

DALBY SQUARE'S FUTURE HOME

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Council

With looming climate change and a rapidly ageing population, the way people live - and the homes they inhabit - is a topic of ever-increasing importance. On Dalby Square in Cliftonville Clare Freeman discovers a pioneering project - the first of its kind in the UK - tackling this issue; a five-storey terraced property being renovated into Britain's first future-proofed multi-generational house

If the concept of grandad and grandson living under the same roof only brings back nostalgic memories of TV shows like *The Waltons*, *Only Fools and Horses* or *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, think again. This once-popular way of living is now having a revival in the UK and throughout the world, spurred by a changing society with increasing levels of loneliness, pressures on childcare and elderly care, a housing shortage and rising housing prices.

Owned by Kent County Council and funded by Thanet District Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund, 12a Dalby Square is - on first appearance - no different to any other house on this socially deprived yet rapidly changing square in Cliftonville West. Hidden behind scaffolding, the five-storey, mid-terrace Victorian house was, like many others in this area, constructed to be used for an extended household; in this instance as a guest house, the Innsbruck Hotel. However, the house is now being transformed by a stellar team of architects and designers - alongside a research team from the University of Kent - into a home which will not only provide a prototype for how to adapt historic buildings



to accommodate projected changes in society and climate, but which will hopefully be replicated in other British historic coastal towns with a 'Sustainable Heritage Toolkit'. It's a bold project and one called 'ground-breaking' by the Academy of Urbanism.

The project was inspired by 78-year-old Jenny Cranstone who has been living in a house on the opposite side of the square with four generations of her own family since 1996. For her, there are many advantages to living in a multi-generational home. "First, you can support each other. There's always someone there to pick up the slack. Also, with the bills, you only pay one council tax, one electricity bill, one gas bill, one lot of insurance, so you save money," says Jenny. "It also keeps you younger and certainly makes you feel less lonely." With this in mind - as well as the results from a research project at 30 Dalby Square which proved that sub-dividing Victorian properties was environmentally damaging - Thanet District Council formed the idea in 2011. They then started discussions with the University of Kent - who will be assessing the success of the project both from an environmental and sociological point of view - and looked for suitable architects to renovate the house. "We know there is a housing shortage, problems of lack of childcare and an ageing society, so we thought, why don't we address these problems all at once?" says Dr Marialena Nikolopoulou, Professor of Sustainable Architecture at the University of Kent. "If families can start relying on each other this helps society. With the luxury of space I think this could be a real solution for getting families back together again and helping the elderly feel less lonely. We can nurture family relationships and help society at the same time."

Lee Evans Partnership, an architecture firm in Canterbury, won a competition to undertake the renovation of the house in 2014.

It's a housing type which they have noticed a growing interest in. "As an architecture firm we are seeing an increasing demand for granny-annexes, and multi-generational housing is becoming more common. These Victorian houses were built for larger families and can be easily transformed into high-performance buildings for multi-generational families," says Nicholas Lee, Director of Lee Evans Partnership. Spanning several floors, the interior is being 'future-proofed' for climate change with a design to improve thermal performance, minimise flood risk, and to conserve water and energy. In the

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rooms, chimneys have been converted to bring in fresh air, whilst extracting air when the rooms are too hot, and on the roof there are thermal solar panels which heat the house's water and contribute to the heating. The spaces are designed to enable three generations of the same family to live together harmoniously, allowing them to live independently yet also interact with each other, with spacious open-plan kitchen and living areas on several floors and private smaller rooms and en-suite bathrooms. The family is also able to adapt the interior to suit their needs, with metal kitchens which can be un-bolted and moved to other rooms if necessary. Outside, a 1950's-style summer house is also being renovated, which - together with a decked area - will provide a private outdoor space for residents.

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The research side of the project will be led by Dr Marialena Nikolopoulou, Professor of Sustainable Architecture at the University of Kent. To assess the houses' effectiveness at addressing climate change, data on temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide levels will be collected for one year via data loggers in certain rooms of the house. "The data loggers - the size of a matchbox - will be hidden in the house so as not to disturb the family," says Marialena. "The data will help us monitor environmental conditions in the house throughout the seasons and also the use of energy. It is hoped that the building will have a significantly reduced energy consumption." The resident family - yet to be chosen - will also be interviewed by the university's School of Psychology, led by Hannah Swift, to assess the effectiveness of having multiple generations of the same family living together. "The different generations will be interviewed separately to try to understand how they use the space and how well it's designed for intergenerational living," says Hannah. "We'll be asking them questions about where they interact with each other, how they decided to divide and use the space and levels of the house, and what works well or not so well for them."

It is hoped that the house will also encourage people to settle on the square and stabilise the community. As noted by Jenny Cranstone, "during a period in the late nineties or early two thousands people would just live on the square for three months and then move. It was constant shifting. We hope this multi-generational house will encourage long-term settling instead." Nick Dermott, Heritage Advisor for Thanet District Council, agrees. "Our aim is to stabilise the community in Dalby Square, which historically has always been in flux. We are creating a building for the future, not just restoring an old building. It's a test bed".



Future layout of 12a Dalby Square



Historical image of 15 Dalby Square