

Updating retirement property



John Lavin, of Cognatum Estates, says: "There are many advantages to buying on a well-established retirement estate. The surroundings will have matured well, the estate will have established a character, and properties are likely to offer better value than a newly built home of the same size."

"But 70% to 80% of retirement homes were built over thirty years ago, and these will inevitably look a little dated. Aesthetic tastes and ways of living change, and it's important that purchasers are able to have the home that fits their lifestyle."

"Most buyers aren't looking for a refurbishment project when they move in later life, but an attractive and well-built older property on a well-managed estate that offers plenty of potential for updating may be a good buy and shouldn't be ruled out."

"Today's buyers are looking for flexible open space, good ergonomics, up to date bathrooms and kitchens, energy efficient and 'connected' homes."

"If all other elements of the property suit you, don't rule it out because of small rooms and bad layout. Surgical examination of the floor plans is a good starting point. Look at the overall square footage, and adopt a sledgehammer strategy to achieving your ideal home. Even supporting walls can be knocked through; an architect, structural engineer or good builder will be able to advise."

"Good flow from inside to outside is a high priority for most people these days, so this is the moment to create or improve this aspect of the property. Also updating bathrooms and kitchens, incorporating contemporary designs and features while future-proofing for later life."

"Don't dismiss property that has a questionable EPC, leaky windows, or that is generally under-insulated. These weaknesses should be taken into consideration in the valuation, and dramatic improvements can be made in the efficiency of an old building. For example, fitting renewable energy generation such as hot water solar, roof-mounted PV panels, and ground/air source heat pumps will bring a property straight into the 21st Century. Even draught excluding/proofing, and upgrading heating systems will make a significant difference."

"At Cognatum, our housing stock has stood the test of time – quality properties with futureproofing built in at the time, which makes them eminently suitable for retirees of today. But we are aware that updating for some properties is desirable, whether that's simple aesthetics or more complicated construction work."

Cognatum has set up a new department that addresses the need to update some of their older properties. Cognatum Services offers everything from a simple redecoration to a complete remodelling of the space, revitalising older properties with refreshing ideas, improved ergonomics and flow, light and airy living spaces, improved aesthetics and energy efficiency, and incorporating features that may be of benefit in the future such as level access, easy to reach plug sockets and the technology for a 'connected home'. The service is designed to provide as little or as much advice and inspiration as required, teaming up with good local craftsmen and contractors to see the work through to completion, and ensuring the project meets budget and lifestyle needs.

John Lavin says, "Cognatum Services means we can help our existing residents, new buyers, or those wanting to sell."

A good alternative to buying an older property and undertaking the work yourself is of course to buy one that's already been updated. Cognatum Services has recently refurbished two of their properties at Bluecoat Pond, their retirement estate adjacent to the campus of Christ's Hospital School near Horsham in West Sussex.

Both properties are spacious, with wonderful views of Bluecoat Pond. They have two bedrooms, new open plan kitchen / dining rooms with fully integrated white goods, including a wine cooler and an induction hob, with Shaker style units and quartz worktops. The interior decor of the cottage has been designed in conjunction with John Lewis and includes curtain poles, curtains and blinds where fitted. All the carpets and flooring are also included in the price. There is also a refurbished wet room on the ground floor.

Bluecoat Pond, situated on the former Christ's Hospital School dairy site, takes its name from the long blue coats still worn by the students. The Victorian pond and water tower are the centre piece of the estate's iconic courtyard, with the pretty brick properties surrounded by well landscaped gardens and grounds.

Although it doesn't officially hold village status, Christ's Hospital has postal facilities, a chapel, a shop and a large railway station, all within easy walking distance of the estate. Christ's Hospital School also offers a hugely varied programme of high-quality music and drama performances, held in their purpose-built theatre designed by the same architect responsible for London's Young Vic.

The properties are available for £575,000 and £550,000.

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Cognatum, a not-for-profit company, has 60 retirement estates in 21 counties across central and southern England, a total of 928 retirement homes. All are in prime locations within vibrant market towns or villages, within walking distance of shops and restaurants. Each estate benefits from thoughtful architecture, landscaped grounds, and a dedicated estate manager.

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