

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

EDITORIAL

2012 was a memorable year with the Golden Jubilee celebrations, and great sporting achievements in tennis, cycling, the Ryder Cup at Medinah and at the outstandingly successful London Olympics. The year started with hosepipe bans and ended with widespread flooding - the wettest weather since records began and a real headache for gardeners.

September saw us launch a major opinion survey of owners, conducted by an independent market research company. There was a very positive response to this with a wealth of information gathered that will be invaluable in helping shape our corporate plan and the way we continue to provide high quality services in the future.

The survey showed strong support for our annual meetings held in October. They are well attended and give us an opportunity to explain budgets and exchange ideas. Service charges for 2013 have again been under close scrutiny, with general increases limited to below inflation, although some reserve fund contributions have had to rise above inflation to bring them up to a level to fund future maintenance work. This year there is no increase in the management fee thanks to savings made throughout the head-office budget.



Bearwater at Hungerford, 25 years after it was completed on the site of an old engineering works, overlooking water meadows on the river Dun

TWO NEW BOOKS

Noel Shuttleworth and Alan Staddon have both brought out self-published books

The Best Kept Secret of Retirement is Noel's personal account of how he and Christopher Thornhill co-founded The English Courtyard Association in the late 1970s, their pioneering ideas for up-market retirement housing and how they created the distinctive style of their developments. Copies can be bought online at Amazon.

Alan Staddon's *Bearwater – A History* describes the local history of Bearwater in Hungerford and moves on to the creation of The Beechcroft Trust's first development there, where an active and sociable community intent on enjoying their retirement was quickly established.

NEVER TOO LATE!



Two owners at Berrow Court, Mary and James Westwood celebrated their marriage in October.

Mary grew up in Strensham, Worcestershire and after teaching for two years she went out to South Africa on a three-year contract, where she met and married her first husband, a South African.

She was to stay in Africa for 60 years, 11 of them as principal of a primary school. When her husband died she returned to Britain as Mrs Mary Hackland and bought a house in Berrow Court, Upton-upon-Severn, where she met James Westwood. Three years after becoming acquainted they decided to marry.

Jim left technical college aged 16 and worked his way up in the engineering world, designing special, purpose-built machines mainly for the food, pharmaceutical, chemical and glass industries. He moved onto become a consultant and now, aged 92, still gets calls for his help with engineering problems.

SUCCESSFUL SURVEY POINTS THE WAY FORWARD

Thanks to a high response to our confidential survey, we know that at least 86% of our owners are happy with their decision to move to one of our developments – with 55% saying they are very pleased.

The customer research company contacted every householder with a range of questions about their property and the services provided by Cognatum. We are grateful for the high response rate of 69% that means we can be confident that the data is reasonably representative of the views of our owners.

The survey revealed that the main reason for choosing one of our developments is to downsize, followed by wanting to do less gardening, less maintenance, to be closer to family and for better security.

Generally the service charge is felt to be good value for money with 88% of respondents saying they were satisfied and with 35% saying they thought it was good or excellent value for money.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most positive response was that 94% think it is important that Cognatum remains a not-for-profit property management organization, something we are committed to as a core value of the company. A similar level of support was given to Cognatum exercising control over extensions and alterations to protect the character of developments – with the caveats of discretion and consultation.

Despite the high levels of satisfaction recorded, some

respondents reported problems which were largely about noise, being overlooked and parking.

We sometimes wonder how useful owners find the annual meetings and the Cognatum newsletter, but they are enthusiastic about both. Some 92% think the annual meetings are worthwhile while 83% said they found the newsletter interesting, with 67% saying they were particularly interested in the property sales reports on the back page.

Interestingly, an analysis of the responses revealed variations in general satisfaction levels across developments. For example, 97% of respondents were happy with garden maintenance on one, whilst on another only 20% said they were satisfied.

These variations are indicators that will help Cognatum improve its services and levels of customer satisfaction in order to ensure that high standards are common across all developments and to provide a yardstick for future surveys.

The survey showed that both regional management and Cognatum head office service could be improved. Overall, Cognatum achieved a satisfaction rate of 71%, which, although high, leaves something to aim for.

More detailed results of the survey should be available in the summer once the information has been analysed. None of its cost has come out of service charges. Instead it was fully funded out of income Cognatum received from its estate agency operation.



A new face

Stephen Dale joined Cognatum in September as a regional manager responsible for fifteen of our developments from Wiltshire to Devon. His 30-year career in the RAF included project managing complex engineering systems. Stephen has a degree in engineering management and a teaching qualification.

After leaving the RAF in 2008 he and his wife Daphne bought a former inn built in 1714 which they fully restored and operated as a bed and breakfast business, before selling it on as a going concern. They have two sons: an army officer and an oil and gas executive.



Threat to our Ash trees

Colin Quinney, Cognatum's deputy landscape manager, has just completed a diploma in arboriculture at Merrist Wood College and is now qualified to carry out tree condition surveys on our developments. This should prove a great advantage now that ash tree disease is threatening the British landscape.

Colin explains: "Ash tree disease, officially called 'Chalara dieback of Ash' is affecting our native ash tree, but so far is not known to affect other ornamental varieties like ash from the Sorbus family or species like Rowan and Whitebeam. Fortunately we have more Sorbus varieties on our developments than native ash. None of our developments currently have a confirmed outbreak – but the disease is widespread and is likely to affect most or all of our gardens in the future."

If owners want to keep an eye out for disease on trees near their developments the Forestry Commission has a useful video and a helpline number: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara>

Meanwhile the usual winter work is continuing: tidying and pruning as well as some clearance of beds to prepare for the spring planting.

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Cognatum Property achieved the same number of sales last year as in 2011, although prices overall were on average 2% down. Property on developments in the Home Counties generally sold faster and achieved better results than those in other regions, mainly because buyers found it easier to sell their own houses first. These experiences mirror national trends for the prime markets. Forecasts suggest that 2013 may again be a year of relative stagnation and static prices before price growth is restored during 2014.

The scarcity of finance and low levels of house building means that there are few, new, up-market retirement developments being built. The stylish, new townhouses in Odiham, Hampshire, have attracted a lot of interest, particularly the final few which are just coming to completion. The show house, which is open on weekdays by appointment (01256 701200), is well worth visiting, to see how comfortable life can be for those downsizing to a modern well-designed and managed retirement scheme. The last remaining properties start at £535,000.

www.seymourplace.co.uk



3 Church Place, Ickenham, Middlesex

A three-bedroom cottage, with the country atmosphere of a former farmyard, in a leafy suburb and with excellent connections into central London.

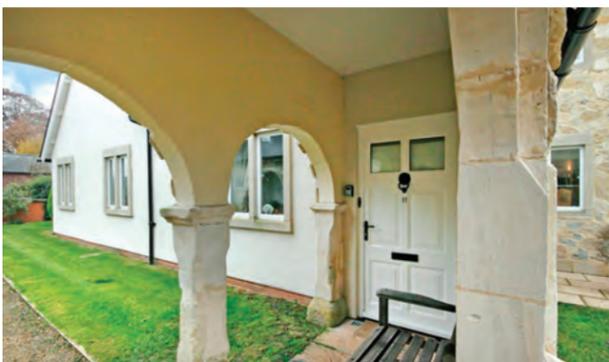
£525,000



10 Earls Manor Court, Winterbourne Earls, Wiltshire

A spacious two-bedroom cottage with a conservatory, set in courtyard gardens, close to local shops.

£325,000



11 Bemerton Farm, Bemerton, Wiltshire

A beautifully converted two-bedroom cottage just 1½ miles from the centre of Salisbury, with a walled riverside garden.

£385,000



23 Ashcombe Court, Ilminster, Somerset

A three-bedroom cottage enjoying views over the courtyard gardens, close to the centre of this bustling Somerset town.

£375,000



12 Framers Court, Lane End, Buckinghamshire

Set in an attractive Chilterns village, close to the vibrant riverside town of Marlow, a two-bedroom cottage with views over the gardens.

£345,000



Seymour Place, Odiham, Hampshire

New development of contemporary designed, energy efficient townhouses, close to the centre of Odiham – just 4 properties remaining.

£535,000 – £560,000



1 Carysfort Close, Elton, Cambridgeshire

A well-presented two-bedroom stone built-cottage overlooking the village church and landscaped gardens.

£315,000



17 Old Town Farm, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire

With a swimming pool in an impressive timber-framed barn, and shops and station nearby, a two-bedroom cottage with a conservatory.

£450,000



7 Herringcote, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

A two-bedroom cottage with a south-facing conservatory, within easy walking distance of the centre of this historic village and the Abbey.

£345,000



14 St Luke's Court, Marlborough, Wiltshire

An immaculate two-bedroom cottage in a quiet location with a private terrace garden and adjacent garage.

£395,000