

Exclusive retirement property for the 55+ with security and exceptional service, managed with integrity and value for money



Andrew Brown of Ash Mill Developments and Henry Thornton at Seymour Place

Across the country there is a real shortage of high quality properties suitable for downsizers. Cognatum manages what is probably the most extensive portfolio of upmarket retirement estates, and is well placed to promote new developments thanks to its expertise and not-for-profit principles. This was demonstrated by our successful partnership with Ash Mill Developments at Seymour Place, Odiham. These modern, well-proportioned, and energy efficient properties were warmly received and sold in record time.

Cognatum now plans to forge links with other quality developers to sponsor new schemes. One of these companies is the award-winning Environ Communities, which has built many innovative developments in the south of England, as well as working on a four-year project in the Tarn region of the south of France. Set in unspoilt countryside in the golden triangle between Albi, Gaillac and Cordes-sur-Ciel and within an hour of Toulouse, this managed development of new houses and apartments, some set around a lake, in the stunning grounds of Chateau de la Durantie, is aimed at active British retirees and the international market. In fact, it may be the answer for those hunting for a second home abroad to complement their Cognatum property.



Chateau de la Durantie
(www.durantie.com)

EDITORIAL

The last few years were ones of consolidation for Cognatum after the merger of The Beechcroft Trust and English Courtyard Association. As the chairman Henry Thornton reported in his annual statement, the company is now firmly focussed on improving customer service and promoting the new Cognatum brand.

Our head office costs remain lower than they were four years ago and we continue to make savings whilst maintaining modest increases in staff salaries and improving service levels.

The customer survey undertaken last autumn gave us plenty to think about in shaping the future corporate plan and underlined the fact that even in the age of the iPad, good personal communication is paramount.

...CUSTOMER SURVEY UPDATE...

In our winter edition we gave an overview of the findings of our survey and promised further information once it had been fully analysed. In general, the survey showed a high level of satisfaction with the service provided, but when compared estate by estate, there are some significant differences.

The top ten estates have an overall satisfaction rating above 70%, but the bottom ten score as low as 43%. As a result, we have developed action plans for each development so that issues can be addressed to achieve a more uniform standard of service performance, with timescales set for improvements.

As with any organisation, communication is the key to success and the survey indicated that there is work to do here. Providing clear and concise information, together with a quick response to problems, is important. Work we have done in the last two years to improve the information on service charges and reserve funds is clearly paying dividends with 90% of respondents satisfied with the information given and 30% thinking it good or excellent.

However, some other areas of communication were deemed less satisfactory. To improve this, we have introduced summer forums – which are currently taking place – at all developments. We hope these meetings will encourage more informal dialogues between our residents and the company. Led by the regional manager, forums will include updates on work in progress, information on finance and most importantly, open discussions on plans for improvements to any aspects of our service. About half of the forums have taken place and we have received good feedback, indicating that these should prove a valuable means of communication in the future.

Taking early steps to implement some of the findings of the survey is important to demonstrate our commitment to improving services. Some changes will be for the long term, such as devolving more authority directly to our estate managers, to allow quicker decision-making. However, we have already made a start on the necessary training for this increased responsibility.

Charles Clayton, managing director, recently sent a fuller account of the survey to all owners. It was an interesting and useful exercise that will help ensure that Cognatum remains a responsive company, with customer service its priority.

Barton Farm Water Meadows

Volunteers, including residents, are helping John Staley to restore an extraordinary irrigation system in the grounds of Barton Farm, used by farmers in the 16th century. The intricate web of channels, sluices and hatches that controlled the irrigation of the meadows, are being restored or replaced. This ingenious piece of agricultural engineering accelerated the growth of grass and enabled farmers to give their cattle and sheep "an early bite" some six weeks before normal pasture was ready. £10,000 has been raised towards the project.



Band of volunteers directed by John Staley (on right)

GARDEN PROJECT AT EAST ILSLEY



After 10 years, even in the best gardens it is time to review the state of the shrubs and to rationalise what is there. Sometimes the shrubs have become over-mature and larger than expected and the original concept for the bed has been lost due to subsequent infill plants. When this happens the best option is to remove all unwanted plants and start again.

This was the situation Charles Gilchrist, landscape manager, faced at Hildesley Court in Berkshire; a bank border that was proving difficult to maintain, with shrubs looming over the benches giving a claustrophobic feeling to the spot. Posts in the wooden retaining walls were also in need of replacement. The decision was taken to grub out the bed and replace the woodwork, at the same time creating a series of terraced beds. This spring a small excavator removed the large shrubs and weeds as well as replenishing the soil for replanting. Beds around the pond and trough were also restored.

The result is a more open and inviting seating area with the views to the fountain visible once again. We have given the new shrubs plenty of room to grow so they will be unencumbered by their neighbours in maturity. It also means that weeding the beds will be easier over the next couple of years while the new plants grow into their positions.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Residents Advisory Panel – At its meeting in March, the panel considered the results of the customer satisfaction survey. Members were concerned that the focus groups had been rushed and poorly attended, but otherwise viewed the results as encouraging, as they showed that there were relatively few complaints. Its recommendations included: greater autonomy for estate managers to speed up decision-making, better communications at all levels and more Cognatum brand marketing. In accordance with the rules of the panel, half the eight members will stand down in September, to be replaced by new candidates who put their names forward at last year's annual meetings.

Annual meetings 2013 – These will be held between 30 September and the first week in November. The exact dates and times are to be confirmed. The 2014 service charge and reserve fund budgets will be circulated to residents at the end of August.

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The customer survey revealed some interesting facts; the majority of buyers (55%) moved more than 20 miles from their last home, and in the West Country this proportion rises to two-thirds. The three main reasons for moving were downsizing, to do less gardening and to escape house maintenance. Being closer to friends was the least likely reason for moving. Overall, the average time buyers had lived in their previous home was over twenty-two years, with the individual maximum being an amazing 85 years – after so long in one place, moving is a momentous decision.

This year sales started slowly after a prolonged cold winter. Yet Cognatum Property sales in the first six months of 2013 were 14% higher than the previous year, indicating some confidence returning to the market. Prices have remained largely unchanged from 2012.

Cognatum Property has just launched its new resales brochure, which sets out the advantages of using the company rather than a high-street estate agent, who will have less knowledge of the retirement housing market.

The first and foremost advantage is that sales prices achieved by Cognatum Property are generally higher than those achieved by local agents who are most unlikely to have a list of buyers waiting for a retirement property.

By contrast, Cognatum Property specialises in retirement housing and its sales team has the experience in this market. Cognatum maintains an enquiry list for all our developments and all properties are featured on our own web-site and Rightmove.

RETIREMENT PROPERTY IN 21 COUNTIES
01491 615961 • www.cognatum.co.uk



10 Wye House, Marlborough, Wiltshire

Quietly located overlooking a formal public garden and just 250 yards from the one of the grandest high streets in England, a two-bedroom cottage with a conservatory, all recently redecorated.

£425,000



6 Hayes End Manor, South Petherton, Somerset

An elegant two-bedroom farm conversion with period features, courtyard garden and ornamental pond. Good range of shops nearby.

£325,000



4 Sandbourne Court, Bournemouth, Dorset

A two-bedroom first floor apartment with a sunny circular bay window in the living room. Lift access and garage. Close to the sea front.

£525,000



19 Mychett Heath, Mychett, Surrey

In extensive grounds with lawns and woodland, a two-bedroom second floor apartment, with a large reception room opening onto a balcony.

£345,000



8 Timbermill Court, Fordingbridge, Hampshire

Edge of the New Forest in a small market town, an immaculate two-bedroom ground floor apartment with conservatory and terrace garden.

£375,000



15 Berehurst, Alton, Hampshire

Large three-bedroom cottage with conservatory. The mature gardens border the Watercress railway; tennis court and a swimming pavilion.

£395,000



26 Barton Farm, Cerne Abbas, Dorset

A spacious detached three-bedroom cottage with conservatory and private garden. The grounds include a water meadow on the Cerne.

£375,000



28 Berrow Court, Upton upon Severn, Worcestershire

In a prime position with superb views towards the Ham, a two-bedroom first floor apartment recently refurbished. Close to shops.

£195,000



22 North Mill Place, Halstead, Essex

A larger three-bedroom cottage with a conservatory and first floor terrace. Set in beautiful countryside on the Essex/Suffolk border.

£315,000



17 Flacca Court, Tattenhall, Cheshire

In a thriving village with a well-stocked high street, a two-bedroom cottage, one with a dressing room, enjoying views over the gardens.

£335,000