

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

EDITORIAL

Our new MD, John Lavin, joined in May with a remit to grow the company and ensure it moves with the times, so that its services continue to meet changing aspirations. These aspirations are also touched on in the report on the customer satisfaction survey.

In this issue we focus on Stuart Court, Minchinhampton, where permission has been granted for seven new properties.

Good service, striving to do even better!

Thank you again to everyone who completed the customer satisfaction survey last December.

We have now completed the analysis of the results and it is encouraging to note that the vast majority of owners score us highly for the quality of the service provided by their estate managers, and the way we maintain the gardens, both of which are fundamentally important features of the Cognatum "brand".

We achieved lower ratings for the services provided by head office and the quality of information we provide, but even so, more than three-quarters of owners would recommend us to a friend – an impressive measure of overall satisfaction.

We are already acting on the feedback reported in the last edition of Cognatum News, and concentrating effort in improving in the areas identified.

For example, having settled into Pipe House, head office is undergoing significant changes as we adopt new technology and systems to improve the way we communicate with owners, and provide head office services generally. This involves the move to a new Customer Relations Management (CRM) system, changing the way we work and communicate.

We have also been working with BT to roll out high speed broadband to all our estates, and have recently signed contracts to complete the programme.

So far, nearly half of our estates have optical fibre connections. These, along with the new infrastructure we are installing in estate offices, will ensure that head office communications with estate offices is instant, effective and reliable, and also holds out the prospect of better communications and enhanced services direct to residents.

Together with other changes, we will continue to assess their impact on customer satisfaction, especially in areas where we should be doing better.



Focus on Minchinhampton

Owners at Stuart Court in Minchinhampton turned out in strength at Stroud District Council to back plans to add seven homes to the estate.



Angela Harris joked: "Everybody turning up must have impressed the committee. With us all brandishing our walking sticks, it had to be a unanimous decision in favour!"

The councillors' decision to approve the joint venture by Cognatum Estates and Environ Communities will boost the number of people able to retire to one of the leafiest developments, in one of the prettiest corners of England.

The five new houses and two apartments will complement the existing 26 Cotswold stone properties, built by English Courtyard to echo the architecture of the centrepiece of the estate, the old rectory, which was converted into apartments. The new homes are cleverly designed to combine contemporary, spacious and energy efficient interiors with a more traditional exterior.

Mike Roe, who was the first resident at Stuart Court back in 2006, explains: "Minchinhampton is fabulous. A lovely little place. If you go out of the back gate of Stuart Court it is 150 yards to the centre of the town where we have a butcher, chemist and a dairy opened by a local farmer selling homemade, prize-winning cheeses. It is quiet here but one of the nice things is that as you walk round you always see someone to chat to. There is an unwritten rule that if someone is reading in the garden you don't shout 'hello', unless they look up and start the conversation."

The small hilltop town perches above steep valleys where some old cloth mills still stand. The main feature of this pleasant old town is the 17th century Market House which is supported on stone columns so the market could be held under cover.

Among the joys of Stuart Court are the gardens, including two courtyards and woodland. The estate managers, Milton and Sarah Hussey, handle the gardening, with Sarah, a graduate of the National Trust gardening training scheme, devoting most of her time to the five acres despite being frustrated by badgers from the nearby set who keep rolling on her new meadowland plantings.

She says: "This is a super job. No other company runs the management on a profit-free basis. Once a year we have an outdoor summer lunch and set up a marquee. Everyone brings something to eat and we usually have far too much, but it's good fun."

The couple met while working at Claridges Hotel, where Milton was a trainee manager and Sarah the florist. During his hotel management career, Milton went on to work at some of the finest hotels in London and Paris, including the Cadogan and the George V.

Jill Dolman, a retired civil servant, who moved in after realizing how lovely the Minchinhampton area of the Cotswolds is, says: "I needed to be somewhere with access to culture. There are always concerts in Cheltenham, and a literary festival. As soon as I came through the gates I knew this was where I wanted to be. It had a lovely feeling and I have no regrets. We have remarkable private grounds and excellent managers. To have a feeling of security where you are also independent is a difficult combination to find."



Aboard a boat skippered by Richard Orton, Major General and Mrs Johnson and Mr and Mrs Smith set off from the moorings at Remenham Row for the Henley Royal Regatta. The regatta first took place on Henley Reach in 1839.

News in brief...

- New development in Alton** – Beechcroft Developments has just built 12 new energy efficient properties at Greenacre Close, next to Berehurst, which is being managed by Cognatum Estates.
- Resident director** – Cognatum Estates appointed Jeffrey Gaines as a non-executive director in April. Jeff's career was largely spent in the car industry. He was involved in setting up BMW (GB) and, following the acquisition of Rover, the major expansion of BMW Financial Services. He moved to Manor Court in Pewsey five years ago.
- Jeff Matthews** – Jeff has joined as the new operations manager with responsibilities spread over a region stretching from Aldeburgh in the east, to Maidstone in the south and Bournemouth in the west. As a trained geologist, his early years were in the international oil industry, before moving into housing management 25 years ago.



John Lavin appointed MD

In May Charles Clayton stepped down after 24 years. The new managing director John Lavin, has a successful track record in housing and property asset management in both public and private sectors, most recently as Head of Property Management at Hanover Housing, a national provider of housing for the over 55s.

"I'm very proud to have joined the company and to be leading the Cognatum team. I'm determined we will continue our track record of providing first class estate management services to our owners and residents."

I'm sure we can develop these services to match the changing aspirations of our customers, and to ensure that we have a strategy to manage a programme of careful growth and new business, benefitting owners as we spread overheads and so bear down on service charges.

I'm committed to visiting all our estates, to meet owners and my estate teams. If you see me on these visits I'd be delighted to stop and say 'hello' and to help with any queries owners may have"

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Savills report that the UK housing market slowed in the early part of 2015, with fewer transactions and mortgage approvals. Whilst the general election may have had an effect, the underlying cause is more likely to be Bank of England credit restrictions on mortgage lending.

Land Registry figures indicate that, on average, house prices are still significantly below their level 10 years ago in real terms, when the market was peaking. There are significant regional variations with those outside London lagging behind in the housing market cycle.

We can see these trends with prices in some outer regions still waiting to catch up. However, we did not experience the slower market in the first half of the year, as it was a busy time for Cognatum Property, with 65 sales agreed and average prices up to 20% higher than in 2014. Higher levels of viewings indicate that there is pent-up demand with properties achieving much closer to guide price than a year ago. Most Cognatum estates now have waiting lists – and no properties to buy!



20 Penstones Court, Stanford in the Vale, Oxfordshire

This three-bedroom Cotswold stone cottage has lovely views over a large landscaped courtyard and open countryside. The local shops are within a short walk and there is a golf club nearby.

£417,500



11 Muskerry Court, Rusthall, Tunbridge Wells, Kent

A two-bedroom wing house with a first floor study area, around a striking courtyard. Rusthall is a mile from Royal Tunbridge Wells.

£550,000



30 Church Leat, Downton, Wiltshire

On the River Avon, close to a beautiful 12th-century church, a spacious three-bedroom cottage with conservatory and balcony.

£475,000



20 Badsworth Gardens, Newbury, Berkshire

Around a garden square, screened by woodland, a large three-bedroom cottage in a vibrant market town with a station.

£475,000



17 Flacca Court, Tattenhall, Cheshire

In a popular village with local shops and plenty of cultural and sporting activities, a two-bedroom cottage with terrace garden and garage.

£320,000



13 Sandbourne Court, Bournemouth, Dorset

In West Overcliff Conservation Area, a two-bedroom first floor apartment with large private roof terrace overlooking landscaped gardens.

£497,500



2 Fullands Court, Taunton, Somerset

On the edge of this county town, a two-bedroom cottage with a conservatory, garden terrace and garage, and local shops nearby.

£250,000



31 University Farm, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire

Overlooking the town duck pond, a two-bedroom cottage with a conservatory. There is a private swimming pavilion.

£295,000



26 Berrow Court, Upton upon Severn, Worcestershire

An attractive two-bedroom ground floor apartment with a garden terrace, close to the town centre.

£230,000



16 Hayes End Manor, South Petherton, Somerset

A spacious and well positioned two-bedroom cottage with west-facing conservatory, surrounded by a private garden in a beautiful village.

£310,000