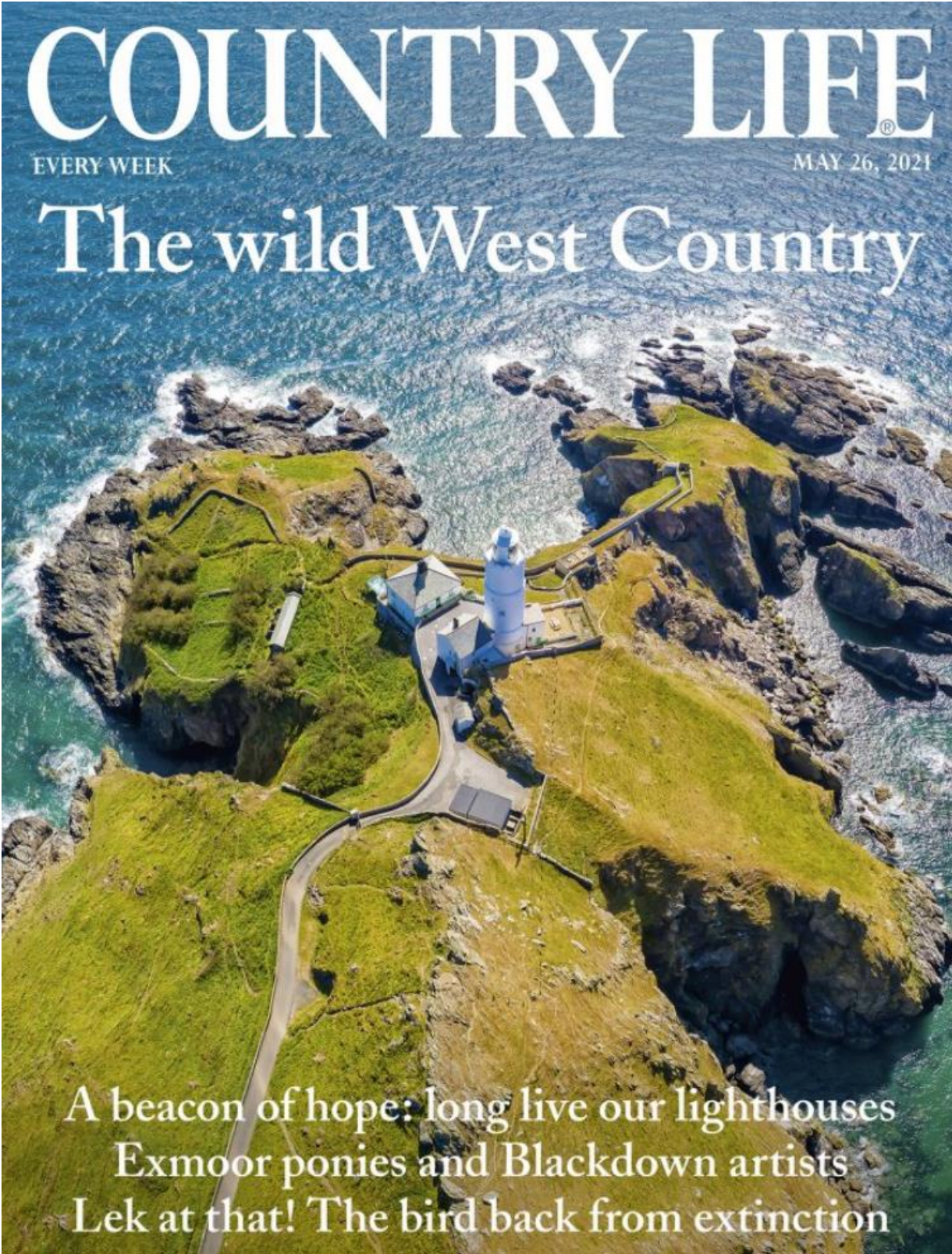


# COUNTRY LIFE®

EVERY WEEK

MAY 26, 2021

## The wild West Country



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# A HOME FOR THE GOLDEN YEARS

As growing numbers of people are choosing to downsize to age-exclusive developments, Carla Passino discovers what makes a great retirement property

**B**UYING a new house is always a big decision, but never more so when considering downsizing and embracing a new lifestyle in an age-exclusive development. 'When someone has to decide whether to move out of their family home, where they raised their family, it's difficult. Not everyone will want to do it, but what senior housing does is to give people an alternative,' says Lauren Harwood, head of senior housing research at Knight Frank, who notes that the market for retirement schemes has been expanding steadily in the past 18 months. 'As the sector grows, there are more options: different price points, options in terms of buying or renting or in terms of whether you want to live in a village-style community in a suburban area or in an urban context. It gives people lots of opportunities.'

As choice widens, however, the features that make a retirement property particularly sought-after can sometimes turn out to be strikingly similar to those that rule the open market: in both cases, location tops the charts. A 2019 survey by Knight Frank revealed that more than half of the respondents saw

location as the most important factor when choosing a property for their golden years. This comes as no surprise to Paul Aitkenhead of Lifestory, a developer that specialises in building houses to suit different life stages. 'A lot of the time, our customers have large rural houses that become a little too much for them and they realise they'd rather see their grandkids, go on cruises or see the world than maintain their home. In those cases, they either move closer to their family or to somewhere where they can walk to local amenities.'

**'The amenities and five-star hospitality services help to foster and encourage interaction'**

The big difference with open-market housing is that age-exclusive schemes promise to take the hassle out of everyday life, so that people can have more spare time to enjoy their ideal location: 'What we do is ensure we keep our end of the bargain: lifts



work, if anything gets a bump when people are moving in, it is redecorated, everything is kept fresh, the gardens are well looked after,' notes Mr Aitkenhead.

That said, there's one area where many people would rather remain hands-on: some light gardening. A slice of green space—in addition to manicured communal gardens—remains a prized asset. 'There is quite a range of what people are looking for, but I'd say top of the list normally comes outdoor space,' reports Mr Aitkenhead. 'People are happy to give up their home and garden, but always want their little private outside space. As much as we have communal gardens, sometimes you want that space and time to yourself.'

For every retiree seeking privacy, however, there's another who relishes the opportunity of becoming part of a like-minded community



and that's where having access to a wide range of communal amenities can really make the difference: 'The modern amenities and five-star hospitality services available within our developments help to foster and encourage interaction among residents,' says Jason Leek, CEO of Riverstone. 'Although bespoke care provision shouldn't be overlooked, the over-65s want to live a life that is uncompromised.'

Riverstone's schemes fall into a particular category of age-exclusive living called housing with care. Mrs Harwood explains that the market is split into two main models: traditional retirement housing, in which people buy or rent an apartment and have access to communal gardens and social areas; and housing with care, which makes up about 15% of the accommodation stock and is rather akin to branded residences in that it offers

#### TO CARE OR NOT TO CARE

'In housing-with-care developments, healthcare service is available as and when required,' points out Knight Frank's Lauren Harwood. 'This can range from assistance with some activities and medication management to buddy schemes or, if you have a particular condition, specific support that you can get in your own apartment. It allows people to live independently, but if they need a little more help, it's there—you can have it at home and it's very flexible.'

a dizzying array of luxury services and attractions. In those developments, 'you'd expect a restaurant and a bistro, probably a more casual cafe, quite often private dining that you can book for a family event; you have wellness (often gym, swimming pool and spa), a hobby and activities room and other amenities, such as a library, study area and hairdresser's,' according to Mrs Harwood. 'What these operators do really well is the service and

hospitality. You are likely to have a concierge and reception staff to help you sort out problems, people doing landscaping and maintenance, all the way through to yoga, card clubs and book clubs, run by both operators and residents.'

With so much going on, it's a wonder that people manage to spend any time inside their new homes. However, having enough indoor space is important to downsizers that want to keep hold of some of their ➤

old furniture and many developers know that. 'Operators have a very good idea of who they are targeting when they build their scheme, so they may have oversize apartments, ones that are slightly bigger than if you merely bought a flat,' says Mrs Harwood. 'They cater to that.'

Mr Aitkenhead says Lifestory works with a third-party company to offer a complete and bespoke service that helps people declutter and move, 'looking at floorspace, what furniture they have, where everything is going to go and perhaps putting some pieces up for auction or donating them to charity'. That said, he continues, the best retirement interiors make the most of light and space: 'We have a focus on designing around wellbeing, so our apartments are very bright, our corridors are very wide and we have big floor spaces. All is designed around our customer and the feedback we get, such as what's the right height to place the oven—all these things are considered. Everything is integrated, so it looks as if it's meant to be. For example, our New Forest development has country-feel kitchens.'

This wellbeing-centred approach requires a lot of thought and kitchens, in particular, pose perhaps one of the greatest design conundrums, with buyers often split into two camps. 'Some people like an open-plan area because they feel cooking has a social side; others are very

Buyers looking to downsize are often undaunted by the prospect of parting with old furniture and belongings, but leaving behind a beloved dog, cat or rabbit is out of the question. Luckily, many age-exclusive developers, such as Audley Villages and Churchill Retirement Living, welcome animals.

'We know that keeping a pet can reduce stress, provide companionship and help to increase physical activity, all of which is essential as we get older,' says Spencer McCarthy, chairman and CEO of Churchill Retirement Living. 'More importantly, we know that many of our owners simply wouldn't

#### WHAT ABOUT PETS?

contemplate leaving their furry friends behind, which is why pets are welcome at Churchill.'

Audley Villages shares the same approach, with managing director of operations, Paul Morgan, revealing that owners are encouraged to bring their pets, 'be that their golden retriever, pet rabbit or even lizard'. Indeed, he continues, 'having pets around our villages really strengthens the community feel and now that that the rule of six is back, it can lead to new friendships, with owners choosing to walk their dogs together in the beautiful grounds and surrounding green spaces'.

A pleasant walk around Churchill's Lockyer Lodge, in Sidford, Devon, might afford a glimpse of rescue poodle Molly, whereas at Audley's St George's Place, in Birmingham, you might catch sight of Inky, a shih-tzu, or Daisy and Scampi, a Jack Russell terrier and 'Heinz-57' respectively, being walked by their owners. But perhaps the most popular Audley dog is Pizze, a 16-year-old Norwich terrier that lives at Cooper's Hill, in Englefield Green, Surrey. Although 'he's getting on a bit these days', his owner, Jenny Warner, reports that 'he is considered quite the pin-up'.

traditional, preferring to stay separated from the living area and then present the food once it has been prepared, like a magic trick.'

As far as decisions go, picking a kitchen is clearly almost as big as choosing whether to downsize. For the latter, at least, Mr

Aitkenhead has a solution at hand: try before you buy. 'We offer a rent-to-buy option called Lifestory Choice to Buy: people can rent with us and, if they sell their home and choose to buy from us within the first six months, they get their rent refunded.'

#### St Elphin's Park, Matlock, Derbyshire (previous pages)

Set in 14 acres of grounds in the Peak District, this village centres around a former Victorian school, which houses a health and leisure club complete with pool, spa, library and restaurant. A mix of new-builds and re-sale properties is available, with prices from £245,000. Audley (01629 258873; [www.audleyvillages.co.uk](http://www.audleyvillages.co.uk))

#### Sarum Lodge, Salisbury, Wiltshire

Only a few apartments remain for sale at this development close to Salisbury's Charter Market, which has a communal area where people can relax, read a book or socialise and a bookable guest suite where friends and family can stay when visiting. From £249,950. Churchill Retirement Living (01722 562539; [www.churchillretirement.co.uk](http://www.churchillretirement.co.uk))



#### Riverstone Fulham, London SW6

This luxurious riverside development comprises 161 beautifully designed apartments that combine style with practicality and private outdoor space. The scheme makes the most of its setting with gardens overlooking the Thames and complements this with an array of amenities that includes library, bar, restaurant, cinema, pool and spa. From £860,000. Riverstone (020-7349 1911; [www.riverstoneliving.com](http://www.riverstoneliving.com)).



#### Ridgmount Apartments, Wimbledon, London SW19

A short walk from Wimbledon village, this new development offers 20 stylish, contemporary apartments, elegant communal areas, including delightful landscaped gardens, and concierge services. Prices start from £650,000. Knight Frank (020-8099 8943; [www.knightfrank.com](http://www.knightfrank.com))



#### Sandbanks Road, Poole, Dorset

Long views of Poole Park are a perk for buyers at Lifestory's Sandbanks Road development, which is situated close to the Dorset town's centre. The scheme comprises 32 apartments, many of which have private terraces or balconies. Prices start from £350,000 or £1,957pcm (including service charge). Lifestory (0808 258 0000; [www.lifestory.group](http://www.lifestory.group))

