

Moving with the times

CHRISTMAS is a time of family gatherings and meeting old friends, so it's not surprising that it's also when many of us think about moving closer to loved ones. Those festive get-togethers make older people realise what they're missing out on – seeing grandchildren grow up, or having fun with life-long pals – and they also prompt concerns from younger family members.

That, and the perennial problem of loneliness, is why there are more enquiries about retirement properties in the weeks following Christmas than any other period.

So, is 2022 the year to downsize? Robin Hughes, CEO of retirement village Castle View Windsor in Berkshire, thinks the pandemic may have created the perfect conditions for a rush to downsize.

"There must be thousands of people in their 60s and 70s who put off moving during the last two years due to Covid," he says. "Even after the various lockdowns were lifted, people in this age demographic were understandably risk averse.

"They didn't want to go out and look at new properties, and equally didn't want anyone coming in to view their current home. That is now starting to change and I predict a bulge in latent interest will sweep through the sector during the year, as these prospective downsizers decide that they have put off moving for too long and that now is the time to get on with it."

Often it's the grown-up children who get the ball rolling, as happened to Carole and John Hodges, who now live a few minutes' walk from their daughter and grandchildren after moving from Buckinghamshire to Castle View Windsor during lockdown.

"It was our daughter who arranged everything," explains John. "She identified



IDYLLIC SCENE: Turnpike Court near Haywards Heath, West Sussex, is a two-bedroom first-floor apartment with a balcony overlooking communal gardens. Offers over £400,000 (01491 821170; cognatum.co.uk)



CLOSE CALL: Carole and John Hodges moved to be close to their daughter and grandchildren. Prices at Castle View Windsor, in Berkshire, start from £375,000 for one-bedroom apartments with a balcony (01753 378127; castleviewwindsor.co.uk). Inset: The communal Sky Deck

Castle View as somewhere she wanted us to move to, as it was being built, and sold us on the idea very early on.

"We were starting to struggle with the old place and we certainly don't miss the garden maintenance and worry about cleaning the gutters and other external jobs."

John, 80, and Carole, 79, moved from a large bungalow and garden near Stoke Mandeville, an area where they had lived for 35 years.

"Moving house and downsizing after so long was awful," says John. "It was emotional and difficult getting rid of things in the middle of Covid and everything brought back memories."

But he says they have no regrets and settled quickly. *"We do miss our old neighbours but it's lovely having people around us here, along with the facilities such as the bar and restaurant, and everyone is so friendly and welcoming."*

Downsizing while you're still fit enough to make it a lifestyle choice, rather than a necessity, is an important consideration but the pandemic has changed people's requirements. Richard Williams is director of retirement estates management company Cognatum and says people now want to downsize to a home that still has space – inside and out.

"The pandemic has made everybody very home-centric, and that has certainly made downsizers re-evaluate what they require from their property," he says.

"Having become accustomed to spending time in the home, those downsizing are reluctant to reduce their space, or their comforts, too dramatically."

"The experience of isolation has had an impact on people of all ages, but particularly those in their later years – a stark wake-up call to make the most of their time.

Williams says flexible space is the solution and downsizing to a location where you can walk to shops, pubs, a doctor, chemist and church. Having local friends has become vital, he adds: *"There's little question that being able to see family and friends has become more important than ever."*

Castle View Windsor has 64 apartments for over-55s, with prices starting from £375,000 (01753 378127; castleviewwindsor.co.uk).

Cognatum manages 60 retirement estates in England.

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