



**The cold weather arrived early with snow falling in November. All estate managers have plans for coping with snow clearance. Our policy is to try to ensure paths are cleared and gritted and that there is a clear access to the public highway. Details of contingency plans are available in estate offices.**

With the parlous state of the economy and its effect on pensions and investments, keeping service charges down is arguably more important than ever. The annual meetings held during the autumn were an opportunity to discuss this in detail with residents.

Cognatum was faced with the challenge of trying to trim costs, while inflation is rising and a higher VAT rate is introduced from 2011. Holding down costs has to be balanced with maintaining good standards of service. Yet we are delighted to report that 95% of our service charge budgets are below RPI, thanks to good housekeeping and the buying power we have as a larger organisation.

A new contract for telephone services will see costs in this area cut next year and beyond. We also managed to keep insurance costs steady at a time when the domestic consumer is paying more. A new contract for energy supplies will also produce savings. In 2011 we will review our emergency alarm needs and hope to reduce costs here too.

All this underlines Cognatum's commitment to operating on a 'not-for-profit' basis – a principle established from the earliest days of both English Courtyard Association and the Beechcroft Trust. We pass on all savings we achieve to residents.

Regrettably this is not always the case in estate management and recently newspapers have highlighted some organisations that seem more interested in profit than service. Poor practice casts a shadow over all of us.

Transparency and fairness are key. Cognatum has no hidden charges and no ground rents, and whilst our management charges might at first glance appear higher than some other companies, they are based on a high level of contact with residents. We believe that this is the right way to retain the support and confidence of those who reside in Cognatum developments and the best means of encouraging new people to buy into the Cognatum way of life.



## EDITORIAL

There is a growing sense of optimism that the recession may be behind us. We have a new coalition government working in the national interest, a rising stock market and property prices now look to be steady; but there is concern about the cuts to come and what impact these may have on us all.

Cognatum has also been cutting costs and the merger has allowed several posts to be amalgamated at our Watlington office, reducing staff numbers. In fact the head office budget for 2011 is nearly 10% lower than it was three years ago, when the two organisations were operating separately, prior to the merger.

Apart from one meeting that had to be rescheduled, all sixty annual residents meetings took place in October, chaired by a director and with the regional manager reporting on the proposed budgets for 2011 – budgets which have been particularly well scrutinised, as is reported in this newsletter.

## MOTCOMBE GRANGE

Cognatum has taken over the management of this new development of 30 apartments built around a manor house in Dorset. Motcombe Grange provides a range of additional services to those usually offered on Cognatum developments, including cleaning, a restaurant, communal drawing room, snooker room, hairdressing salon and a fitness suite. A few new apartments are still available.



## NEWS IN BRIEF...

**New Director** – Mike Owen, who joined the Cognatum board in May 2009, retired in December and Genie Turton has been appointed new resident director. Mrs Turton, a former senior civil servant, now works as a non-executive director in the private and charitable sectors. Her last job in Whitehall was Director General for Housing, Planning and Urban Regeneration. She is a Trustee of the Dulwich Picture Gallery, the Horniman Museum, the Edward Heath Charitable Foundation, Wessex Archaeology and is also an adviser to the Wates Group. In 1996 she was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath.

**Residents Advisory Panel** – Members of the new panel had their first meeting in November, chaired by Christopher MacKenzie-Beevor. The members are David Abbott, John Bridgman, John Carter, Major Mervyn Colenso-Jones, Dr Trevor Lewis,

Margaret Sullivan, Colin White and Christopher Willy. The panel will meet twice a year and act as a think tank for Cognatum, addressing issues from public profile to policy and practice. Their deliberations will be reported in future newsletters.

**Emmer Green** – After delays caused by the recession, work to create nine new properties next to Lyefield Court at Emmer Green in Reading is nearing completion. Beechcroft Developments took over the project after English Courtyard Developments went into administration. The properties are now available for sale through Cognatum Property.

**Computers** – All estate offices will start the New Year with new computers, email addresses and fast broadband connections. These changes are intended to improve communication and response times, while saving on postage and other costs. An Internet shopping service for residents on some developments will be tested to see if this would be welcomed.



## ROYAL CONGRATULATIONS

Last year birthday cards from Buckingham Palace marked two extraordinary achievements. In July Mrs Di Greener celebrated her hundredth birthday with family and neighbours at University Farm, Moreton-in-Marsh. Mrs Greener has lived there since 1993 when she moved from Cheshire with her late husband, Bill, who had been managing director of their family cotton business before going into farming with their son Simon. Their other son, Sir Anthony Greener, is a former chairman of Diageo plc. Mrs Madeleine Shore, who lives at Fullands Court in Taunton, also celebrated her centenary in October. Mrs Shore said it was a momentous day and that she had spent "eighteen very happy years in a lovely flat overlooking the surrounding Somerset countryside and the gardens".

## Location, location – and condition

All Cognatum developments are in prime locations, set in historic market towns and villages. Yet tastes change and older properties may benefit from some freshening up.

In the mainstream country-house market vendors are advised not to redecorate because incoming purchasers like their own style. However, retirement homebuyers are generally looking for more comfort and convenience. Most prefer to move into an immaculate property, which is why vendors who spend money refitting kitchens and bathrooms and redecorating often achieve a quicker sale, particularly in a difficult market.

Whilst there are a great number of companies that can advise on interior design, we may be able to assist through Genepi Design, which was set up for people buying or owning a Cognatum property. Genepi Design will guide you through the options and can arrange everything for you. (07801 476706, www.genepidesign.com)

For the last couple of years prices have moved up and down so fast that it can be hard to understand what is happening. The Nationwide house index in October reported falls of 1.5% in property values over the previous three months, while Halifax reported a 1.8% rise during October, proving that statistics can be perplexing.

Looking back over 2010, Cognatum Property had a great spring market that tailed off in the summer. The year ended with a bang, with a number of new owners deciding to be settled in by Christmas. Cognatum Property successfully arranged over 25% more sales compared to 2009 and the average price of property sold was 10% higher.



### 15 Church Leat, Downton, Wiltshire

Next to a beautiful 12th-century church, a riverside two-bedroom cottage with balcony overlooking the Avon, close to local shops and within easy reach of the New Forest.

**£350,000**



### 14 Walpole Court, Puddletown, Dorset

Immaculate two-bedroom cottage close to the centre of the village, surrounded by unspoilt Dorset countryside.

**£299,950**



### 7 Church Place, Ickenham, Middlesex

On the edge of London with local shops and Underground service, an attractive two-bedroom ground floor apartment with a sunroom.

**£495,000**



### 30 Bearwater, Hungerford, Berkshire

A two-bedroom ground floor apartment with a conservatory, lake and its own bridge over the Dun into the centre of the town.

**£270,000**



### 17 Turnpike Court, Ardingly, West Sussex

Two-bedroom Wing House with a conservatory on the edge of this award-winning village within an area of outstanding natural beauty.

**£495,000**



### 19 Bramley Grange, Bramley, Surrey

A three-bedroom house with conservatory, flexible accommodation & under-floor heating in 5 acres of parkland with a swimming pavilion.

**£599,950**



### 1 Hayes End Manor, South Petherton, Somerset

A most impressive and elegant two-bedroom house created out of a period building, overlooking a courtyard garden in a popular village.

**£355,000**



### 16 The Orchard, Fairford, Gloucestershire

Ground floor two-bedroom apartment with an open-plan layout, swimming pavilion in the gardens and close to the shops.

**£285,000**



### 21 Berrow Court, Upton upon Severn

Delightful fully modernised two-bedroom cottage within easy walking distance of a wide range of shops in this riverside town.

**£215,000**



### 15 Muskerry Court, Rusthall, Kent

Parkland setting, overlooking an ornamental pond, a two-bedroom Wing House with exceptional living space and under-floor heating.

**£495,000**