

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

MD TO RETIRE IN MAY



Charles Clayton, Cognatum Managing Director, has decided the time has come to retire after 24 years with English Courtyard and latterly Cognatum. He joined The English Courtyard Association in July 1991 following a career as head of property for the Spastics Society (now Scope), where he looked after maintenance and capital projects for the 65 estates including colleges, workshops and housing.

He joined English Courtyard in a part-time role while he set up his own company to provide advice to institutional building owners on requirements for disabled users. Thanks to the rapid growth of ECA, he quickly became a full timer and was appointed Regional Manager.

He became General Manager in 2000 and MD in 2001, at a time when two or three new schemes were being built each year. With developments spread across the English counties, there was an urgent priority to improve communication with owners and staff. In 2008 following the demise of English Courtyard Developments, he joined Cognatum and began the task of merging English Courtyard and Beechcroft Trust.

He said: *"These have been happy years and I feel grateful and privileged to have spent much of my career with a company that is so worthwhile and well respected."*

Cognatum's Chairman, Henry Thornton thanked him for the great job he did in bringing the two companies together and wished him well for his retirement in May.

He added: *"We have been fortunate to have someone at the helm with the experience and ability to make the merger such a success."*

The recruitment of a successor is under way. A panel of directors was set up last September to oversee the recruitment of a new managing director, looking for someone with the appropriate background to both lead and grow the company and to build on its reputation for managing top-end retirement estates.

News in brief...



First World War Commemoration – Thanks to the many events arranged to support the Royal British Legion's initiative to commemorate the First World War, more than £6,000 was collected through Cognatum for the RBL. In September a special buffet lunch was held at Glebe Barn to thank some of those involved in the fund raising. Guests included Dick Stillwell, Chairman of the Watlington branch of the Royal British Legion, and Ken Cook, a Second World War veteran.

Jim Harris – After serving for three years as a non-executive director, Jim Harris, a resident of Stuart Court, Minchinhampton, has stepped down from his board role. Thanks to a 43-year career with British Airways, latterly as Director of Marketing, Jim brought a wealth of management expertise to the board.

Cognatum Estates – Just before Christmas we moved head office from the thatched Glebe Barn outside Watlington to the less rustic premises at Pipe House in Wallingford. The change of address and letterheads prompted us to take the opportunity to make a small technical change to the name of the company – to Cognatum Estates Limited, to provide greater clarity about the nature of our business.

Customer Survey – Surveys during the busy Christmas period are not universally popular, yet the short December survey is providing invaluable feedback and ideas for the future. The response rate was 56% and results show that whilst overall satisfaction remains at around 75%, there has been a boost in approval ratings for estate managers, head office and gardening. A more detailed report will be given in the next issue.

ARMA – This year Cognatum Estates is moving its allegiance from the Association of Retirement Housing Managers to the Association of Residential Managing Agents (ARMA), the country's leading trade association for managing agents with more than 300 members. ARMA provides training in residential leasehold management and it requires all member organisations to comply with a regime to protect consumers and deliver best practice. This is the right direction for Cognatum, which prides itself on transparency and customer focus. The company hopes to take advantage of the support and training offered by ARMA.

EDITORIAL

As we enter an election year there is greater confidence in the economy, although some uncertainties persist. At the annual meetings in the autumn, Charles Clayton noted that over the past five years our mission has been to ensure our service charges offer best value. Although increases vary across the estates, the average increase since 2009 has been 5% compared to a rise in the retail price index of 20%, a creditable outcome.

Cognatum Estates is passionate about the upkeep of our gardens – some 150 acres of captive countryside for our gardeners and two landscape managers to work their magic on. In this issue there are some pictures of colourful pergolas taken in 2014. Buildings too are important and Richard Morton, from the Heritage Panel, talks below about preserving their beauty.

CHANGING APPEARANCES

The Heritage Panel met for the second time in November and discussed providing advice on conservation and energy saving through a series of advisory articles. The panel considered requests for new doors and windows in properties and the erection of a conservatory, and it offered comments on size, design and materials. All decisions are based on practical considerations, bearing in mind the wish of individual owners to improve their property, whilst ensuring that the integrity and heritage of the built environment within developments is maintained. Where possible the panel looks for ways of granting permission or providing advice on how plans might be improved.

Richard Morton, who designed many English Courtyard schemes, writes about the merits of timber versus Upvc windows:

"Most Cognatum houses were built with timber windows and some will now be 35 years old. Some of these windows need repair or replacement and while there is a common perception that changing to Upvc will save long-term maintenance, caution is needed."

"Many Georgian and Victorian houses still have their beautiful original timber windows in good working order; new windows, well made out of good timber and regularly painted, should last for a very long time. If something goes wrong a carpenter can replace some of the timber or fit new ironmongery. Upvc frames need no decoration but are not immune from failure and discolouration. White Upvc yellows over time while the stained effect available for some Upvc windows never matches real timber staining. The specialist ironmongery on which they rely tends to go wrong and it is often impossible to get identical replacements, meaning the only option is to replace the entire window. Studies show that while there is a maintenance saving with Upvc over the first 10-15 years, it is more expensive in the long run. In developments designed to give a harmonious and unified appearance it is important to avoid jarring changes. New timber frames merge with the old but Upvc frames that are factory made to standard patterns cannot match a window that is in any way unusual. The windows at Hayes End Manor, one of the first schemes I worked on, were specially designed to tuck behind the stone outer frames and I would be astonished if any Upvc supplier could come close to matching these. A final concern is that unless Upvc replacements have trickle ventilators, they can trigger condensation. So please, remember the advertised cost savings of Upvc are only a small part of the story."



Wisteria and a Ceanothus at Northfield Court, Aldeburgh by Miles Biggs.



Climbing roses at St Luke's Court, Marlborough by Michael Jackson.



A Wisteria avenue at Earls Manor Court, Winterbourne Earls by Pam Taylor.

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Peter Walton, Head of Sales writes – “2014 was a successful year which saw prices and activity increase, especially in the counties closer to London. A Prudential survey pinpointed the best retirement locations and Cognatum has developments in all the top 10 counties, including Cheshire, which came in at number 11. As Knight Frank concluded in their 2014 research into the retirement housing market, proximity to shops and transport links are key considerations, another plus point for Cognatum schemes.

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10 Thames Bank, Goring-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

A magnificent three-bedroom first floor apartment overlooking the Thames with underground garaging. Close to Goring Lock and a few minutes walk to the station and the shops in the High Street.

£775,000



16 St Mary's Court, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire

A large two-bedroom Wing house with west facing conservatory and carport. Shops are conveniently close, and a regular market.

£600,000



28 Atwater Court, Lenham, Kent

Built in a former walled garden in the centre of the village, an immaculate two-bedroom cottage with a garage.

£327,500



23 Lyefield Court, Emmer Green, Berkshire

An attractive two-bedroom first floor apartment with balcony looking towards the golf course and within a short walk to local shops.

£375,000



4 The Orchard, Fairford, Gloucestershire

A Cotswold stone three-bedroom cottage with a conservatory and garage. There is a swimming pavilion in the main garden.

£350,000



12 Walpole Court, Puddletown, Dorset

Looking out on the main garden courtyard a three-bedroom cottage just a short walk from the centre of this pretty Dorset village.

£275,000



18 Dunchurch Hall, Dunchurch, Warwickshire

With 10 acres of landscaped gardens, a three-bedroom first floor apartment with a large bay window and stunning views.

£375,000



3 Carysfort Close, Elton, Cambridgeshire

Overlooking parkland and built in local stone, a two-bedroom cottage with a private terraced garden, allotments and garage.

£275,000



4 Crittles Court, Wadhurst, East Sussex

Just off the main street in this small market town, a well presented two-bedroom first floor apartment with a garage.

£249,950



20 Home Farm, Iwerne Minster, Dorset

With views over the 3.5 acres of gardens, a two-bedroom cottage with conservatory, first floor balcony and garage.

£285,000