

EDITORIAL

The merger between The English Courtyard Association and The Beechcroft Trust was successfully completed, within budget, at the end of last year.

In his annual Chairman's Statement, Henry Thornton said: "Together we form a robust and professional organisation, capable of taking on the challenges and opportunities of the future and writing a new chapter in retirement property."

"The merger has resulted in significant annual savings and this year our overheads should be ten percent lower than two years ago when the companies operated separately. The coming years should bring even more savings, thanks to economies of scale and efficient operating methods, such as the introduction of payment by direct debit on all sites."

"The merger has allowed us to reduce English Courtyard property management charges, which were higher than those at Beechcroft Trust, as a first step towards equalising charges within the next few years. This does not mean that all service charges will be the same, because other factors, like location, facilities and the number of properties on a site, have to be taken into account."

"Beechcroft Trust properties may not see management fees reduced, but residents will enjoy improved services, more regular visits from regional managers and a new, in-house, horticultural advice service."

"With the economy in recession, our independent resale service has been operating in a difficult market. Sales have been frustratingly slow. Despite this, Cognatum Property was responsible for selling 67 percent of all the Cognatum properties that were sold in 2009, thanks to our investment in a new website, together with regular national advertising."

NEW RESIDENTS ADVISORY PANEL

Now that Cognatum is firmly established, two residents will be appointed to the Cognatum board to provide balance and a cross-section of views about policies and running the company. The ECA has had resident directors since 2000, and we already have Mike Owen, who lives at Mytchett Heath in Surrey, on the Cognatum board. A second resident director drawn from a Beechcroft Trust development will be appointed.

In addition, a panel of eight residents will meet twice a year to comment and advise on Cognatum's activities, policies and processes.

We have received a good response from those wishing to participate; in fact we have more applicants than panel places. Everyone who expressed interest is being seen individually before appointments are made for the inaugural meeting in July.

The panel will be chaired by Christopher MacKenzie-Beevor, a director and manager of the west region. Christopher joined ECA in March 2007 after a military and business career and is Vice-Chairman of the Cavalry and Guards Club. He has experienced the Cognatum service from both sides, as his mother lived at Malthouse Court in Towcester and an uncle still lives there.



Christopher with an american brook trout in Argentina

Maternity Cover for Nicky Meads



There will be a temporary change in regional responsibilities for the next six months because Nicky Meads has left us to have her first baby. Nikki Routledge will cover for her, working from her home base in Luton and managing our central region, which includes Cheshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire.



St Luke's Court

Change is inevitable, yet we draw comfort and reassurance from tradition and heritage. This has been the cornerstone of the Cognatum philosophy since we pioneered quality retirement housing more than thirty years ago.

All our schemes are located, designed and constructed in the best tradition of English housing. They are all in historic towns or villages, many in conservation areas, and have been designed to match the local architectural style. Our success is reflected in the many civic, national and industry awards won over the years. One example is St Luke's development in Marlborough, Wiltshire: a former workhouse, built for 180 inmates in 1837 at the cost of £4,362, which was later used as a children's hospital. When English Courtyard converted the workhouse, a key issue was whether to retain the original cruciform buildings that bear witness to our social and economic history. St Luke's is now a successful blend of old and new build – with a level of comfort far removed from the spartan conditions of the workhouse inmates.

Nearly all our developments have links with the past, which underscores our commitment to retaining and enhancing the national heritage. Our early buildings have spent thirty years quietly maturing and are now forming part of England's architectural heritage. With that comes a responsibility to maintain and protect this heritage, for current owners and those to come.

All our developments are designed to a harmonious

formula – generally around garden courtyards with garages tucked out of sight. To retain their good looks, there are covenants preventing residents from altering the appearance of their properties, without Cognatum's consent. Covenants like these have protected the appearance of famous London squares and terraces for a century or more.

A controversial issue is the desire to replace timber windows with UPVC, something that English Heritage and planning authorities discourage in conservation areas. Replacement windows can reduce redecoration costs, although claims that they require no maintenance and last longer than timber windows are overstated. In fact, timber windows are generally easier to maintain because sections can be repaired simply. Uniform windows on each development play an important part in keeping every site looking its best.

Changes in legislation and new building materials and construction methods can provide opportunities to make our homes more comfortable and energy efficient. We need to embrace these, but in a way which protects our heritage without detracting from the initial design. To quote English Heritage, conservation is "not meant to fossilise a building but to ensure the architectural and historic intent is carefully considered before any alternatives are agreed". As our properties age gracefully, we are ever aware of our responsibility to conserve all that is fine for the future.

Service charges are good value

Cognatum properties are ideal for those trading down from large family houses – but how do they compare in terms of annual costs, taking the service charge into consideration? We have put together a comparative table of expenses using an "average" service charge for a Beechcroft Trust or ECA property. There are slight differences between the two; for instance, ECA gardening is included in staff costs, and there are some additional communal services such as guest rooms and laundrettes. To simplify the comparison, costs of swimming pools on a number of Beechcroft Trust schemes have not been included, nor minibuses on ECA schemes.

We have made a few assumptions about the costs of a typical family house based on similar lifestyle and security. The arithmetic confirms that, in addition to the financial benefit of releasing capital, living on a retirement development could reduce annual household expenditure by up to a third. What do you think?

Included in service charge:	Beechcroft Trust	English Courtyard	Family House	Family House Assumptions
Management, staff, common parts	1,290	2,200	0	No staff
Alarm service	110	230	600	Personal alarm
Window cleaning	95	65	210	£35 every two months
Gardening/grounds	480	120	1,350	£40pw for 30 weeks + costs
Building insurance	90	110	500	
Maintenance/building repairs	145	135	500	Odd jobs, drains, gutters
Reserve fund for non-annual work	540	755	750	External decoration etc
Sub-total	£2,750	£3,615	£3,910	
Other household expenditure:				
Electricity/all energy	1,000	1,000	2,250	
Council tax	2,200	2,200	2,200	Band G
Water/sewerage	240	0	440	
Burglar alarm	0	0	180	Maintenance and monitoring
House sitter	0	0	525	£25pd for 3 weeks
Cleaner	1,000	1,000	1,500	£30pw for 50 weeks
Sub-total	£4,440	£4,200	£7,095	
TOTAL	£7,190	£7,815	£11,005	

HIP, HIP, HOORAY...

After ten years, it takes a coalition government to see sense and abolish Home Information Packs.

Despite widespread opposition from all sectors of the property world well before the 2001 General Election, the government pushed forward their plans to introduce Home Information Packs. These packs became mandatory for all larger properties from August 2007 and subsequently for properties of all sizes.

The Government's rationale for HIPs was to speed up the process of buying and selling property in England; to reduce delays between acceptance of an offer and exchange of contracts, which often led to a collapse of the deal. However, from our experience, most transactions involve a chain of buyers, so delays are mainly caused by slow conveyancing. No legislation will stop people changing their minds or failing to obtain an acceptable mortgage offer. It was therefore no surprise that the introduction of HIPs had no impact on this problem, and simply added another cost to the process.

There is little doubt that the extra cost of HIPs prevented many potential purchasers from putting their properties on the market. In an already fragile market this led to a famine of serious purchasers. Following the General Election, we have seen a gradual increase in activity, leading to a number of sales agreed at asking prices. We are not predicting significant growth in property values over the next few months but long-term predictions are good and it is likely that we will see above-inflation growth from 2011 onwards.

RETIREMENT PROPERTY IN 21 COUNTIES

01491 61 59 61 • www.cognatum.co.uk



27 Hayes End Manor, South Petherton, Somerset.

A unique two-bedroom bungalow with a conservatory in a secluded position overlooking fields towards Ham Hill.

£345,000



12 University Farm, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos

Three-bedroom cottage with a conservatory on a garden square with swimming pavilion, close to the High Street.

£370,000



7 Penstones Court, Stanford in the Vale, Oxon

Two-bedroom cottage with conservatory and garage overlooking the courtyard gardens.

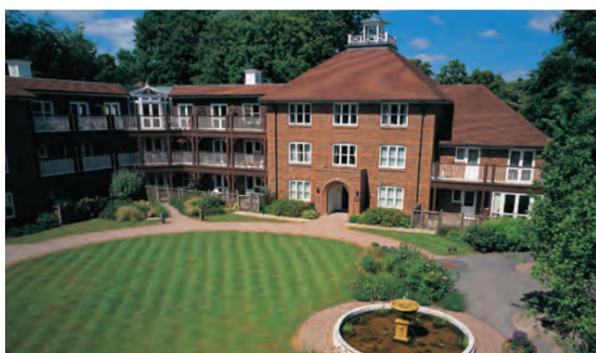
£295,000



10 Timbermill Court, Fordingbridge, Hampshire

An immaculate first-floor three-bedroom apartment with view towards the water meadows on the edge of the New Forest.

£475,000



24 Wyke Mark, Winchester, Hampshire

Spacious three-bedroom first-floor apartment with balcony, in a wooded suburb of this cathedral city.

£425,000



17 Islescourt, Ramsbury, Wiltshire

A charming two-bedroom cottage with conservatory and garage, overlooking the garden and pond.

£250,000



27 Badsworth Gardens, Newbury, Berkshire

Attractive two-bedroom cottage with conservatory and garage, around a garden screened by woodland.

£315,000



14 Framers Court, Lane End, Buckinghamshire

Large three-bedroom brick-and-flint house with terrace and garage, close to the village shops.

£385,000



19 Home Farm, Iwerne Minster, Dorset

A converted two-bedroom cottage with enclosed garden, in a charming village in beautiful countryside.

£315,000



38 Mytchett Heath, Camberley, Surrey

Spacious open-plan two-bedroom Wing House overlooking gardens and fields to the rear.

£475,000