



DEAL TREASURES: *The small Society*

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The phrase “nothing in life comes for free” is usually true – but since 2022, Pete Dennis, the founder of The small Society charity in Deal, has been proving that it is not always the case

Pete Dennis set up the The small Society to provide free (yes, completely free) respite breaks for carers - with particular emphasis, although not exclusively, on those who devote their time to supporting someone with a mental health disorder, as Pete has bipolar himself.

Tucked away down a very peaceful side street, not far from Deal train station and the High Street, The small Society is a hidden gem and an absolute haven. Pete has an engineering background and has been laboriously and lovingly building his own beautiful home here over the past 15 years, alongside two smaller abodes, all set in an extensive courtyard garden.

Pete founded The small Society charity with the support of two nieces, a nephew and two friends who are now the charity's trustees. Carers can apply to come and stay for anything up to six nights at a time to have a break from their caring duties. The small Society normally operates from April to September, although Pete says if someone wants to come outside of those times it may also be possible.

One abode sleeps two people and the other is for a single person. Each features a private kitchenette area, an ensuite

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bathroom with a walk-in shower and its own lovely outdoor seating area. Guests can rest, relax and enjoy a change of environment; listen to the sound of a water fountain running into fish ponds, surrounded by the beautifully planted courtyard with its quirky objects and artefacts. There is also an allotment area where guests are encouraged to help out, and to use the produce if they wish. Or, of course, they can explore the wonderful sights that Deal and the surrounding areas have to offer.

The small Society has a special atmosphere, perhaps in part due the history of the site, some of which is still visible. There had been a windmill nearby since the 1700s, which was replaced in the 1860s by Chitty's steam mill, built on The small Society site along with five millworkers' cottages. These were partly demolished in 1900 and again in the 1950s, but sections of the mill and the cottages have been left intact, with Pete using the footprint of the mill to build his home, subtly blending in the old with the new. The site is open once a year for Heritage Open Day in September when the public can visit and learn more about its history.

As any carer knows, having some time out by yourself to recharge your batteries is extremely valuable, and in many cases it rarely happens. The small Society is a unique and much-needed initiative and as such, guests have travelled from as far away as Manchester and Wales to benefit from it.

The value of what The small Society is providing for carers, who often dedicate their lives unpaid to caring for others, cannot be overestimated. Through the charity, they are made to feel important; that they deserve a holiday, for free. That is priceless.

It is a very inspiring initiative. As Pete says: “I have a general attitude that if you can help you should... I would like to think that if there are people out there who happen to have granny annexes that aren't used they could open them up for others to use.”

There is nothing small about what Pete has created or about what The small Society is offering. It is huge. A true Deal treasure.

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dealheritage.org.uk/heritage-open-days



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