

## Dalby Square Conservation Area

The Dalby Square Conservation Area in Margate was designated by Thanet District Council in August 2010, the first within the area of Cliftonville. It is an example of a tightly focused conservation area which takes in the 1860s square filled with large terraced buildings surrounding an open green space, historically used for tennis and croquet.

The conservation area has seen much change and until the First World War Cliftonville was one of the most exclusive seaside resorts in England. With the opening of the Cliftonville Hotel at one end of the square in 1868, the area grew rapidly in popularity and at its peak neighbouring boarding schools attracted over 5000 pupils alongside exclusive and fashionable hotels.



Dalby square View from Windsor Hotel of Dalby Square. © Thanet District Council

During the Second World War the south end of the square was badly damaged and the Hotel demolished in the 1960s. With the downturn in the British holiday market in the 1970s many of the large houses were converted into bedsits, hostels and care homes. The Cliftonville West Ward itself ranks among England's most deprived wards and the most deprived in Kent. The population is highly transitory with less than 20% of the residents originating from Thanet and privately rented accommodation making up 80% of the residential space (the national average is 14%).

In 2012 Thanet District Council secured a £1.9 million grant from the Heritage Lottery fund for a Townscape Heritage Initiative for Dalby Square. This has provided a grant scheme for residents for repairs to the outside of buildings as well as reinstating lost architectural

features, empty buildings have been brought back into use such as 12 Arthur Road (soon to be a holiday let business) and much needed public realm works to the square have been provided including railings and street lighting. The gardens have been remodelled and a project to return a car park back to gardens is about to get underway.

Importantly the £2.5 million project (which comprises 75% Heritage Lottery Fund and 25% Thanet District Council) set out not only to improve the historic environment but looked to increase community cohesion and foster positive attitudes towards Cliftonville as a place to live and visit. The overarching objective was to change the public attitude so that the historic environment came to be seen as an asset not a hindrance.

One of the most exciting and ground breaking projects within the square was the climate change adapted multi-generational house at Number 12A. Initially Thanet Council secured funding from the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) for a project to understand how Victorian seaside houses would perform environmentally in 2080. Predictions suggest that by then summers will be much hotter and dryer and winters warmer and prone to sudden torrential rainstorms. 30 Dalby Square was chosen as a test house and working closely with Kent School of Architecture the study found that due to its massive traditional construction, terraced configuration and high ceilings, the house performed environmentally far better than most modern dwellings. The most far-reaching finding was that it is of vital environmental importance not to subdivide the building internally – especially the staircase which runs continuously from the basement to top floor which acts as a natural ventilation stack. This staircase subdivision is almost always inevitable when the Victorian houses in Cliftonville are converted into flats. The TSB project proved that the houses of Dalby Square are not just reservoirs of embodied energy and aesthetically pleasing artefacts; they also have a highly sustainable future.



Number 12 Arthur Road, Dalby Square post renovation. © Thanet District Council

Armed with these exciting results the project looked to apply the recommendations to 12A Dalby square and create a prototype of how to best adapt an historic building both for changes in climate and in our society. Working with the University of Kent the house was reconfigured to support multigenerational living both avoiding the environmentally damaging subdivision and promoting a new form of social family model addressing problems in housing shortage, lack of childcare and an aging society all in one!

The layout is designed for maximum flexibility placing the oldest generation in the semi-basement and ground floors, the middle generation on the first and second floors and the youngest generation on the third. In addition, an historic summerhouse in the garden (built to house the hotel owners during the height of the summer season) has been restored, perfect for a teenager looking for independence. Although each generation has their own facilities shared spaces include the grand first floor reception room complete with balcony overlooking the Square. Both the house and wellbeing of the tenants will be monitored by the university of Kent team. A new sustainability toolkit will also be published so learning can be shared. With the climate monitoring equipment installed the house only now awaits a multi-generational family to take up residence.

For this conservation area change brought about by this ambitious scheme has meant good growth not only for the buildings and environment of the square which have been returned to their former glory, but for the people of Cliftonville providing better places to visit, live and socialise as well as new ways of living for the future equipped for a changing climate.

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