

Technology helps to save branch

MP Charlie Elphicke visited a building society to see how technology is being used to speed up the mortgage process.

He also learned that Nationwide's Dover and Deal outlets are safe despite a trend of bank and building society branch closures.

The Dover MP met staff at the town's Nationwide in Biggin Street, touring the branch and learning about new services on offer.

One is Nationwide Now, which allows customers to complete mortgage applications via video as soon as they get to the branch, rather than wait for appointments.

Mr Elphicke said: "It was great to see Nationwide being innovative with digital services.

"Mortgage access is going to be key to building a better future for Dover and Deal.

"I want to see more people owning their own homes and putting down their roots in this wonderful area.

"That's why I was also pleased they have committed to keeping the Dover and Deal branches open, meaning people who want a more traditional service can get it."

Hannah Golding, manager at Dover, said: "With one quarter of all new mortgage applications in the Nation-

wide network being advised by Nationwide Now, this was a great opportunity to showcase the services we are able to offer."

Nationwide's Deal branch is in the High Street.

The building society closed 23 branches throughout the country in 2012, although New Romney was the only one to go in Kent.

It was part of a trend of financial service branch shutdowns following a fall in walk-in customers and a rise in remote banking.

At the end of 2015 NatWest Bank shut branches in New Romney and Cheriton, Folkestone, and the Sandwich and

Broadstairs branches are earmarked for closure this summer.

Barclays shut its Hythe branch in November 2015.

But recently Nationwide bucked the trend by, in March 2015, announcing a £300 million five-year investment in its branch network. It was then that the building society announced planned to roll out Nationwide Now across more branches.

It has not closed branches to the same extent as its rivals since it is a mutual financial institution, so it does not have the same profit pressures and so can reinvest money made into services.



Dover MP Charlie Elphicke visits staff at the Nationwide Building Society branch in Biggin Street, Dover

Professor backs fight to protect Goodwin Sands

by Sam Lennon
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An eminent scientist has joined the call to protect the Goodwin Sands from dredging. Prof Robert Duck visited Kingsdown and commented on its vulnerability to heavy waves and said that the Sands were a protection.

The Port of Dover wants to dredge in the area to provide material for its redevelopment of Dover Western Docks.

But Prof Duck said: "The harbour board needs to prove categorically that this will not affect this stretch of beach.

"If they cannot do this the dredging should not be allowed to go ahead."

He also feared that if the harbour board wins a licence from the government the Goodwins could also become a commercial dredging site, which, he believes, would have long-term devastating consequences to this stretch of coast.

Prof Duck is an emeritus Professor of environmental geoscience from the University of Dundee.

He was invited to view this area by Amanda Mount from the campaign group Goodwin Sands SOS (Save our Sands) who lives in Wellington Parade, in Kingsdown.

Prof Duck said he was certain Goodwin Sands protects the foreshore of East Kent and the historical depletion of sand through previous dredging contributed to their present state.

Dredging first started in 1976 and continued until 1990.

He explained: "Everything has a knock on effect."

Mrs Mount and her sister Carey Newton hosted the professor on a flying visit shortly after a storm surge.



Amanda Mount of Goodwin Sands SOS with Prof Robert Duck

NO IMPACT TO AREA SAYS BOARD

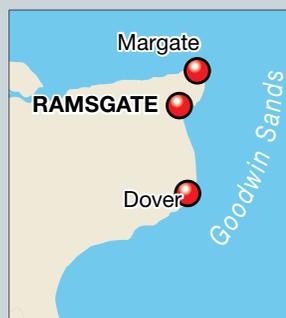
Goodwin Sands SOS says that the Sands should not be disturbed as they are a marine graveyard with the remains of 82 Battle of Britain pilots.

But it is also against the dredging because of fears of coastal erosion and wants to protect a proposed Marine Conservation Zone and a seal colony.

The Port of Dover wants to dig for 2.5 million cubic metres of material for its major Dover Western Docks Revival.

It adds that the south western area it has chosen will lead to the least environmental impact.

The harbour board also



argues that all known military sites will be avoided along with the seal areas and sensitive seabed habitats.

And it insists that there are no coastal impacts such as wave heights, tidal current velocities and coastal erosion.

He came when shingle and seaweed were strewn high up the beaches at both Deal and Kingsdown.

He also saw Oldstairs Bay from the cliffs at Kingsdown and said he was struck by the vulnerability of the coast.

Walking along the seafront by the old lifeboat house he commented on the lack of beach there to take the brunt of incoming waves.

Prof Duck also noticed that a small bay was beginning to

form beside the new groynes on Wellington Parade, which he believed could cause problems in the future.

But he noted that Deal was well protected by the hard engineering of the new sea wall.

Geoscientists study the physical aspects of this planet, such as its composition, structure, and processes.

An emeritus professor is one who no longer has a position in a university but keeps the title.



Farmers will need help post Brexit

MPs back NFU in bid to support farmers

Kent MPs have heard from the NFU how the government could help Kent farmers and growers continue to feed the county's 1.7million residents post Brexit.

NFU representatives addressed seven Kent MPs during a meeting in Westminster earlier this month – setting out the positive contribution of agriculture to the country.

They detailed four principles which British food production needs in a post-Brexit Britain:

■ The best possible access to trade with Europe.

■ Access to a competent and reliable workforce.

■ Government policy recognition of agriculture as a key industry in a post-Brexit Britain.

■ A period of transition allowing farm businesses to adapt to any changes in trading relationships or agricultural policy.

The NFU says farming underpins the UK's food and drink sector which is worth £108billion. Around 15% of Kent's workforce is in the food industry and there are 15,000 farm jobs in Kent.

MPs who attended the briefing were Gareth Johnson (Dartford), Damian Green (Ashford), Charlie Elphicke (Dover), Craig Mackinlay (south Thanet), Helen Grant (Maidstone & The Weald), Helen Whately (Faversham & Mid Kent) and Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester & Strood).

Kent NFU Adviser Amanda Corp, who was among the NFU delegation, said: "The Kent MPs saw video presentations from county farmers and growers. They said the NFU should continue to promote the role of agriculture in food security and self sufficiency."

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