

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

EDITORIAL

Cognatum has some of the most stylish retirement developments in the country, set in stunning locations. To preserve the beauty of these award-winning schemes we are setting up a Heritage Panel to protect their architectural integrity, while ensuring that any proposed changes are given speedy consideration.

Rest assured that despite references in this issue about estate managers' forums, remuneration committees and the Heritage Panel, Cognatum is not becoming more bureaucratic.

The company has its feet firmly planted on the ground and is looking to the future, not the past.

There has been a reorganisation and this has focussed on ensuring the minimum of hierarchy and maximum of responsiveness to our clients. The board, made up of the chairman, three executive directors and five non-executive directors, two of whom are also residents of a development, is always keen to receive ideas which may improve service, the buildings and gardens.

Despite the terrible weather, the good news at the beginning of 2014 is the fact that the housing market is looking more buoyant with better prospects for those wanting to buy or sell. Cognatum Property has a wide range of cottages and flats for sale across most of our regions.



Malthouse Court in Towcester celebrated its 25th Anniversary...



...with a garden party and a band. Mrs Mary Wood and Mrs Megan Middleton, who have both lived there since the development was built, cut a celebration cake.

Malthouse Court was built in the traditional South Northamptonshire style, just off the famous Watling Street, the ancient track way, first paved by the Romans, which runs through the centre of the town.



RECRUITING ESTATE MANAGERS

Lyn and Dave Logsdon are the new courtyard managers at Berrow Court, Upton on Severn. Dave has retired from the Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, while Lyn had a career in accounts

Securing the right people as estate managers is key to the service we offer. Our managers have to be confident, caring, first-aiders, computer literate with management experience and preferably knowledgeable about gardening and building care. A recent round of interviews has reminded us that finding all these qualities in one individual is a tall order.

Over 35 years we have established a tried and tested procedure. Surprising though it may seem, advertisements in The Lady get the best response, because it is known as the place to look for residential positions.

Applications can come from anywhere in the UK and sometimes abroad, for people planning a return to this country. It is not uncommon for Cognatum to make several appointments at the same time after short-listing candidates for interview. Few candidates have experience in the role, but the in depth interviewing process has proved so successful in finding people with the right blend of skills that half of our estate managers have been with us for five years or more.

Appointments are always conditional on references and a probationary period. Where couples are appointed, we are careful to ensure both are compatible with the demands of the job.

Nowadays we have other recruitment options, including our website, which includes a section on jobs. We also sometimes use recruitment agencies specialising in people coming from the armed forces and police, who often have the combination of practical and personal skills required.

HERITAGE PANEL

All Cognatum developments have been carefully designed to create beautiful homes in lovely locations and grounds. Conservation areas were often chosen and top architects selected to ensure the architecture fits seamlessly into the local styles. From the knap flint of Buckinghamshire to the local Cotswold stone, research and attention to detail has produced the enduring appeal of our properties – some dating back almost 40 years.

Our homes have won exactly 100 awards – surely a record for any UK retirement developer – for design, landscaping and the over all development.



Built using local natural Cotswold Stone, Allcourt, Lechlade appears timeless in it's beautiful setting around a wildflower meadow

Over time standards and materials change and so do the demands of new property owners for solar panels and conservatories. Whilst we want to assist and encourage the improvement of properties we manage so they provide the highest level of comfort, usability and efficiency, proposals for external alterations may affect neighbours and the overall appearance of a development and so need to be carefully considered before giving the go ahead.

To help this process, we are establishing a panel to include architects involved in the design of some of our developments, to provide advice and guidance on changes to protect our heritage for future generations.

New members for RAP

There were changes in September when half the Residents Advisory Panel retired after serving their three-year term. The four new members are Jon Lloyd (Sandbourne Court, Dorset) a former town planner and planning inspector; Jo Williams (The Orchard, Gloucestershire) who was in the Guernsey civil service and then became chief officer to the Board of Health; Barbara Dunford (Old Town Farm, Buckinghamshire) a former music teacher, headmistress and county music adviser for Buckinghamshire; Gail Thomas (Herringcote, Oxfordshire) who worked in the library service running specialist libraries for universities. Gail also worked for the EU advising eastern block countries on establishing libraries.

The four other panel members are Margaret Sullivan and Colin White who both agreed to serve a fourth year and will retire in September, and Alan Robson and Jean Schooling who joined the panel in 2012.

The panel met twice in 2013. The March meeting discussed the customer survey. The panel's suggestion for an action plan was sent out in a letter to owners in July. They also assisted in Cognatum's response to the revised code of practice by the Association of Retirement Housing Managers, which is awaiting government approval before being introduced as the new benchmark for standards in housing management.

Their October meeting contributed to the revision of the Purchasers Information Pack, which will be circulated to owners during 2014.

Board changes in 2013

Noel Shuttleworth, whilst remaining Life President, has retired from the Cognatum board because of ill health. Noel, who founded English Courtyard in the 1970s, was the man responsible for revolutionising retirement housing in the UK.

Genie Turton has stepped down after completing her three-year term as a resident director in December. Her replacement will be announced in the spring. Genie, who has a house at Bemerton Farm in Wiltshire, had a distinguished career in the civil service and brought great insight of corporate governance. She also helped with the development of the customer survey and sat on the remuneration committee. In addition she chaired the recently established estate managers' forum.

Alex Matthews joined as a non-executive director in December. He has a wealth of experience in customer service, after a long career with Marks & Spencer and then HSBC where he established their retail presence in Russia, before taking up a job as head of customer experience for the HSBC Group.

Concern for gardens after prolonged winter rains



Some handsome mature trees were lost from our estates during the winter storms. Others were unsafe and had to be removed. The prolonged rain is hindering new gardening projects for 2014. Where areas have been underwater, bulbs may have rotted and some smaller herbaceous scrubs have died. Work cannot start on saturated ground because it would cause soil compaction and create long-term drainage problems.

Charles Gilchrist and Colin Quinney, our landscape managers, are organising two pruning courses for the early spring. These are popular in-house one-day courses, help our estate managers learn correct pruning techniques and requirements for specific types of plants and shrubs, improving their skills and confidence, whether they handle the landscaping themselves or supervise others.

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The end of 2013 saw the appointment of Peter Walton FNAEA who joined Cognatum Property as Head of Sales and is supported by Anita Pemberton-Hall and Jaqui Ward. Peter has nearly 30 years experience in property sales and ran his own agency in Oxfordshire.

Cognatum Property is an independent estate agency providing sellers of Beechcroft Trust and English Courttyard properties with their own exclusive valuation and marketing service. It maintains a database of buyers interested in retirement property and advertises regularly in the national press and on the Internet.

In the latter part of 2013 the housing market showed increased demand with more buyers successfully selling their own properties. The London 'boom' should slowly make its way out across the country and lead to increased sales and rising prices in 2014. Cognatum Property currently has some 80 properties for sale across 60 developments.



16 Muskerry Court, Rusthall, Tunbridge Wells, Kent

This three-bedroom house (centre) has a conservatory and overlooks the beautiful landscaped courtyard gardens. Muskerry Court is perfectly situated in the village of Rusthall, only a mile from the spa town of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

£575,000



10 Herringcote, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

A well-presented two-bedroom cottage with conservatory and garage, overlooking a garden square with a dovecote.

£340,000



9 St Peter's Close, Goodworth Clatford, Hampshire

A charming two-bedroom cottage built in traditional brick and flint and overlooking the carefully nurtured gardens.

£395,000



28 The Orchard, Fairford, Gloucestershire

Within easy walking distance of the shops, a two-bedroom cottage with conservatory, garage and swimming pavilion in the gardens.

£250,000



7 Ashcombe Court, Ilminster, Somerset

This attractive two-bedroom wing house with a garage, set in private grounds, in the centre of this Somerset town.

£295,000



14 Badsworth Gardens, Newbury, Berkshire

A large one-bedroom apartment overlooking the delightful gardens screened by woodland, within easy reach of the town centre.

£210,000



14 Old Town Farm, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire

A three-bedroom cottage with conservatory, garage and an indoor swimming pool, within easy walking distance of shops and station.

£535,000



33 Mychett Heath, Mychett, Surrey

A large two-bedroom wing house with garage and garden, lies within the four-acre grounds and natural woodland.

£400,000



6 Hayes End Manor, South Petherton, Somerset

A two-bedroom period cottage conversion overlooking the pond and courtyard gardens, in a popular village.

£299,000



17 Church Leat, Downton, Wiltshire

The balcony from this delightful two-bedroom house overlooks the River Avon, and is close to a beautiful 12th-century church.

£375,000