

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

## Poppies at Mytchett Heath

Planted and photographed  
by Chris Patten

The centenary of the start of the First World War and the British Legion's initiative 'to cover the country in poppies' has been supported across the nation with functions to raise funds for the Legion. The poppies are particularly lovely in the extensive grounds at Mytchett Heath, Surrey, just a few miles from the home of the British Army at Aldershot.



### Annual meetings and summer forums

The annual budget meetings will be held between 24 September and 29 October. These meetings are necessarily quite formal, chaired by a director and with the budget presentation given by the regional manager. Prior to 2013 they were the only regular meetings where residents and Cognatum management met together.

Then we introduced "summer forums": informal meetings, led by our regional managers, where matters of interest can be discussed, with input from estate managers. These have been a great success. The informality aids dialogue and prompts ideas of local interest. Pressure is also eased on the annual meeting by early consideration of some matters.

Last year the idea that estate managers should attend all annual meetings was widely supported and is now our policy. We have also been considering how to ensure ready access to directors – the majority of whom are non-executives – and whether they should continue to attend all the autumn budget meetings. While it is important to retain personal contacts, our view is that thanks to the success of the summer forums, directors might attend either the summer or autumn meetings. This will be discussed at the budget meetings.



Even the best national estate agents are acknowledged to offer poor service for people buying or selling retirement homes. They are not specialists in retirement properties and lack knowledge about the benefits and services supplied to those moving to a Cognatum property.

We do our best to both promote brand awareness and to maintain

a high level of interest in our lovely estates and properties. We provide an exclusive valuation and marketing service, as well as promoting new niche retirement developments. Yet the conundrum for Cognatum is that as a not-for-profit management company, we do not want to take the risk of getting directly involved in commercial enterprises or funding them out of service charge income.

The solution is Cognatum Property, an independent estate agency, set up to market properties, maintain a database of potential buyers, and to promote, new top-end developments with house builders. The managing director, Charles Clayton, sits on the agency's board to represent Cognatum's interests.

The agency makes a financial contribution towards head office overheads, pays for advertising, website and newsletter costs and hands over 50% of its annual profits to the management company, ensuring everyone benefits when owners sell through Cognatum Property.

### Heritage Panel meets for first time

The first meeting of the new Heritage Panel took place in June, after it was set up in response to the 2012 customer survey, where 92% of respondents wanted Cognatum to monitor external changes to the buildings in order to preserve their handsome character.

The panel of four comprises: Richard Morton, a prominent architect, responsible for many ECA schemes, Michael O'Connor, a chartered surveyor, who acts as advisor on our maintenance programme, Henry Thornton, chairman of Cognatum and co-founder of Beechcroft Developments and Charles Clayton, managing director and a surveyor.

The panel considered five requests for changes to doors and windows, a new conservatory and resurfacing of a drive. Their recommendations have been referred back to the owners and regional managers. Now the panel plans to draw up a code of practice for external alterations and to prepare technical advice to help owners planning internal renovations

## OFT LAUNCHES REVIEW

Earlier this year, the Office of Fair Trading launched a review of residential management services, to see whether they are working well for consumers, and how they might be improved. The OFT looked at leaseholders' perceptions of value for money from management service providers, and also whether they understand their rights and obligations and are able to influence decisions made by their management companies.

In April, the OFT was abolished, but the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is now continuing with the review. The Residents Advisory Panel (RAP) decided it was important to contribute to the research and produced a report that was sent to the CMA in June. This focused on the importance of good communication and transparency when dealing with leaseholders. It also emphasised the need for good practice and a focus on customer service, which build trust by putting the interests of the leaseholders first. The panel was clear that the not-for-profit principles of Cognatum, offers residents a significant advantage, while recognising that this superior model may not be universally possible.

The review is likely to recommend some form of regulatory framework, when it is published around the end of the year. It is expected that companies will be required to register and operate to set standards. As an organisation that prides itself on its practices and high ethical standards, Cognatum will welcome this.

A copy of the RAP submission can be viewed in the news section of our website: [www.cognatum.co.uk](http://www.cognatum.co.uk)

## EDITORIAL

In his annual statement chairman Henry Thornton said: "We have a brand worth promoting and a need to preserve the interest and value of our privately managed estates." He reported on the introduction of summer forums, the increasingly valuable role of the Residents Advisory Panel, new garden plans, the Heritage Panel and partnerships planned for new schemes.

As Peter Walton, Head of Sales, reports on the property page, the first half of 2014 has seen a welcome upsurge of sales activity and prices.

### NEWS IN BRIEF...

#### New board member –

Our new resident director, Nicola Ratcliffe Wilson, joined the Cognatum board in June. Nicola, who has a house at Church Leat in Downton, is involved in voluntary work associated with education, conservation, planning and environmental issues, and has held senior positions in both government service and the private sector, including the management of a substantial property company.



**Minchinhampton** – Environ Communities are working with Cognatum to get planning permission for a small extension of seven properties on land adjoining Stuart Court. A planning application is expected in the autumn.

**Salisbury** – An appeal has been made against Wiltshire Council's refusal to grant planning permission for a scheme to convert a lovely Regency house, set in woodland grounds within walking distance of the cathedral, into four apartments and eleven modern houses.

**Resident survey update** – Following the success of the detailed 2012 opinion survey, Cognatum intends to conduct a smaller survey at the end of each year, to gauge customer satisfaction. The first one should take place in January, after details have been discussed with the RAP.

**Motcombe Grange** – After three years Cognatum has decided to discontinue the management of Motcombe Grange in Dorset, which was developed by a private company some ten years ago.

### Creating a wildlife haven

At Mill Place, Cirencester, the grassy area between the houses and millstream has been transformed into a wildflower meadow. The patch nearest the main lawn has been planted with primroses, cowslips and snake's head fritillaries, to form a spring flowering meadow. Once these have flowered, the grass is cut back to medium length. A mown path separates this meadow from the summer flowering meadow created in the longer grass under the apple trees. The plants here include colourful knapweeds and field scabious.



Geoff Stansfield, a keen amateur naturalist, identified over 50 different species of plants in the meadows, with 30 different species of insects, including 10 species of butterfly, as well as a good number of birds attracted by the plants and insects. The success of converting this patch of land, in the middle of Cirencester, into a valuable nature reserve, rewards the effort that went into making this a small haven for wildlife.



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Spring and summer have seen the revival in the market for our properties. The influence of the booming London market has slowly spread out into the Home Counties and along the Thames corridor. This affects us in two ways. One is the increased ability of buyers to proceed, having successfully sold their own properties; the second is the improvement in the prices we are obtaining for our properties. Demand on some of our private estates has out-stripped supply and many properties are selling immediately to buyers on our database. This has helped increase prices to peak 2007 figures and beyond in some cases.

We expect this to continue during the rest of the year and into the next, enabling us to provide the best service for our clients. This page features a selection of the wide choice of properties we are currently marketing across the country.



**4 Churchfield Court, Girton, Cambridgeshire**

Just three miles north of Cambridge, a delightful two-bedroom cottage with a garage, overlooking courtyard gardens and with open countryside beyond. Churchfield Court is on the edge of the village and close to Girton Golf Club.

**£365,000**



**4 Remenham Row, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

On the banks of the Thames, a large two-bedroom ground floor apartment with a garage and riverside gardens.

**£675,000**



**8 Sandbourne Court, Bournemouth, Dorset**

A particularly light and open plan two-bedroom ground floor apartment with a private terrace, close to the sea front.

**£495,000**



**18 Carysfort Close, Elton, Cambridgeshire**

An immaculately presented stone-built two-bedroom cottage with private south facing-garden and garage, overlooking parkland.

**£285,000**



**2 Bemerton Farm, Bemerton, Wiltshire**

Converted from a 19th century farm, a charming three-bedroom cottage, with a walled riverside garden just 1½ miles from Salisbury.

**£445,000**



**3 Hayes End Manor, South Petherton, Somerset**

Part of the original manor house, a spacious two-bedroom cottage in a pretty farm setting and a popular village.

**£305,000**



**3 St Luke's Court, Marlborough, Wiltshire**

An attractive two-bedroom first floor apartment with a private ground floor entrance and views over the town to the Savernake forest.

**£415,000**



**15 Flacca Court, Tattenhall, Cheshire**

In a thriving village with good local shops and close to the local cricket pitch, a two-bedroom cottage with conservatory and garage.

**£325,000**



**24 Northfield Court, Aldeburgh, Suffolk**

A two-bedroom first floor apartment with two balconies overlooking landscaped gardens in this delightful seaside town.

**£300,000**



**29 University Farm, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire**

On the High Street, a spacious four-bedroom cottage with conservatory garden and garage. There is a swimming pavilion in the grounds.

**£350,000**