1,100 homes

Plans for 1,100 homes in the Swale Local Plan are "undeliverable" a parish council has claimed.

Disgruntled residents living near Sittingbourne in Teynham shared their views on a possible development which would bring the homes and a new bypass through Lynsted.

Named the Teynham Area of Opportunity (TAO), more than 700 people commented on the plans after the deadline passed for Swale council's Local Plan.

There were more than 2,300 comments on the borough-wide plans, meaning just over 30% of them were about the area of opportunity.

Lynsted with Kingsdown Parish Council analysed the comments and found that 93% of respondents were against the plans.

Parish council chairman Julien Speed said: "Swale council stated there was overwhelming objection to the general concept of garden villages in the 'Bearing Fruits' consultation in 2018. So they replaced this idea with the TAO."

"Yet there were just 92 responses to garden communities in 2018, some of which were in favour. "By contrast, there are now 200 hostile responses to TAO."

"Using the council's logic, they must surely reject the development in Lynsted and Teynham – as more than double the number of people have objected."

Mr Speed claims plans for the TAO were submitted before important evidence from analysis such as traffic modelling and air quality assessments were complete.

He added: "The conclusion is that the Local Plan is not fit for purpose. The development strategy is prejudicial and undeliverable."

"The authority must withdraw the Local Plan now and commence a new Regulation 18 consultation to properly assess the issues and options."

Benefit tests questioned

Sittingbourne and Sheppey's MP, Gordon Henderson, has questioned the government on whether assessments for health and disability benefits are being conducted safely.

MP Justin Tomlinson replied to say face-to-face tests will be done safely and that this means of checking will only be done for people who cannot use other means.

In-person assessments were paused in March.

Returning exercise class is jumping for joy

A fitness class instructor is looking forward to welcoming people back to her sessions after months of virtual classes.

Kelly Kay's 'clubbercise' will be returning to Kemsley Hall in Sittingbourne on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

During the pandemic the instructor has been hosting

classes via Zoom and fought hard to keep the business afloat.

She said: "Clubbercise is a really fun, dance based workout that is done in the dark with glowsticks to club tunes. It's for all abilities and everyone is welcome."

"I can't wait to get back to halls and with people."

Kelly's fitness class won best local business at the Sittingbourne Carnival in 2018.

It costs £4 to participate via Zoom or £5 for a session at the Kemsley Hall.

Message Kelly on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ClubberciseSittingbourne for more information.

It's never been more important to have a website that works

Let us create a website that works for you

mykentwebsite.co.uk

