

# Health-conscious move

## Covid-19 has made over-70s think afresh about buying a home with care on offer, says DEBORAH STONE

The past few years have seen a steady growth in retirement villages and developments in the UK, with modern accommodation and facilities appealing to still-independent oldsters downsizing to travel the world.

Interest in these developments is higher than ever but not because they make ideal lock-up-and-leave bases. Now it's all about the care on offer as over-70s come to terms with being labelled "clinically vulnerable" during the coronavirus pandemic.

Enquiries from younger retirees are also well above those in previous years, according to Cognatum, which manages 60 retirement estates across central and southern England.

*"It seems that coronavirus has changed the way the retired perceive themselves,"* says managing director John Lavin. *"Prior to the pandemic, 70 was considered the new 50. Now, anybody over 70 has had to come to terms with the fact that the pandemic does have a disproportionate impact on the health of the over-70s."*

Despite a relaxation of social distancing and the end of shielding for most people, many over-70s are still anxious, he says: *"While some residents are desperately keen to return to a more familiar, pre-pandemic way of life, there are many others who are concerned by the prospect."*

Most people who downsize to age-restricted developments are looking for companionship among like-minded people and an escape from maintaining large houses and gardens.



**POPULAR:** Care is available at Ellerslie, while homes are being renovated at Bluecoat, below

But health is another concern and although Cognatum-managed estates do not offer specialist health care, during the pandemic deep-cleaning regimes have been increased and managers have kept in close touch with residents.

It was health concerns and the difficulties of self-isolating alone that prompted 73-year-old Paul Kelly to move into a retirement property shortly after lockdown.

Mr Kelly was one of the first to take advantage of virtual viewing of properties offered by retirement living provider Audley Villages. He was taken on a video tour of the apartment he was interested in, plus the library, restaurant and wellness club, with the sales manager answering his questions. Then he visited Audley Ellerslie, in Worcestershire, in full PPE when lockdown was lifted, moving in a few weeks later.

*"I decided to look for an apartment during lockdown. For me it felt like there was no better time,"* says Mr Kelly, who was living in a remote village away from his family.

*"This was why moving to somewhere with a strong sense of community was so important for me, as well as having access to care as much or as little as I need it."*

*"It wasn't an easy time to sell my property, with fewer potential buyers, but it didn't take too long in the end."*

Mr Kelly moved in June and says: *"I'm just glad that lockdown didn't stop me from making the move. I'm settled in now and can begin to enjoy the lifestyle that I want."*

Audley Ellerslie has 101 properties in three Victorian mansions in Malvern, where extra care is available if required. New one-bedroom apartments are for sale from £299,950 (0800 093 8181; audleyvillages.co.uk).

Cognatum has two new estates in development at Salisbury, Hampshire, and in Wingham, Kent. It is also renovating existing properties at Bluecoat Pond near Horsham in West Sussex, including a two-bedroom end-terrace cottage for sale at £550,000 (01491 821170; cognatum.co.uk).

The homes are within the former Christ's Hospital School dairy site around a Victorian pond and pretty courtyard, with a shop, chapel and railway station an easy walk away.



[www.cognatum.co.uk](http://www.cognatum.co.uk)  
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Published in Sunday Express  
Sunday 9th August 2020*