

# How to find your perfect home



Your complete guide to retirement villages

# Welcome

**T**he concept of retirement village living was pioneered in places like Australia and the USA where it has now become an established part of the housing market landscape. Although there is still a long way to go here in the UK, retirement villages are becoming more prevalent. There are now some exceptional retirement villages in development around the country, making this a viable and attractive option for people enthusiastically planning for their retirement and where best to spend it.

The key aspect to retirement village living that really sets it apart from other alternatives is the unique combination of amenities and services it offers. Choosing to live at a retirement village puts you in complete control of your life right now as well as for the future, so you can get on with enjoying your well-earned years of retirement knowing you've got support as and when you want it.

This guide has been devised to explain what these communities can offer and help you to decide whether retirement village living might be the right choice for you.

Associated Retirement Community Operators (ARCO) is the main body representing the retirement community sector in the UK. For extensive information about retirement villages and where to find an ARCO-registered village, visit [www.arcouk.org](http://www.arcouk.org) or telephone 020 36971204.



“The idea of ‘retirement housing’ in the UK is sometimes misunderstood, with many assuming that the only choice of housing with some level of care is a care home. In fact, there are various types of housing specifically designed for older people keen to maintain an independent lifestyle.”

Retirement Housing Report,  
Knight Frank, 2014

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## Housing options today

Where can people who are approaching, or already enjoying, retirement look for a new home?

**A**nyone taking a proactive approach to planning their retirement will need to know exactly what options are open to them. Depending on their personal circumstances, requirements and preferences, there are several housing choices for people nearing or enjoying retirement that are not necessarily available to other people.

### Your current home

There is, of course, the very straightforward option of remaining in your current home. Although, if your home was originally chosen to accommodate a growing family

that has since flown the nest, it might be worth assessing whether you are still happy with its size, layout or garden.

### Retirement villages

These are purpose-built developments that can vary in size to create a village-style community. They can provide accommodation of different types, sometimes a mix of apartments, bungalows or houses, for residents typically over 55 or 60 years of age (the age restriction can depend on planning requirements or the village operator). Retirement village homes are self-contained and there are often dining or leisure facilities provided too.

The homes in such developments are generally sold as leasehold properties, although some may be available to rent, depending on the village operator.

### Sheltered housing

Sheltered housing consists of self-contained flats or houses that have a manager or warden who often lives on the premises. It is common for sheltered housing to offer a 24-hour emergency alarm system too. The size of a sheltered housing site can vary from a single building divided into compact residential units, to a collection of flats and houses in one specific location.

Depending on their personal circumstances, requirements and preferences, there are several housing choices for people nearing or enjoying retirement that are not necessarily available to other people.



### ‘Downsizing’

Moving into a smaller home has long been a popular option for people whose children have flown the nest. Small homes in the UK, particularly those built pre-1960, might be perfect size-wise but can lack functional space, natural light and high ceilings. If you are looking to ‘downsize’, make sure that wherever you are moving to is not simply smaller, but is appropriate for your lifestyle.



If you have any severe medical or mobility issues, a care home might be an option to bear in mind. At a care home, residents have their own private room and there are communal areas such as a dining room and lounge. Different homes can offer different levels of care. A care home is likely to provide assistance with washing, dressing and administering medication

whereas a nursing home will also have qualified nurses on hand day and night. Some care homes may specialise in providing particular forms of care for specific medical issues.

### Find out more

 Age UK has lots of helpful information about care homes, visit [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

### House sharing

The option of moving in with relatives, be that your children or a sibling, will depend on the size of the home to be shared. Some families pool resources to find a new property to suit two or three generations. It might not be possible to share with a family member so you could consider the idea with a like-minded friend.

### Park homes

Park homes are also known as mobile homes. These bungalow-style or single storey lodges are typically available in rural settings or parks. They provide homes on a private estate, some of which are designated specifically for people who have retired, and offer a community atmosphere. Residents generally buy the building and rent the land on which they sit. You can live in a park home all year round.

# Why choose a retirement village?

Here are some of the key factors that influence people when they decide that moving to a retirement village is the right thing for them.

**P**eople choose to make their home in a retirement village for a variety of reasons. As well as providing somewhere to live, a retirement village can offer many solutions or desirable factors that often can't be addressed when simply moving from one street to another. For some people, it is not just a new house they are seeking, but a whole new approach to life.

## Make it the perfect size

If you live in a large home, you may find that you don't need all the space you have so you certainly don't want to be spending money heating it or time and effort cleaning it. If your home is the right size for you, perhaps the layout is no longer suitable with regard to stairs or the location of the bathroom, for example. Moving house in retirement used to be called 'downsizing' but think of it instead as 'right-sizing' and

finding a home that is ideal for you. For example, moving from a two bedroom house to a two bedroom apartment might make the world of difference.

## Carry on carefree

Retirement villages are there to make your life easier on every level so you don't have to worry about 'what ifs'. These villages aim to provide a wide range of services, from concierge duties such as signing for parcels while you are away to assistance with



personal care. Some villages can even offer high levels of medical and domestic support so you don't need a Plan B or to contemplate alternative arrangements further down the line, such as having to move to a care home.

### Good neighbours around you

Retirement villages recapture that feeling of living in a caring, cooperative neighbourhood and the sense of well-being and security this way of life brings. You are more likely to have like-minded neighbours, which will create an atmosphere of consideration and mutual appreciation. On a more practical level, there is likely to be 24-hour emergency support from someone on site, on call or at the end of the phone.

### Feel part of a community

If you live in a large town or city, friends, activities and amenities can be quite a distance away making life seem quite disjointed. In a retirement village location, you know that those around you are in a similar situation. Your pace of life may match that of your neighbours, plus there may well be many interests and hobbies you share. There are likely to be places to mingle with other village residents, such as restaurants, libraries and gardens and many activities and events to attend if you wish.



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**Find out more**  
With more retirement villages planned for the UK, keep up-to-date with developments at [www.arcouk.org](http://www.arcouk.org)

### A growing trend

According to Associated Retirement Community Operators (ARCO), there are 20,000 people living in retirement villages across the UK. ARCO's members include housing trusts and housing charities as well as housing developers, all of which provide homes for thriving communities along with flexible support services. As stated on the ARCO website, there are currently 26 ARCO members, representing more than 400 retirement communities in the UK. This is more than 50% of all housing with care schemes and includes both private and not-for-profit providers.



## Retirement village living revealed

Discover what life can be like at one of the many custom-designed villages popping up around the country.

**L**ife at a retirement village is exactly what you want it to be. How it might differ from your life before is that there are significantly fewer things to worry about. A retirement village should relieve you of everyday chores such as gardening and home maintenance, leaving you to focus on doing the things you want to do with your free time.

### Holiday mode at home

Like a holiday resort, a good retirement village is likely to offer leisure amenities and essential facilities, all conveniently located for you. There could be places to

socialise such as bars, cafés, restaurants or larger venues for bigger gatherings. There may be places to relax, which can include gardens, swimming pools, spas or allotments. It could boast a village shop too, perhaps even a hair salon or gym, in fact everything you might expect to find in any small residential area.

### Get out and about

Your village is likely to have someone who coordinates and arranges events and activities. These can take place within the village or further afield and can be part of a larger, ongoing programme or a one-off, special event. Many retirement villages

are close to towns so getting to larger shops and amenities is no problem. There may even be a car and driver available for out-of-village trips.

### Enjoy your surroundings

Many retirement villages are custom designed and therefore much thought and attention is given to the grounds that surround it. The village environs are maintained by the village operator and so should be clean and litter-free with landscaped gardens and manicured green spaces. Pathways should be wide and smooth with plenty of seating so you can make the most of your surroundings.

## Welcome your friends and family

When choosing the size of your home in a retirement village, you can factor in spare rooms for family and friends when they come to visit. Even if you decide not to have a spare room, it is unlikely to be a problem as some retirement villages have a guest suite where your children and grandchildren can stay. Should you be hosting a get-together, there may even be no need to cook if you can head out to the village's dining room or restaurant.

## Do your own thing

Just because there might be events, activities, trips and classes taking place in your village, it does not mean you have to participate in all, or even any, of them. You can find your own pace of life or level of interaction. You can come and go as you please, do as you wish and carry on living your life as you want to.

Life at a retirement village allows you to focus on doing the things you want to do with your free time.

**i** **Find out more**  
All retirement villages are different so do check the availability of amenities and services provided by each one.

## Over 9,500 Saga customers were interviewed about their retirement plans.

- Of those likely to move home in retirement, 55% said they would be likely to move to a bungalow, 52% to a small house, 25% to a purpose built retirement flat, and 23% to a non-retirement flat.
- Almost seven-in-ten (69%) of those likely to move in retirement would do so to move to a property that would suit them better in retirement. Other reasons for moving home included releasing capital to enjoy retirement (22%), to be closer to family (15%) and to move to an area that's more rural (15%).
- When looking for a new property in retirement a number of factors were important in this decision. 19% wanted a property that they would not have to move from again, 18% wanted a more manageable home, 14% sought more outdoor space, and 14% would look for high quality accommodation.

Saga Populus Survey, September 2014



# Which is the right retirement village for you?

Here are some important factors to bear in mind when considering a retirement village as your future home.

**T**here are more retirement villages in the UK than you might think, with many more in the planning stages. With such a range from which to choose, it is worth spending time doing some thorough research so you can ascertain what is available to you in the area you have in mind. Here are some aspects to consider when thinking about retirement villages as an option for you.

## All are not equal

Don't assume that all retirement villages are the same. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' or across the board, industry-standard when it comes to the provision of amenities and services. Just because one offers certain provisions, doesn't mean these are necessarily available at another. Developers are beginning to realise the possibilities of what a retirement village can offer in terms of amenities and quality of

accommodation, so it is definitely worth the trouble of shopping around or taking the long-term view of places still in the construction phase.

## Your 'must-haves'

Decide on your personal 'definites', those things that you would insist on your retirement village having, followed by the things you regard as being less important. This can help to narrow down the options. Being able to get into town easily





"Moving into a new home in retirement is not for everyone, but more people may consider it when they can see examples of thriving retirement communities designed for active and socially engaged older people. As Emma Cleugh, head of institutional consultancy at Knight Frank, says: "It's time to move retirement housing from the niche to the mainstream." It's time to change."

Retirement Housing Report, Knight Frank, 2014

might be more important for you than having a hair salon on-site for example.

### **Flexibility for the future**

Retirement villages are home to a broad range of ages and physical abilities. As a result, there is a range of services available to residents, from standard domestic help such as a cleaner or housekeeper, through to specialised at-home medical care. Check the services provided by the village and that they can be implemented at any stage of your residency and put together as part of a personalised package.

### **Visit your favourites**

Once you have made a shortlist, it is time to start visiting. Plan to visit more than once, making initial visits to gauge your first impressions and then spending a whole day there if you can. This way you can get an idea of the flow of daily life in the village, see people come and go and chat with residents. Some villages offer a 'try before you buy' scheme where you can stay for a few days to see how you would settle in. If possible, take along your family or a friend when you visit. It is always helpful to have another point of view and you can talk about any concerns you may have.

### **Look further afield**

Bear in mind that, even if it is in the most idyllic of settings, you don't have to spend all your time in the retirement village. Make sure you investigate what there is within walking distance and what you can reach by public transport should you not have a car. Take a look around the local town for the availability of larger shops, galleries, railway stations and cinemas if these are things you like to have nearby.



## Why move to a retirement village?

It can be tempting to stay in familiar surroundings until circumstances dictate otherwise. What are the advantages of making the move now?

**T**here are many compelling reasons why people choose to live in a retirement village and these reasons will differ from person to person. Look at your situation objectively, and if the idea of retirement village living sounds attractive but you do have reservations, here are some reasons why it might be an idea to make the move sooner rather than later.

### Not retired? Not a problem!

Despite its name, you do not have to be retired to live in a retirement village. You can be working and still qualify to live in a retirement village, purely on the basis of your age. It can vary from one local council to another, but generally you need to be over 55 or 60. If you are part of a couple, often just one of you needs to be this age, but do check the retirement village's own regulations.

### Take control of your future

It can be tempting to stay where you are until you are forced to make a decision about moving. Whether this is due to mobility issues, care requirements or other changes in circumstances, moving home once you actually need to can make the process more difficult or stressful. Moving to a retirement village that has a full range of services enables you to relax and enjoy life now, mindful that any

future day-to-day aspects can be handled easily and without any upheaval.

### All mod cons as standard

One of the attractive things about retirement villages is that they are likely to be ready for you to move in straight away with nothing needing to be done. They may be newly or recently built and you may very well be the first person to occupy the flat, apartment or house, so the decorating, flooring, appliances and fittings are all brand new. If you have been in your current home for a while, there are bound to be things that need attention and it is easy to 'make do' rather than face the upheaval of fitting a

new bathroom or getting the staircase painted. Faced with a whole-house renovation, it is not surprising that the lure of a modern home is so appealing.

### A buyer's market

The property market in the UK has reached an unprecedented stalemate. Older generations currently own 85% of larger, family-sized homes that are snapped up by growing families. Unfortunately, anyone looking to sell their house and move to a smaller home will find themselves competing with a burgeoning number of first-time buyers. More and more retirement villages are being built so there are homes ready and waiting, designed specifically for you.

### A protected balance of life

There is no denying that the rate of modern life is louder, faster, busier and more hectic than ever before. Retirement villages are purposefully designed, resulting in a defined environment that is not at risk of being over-developed or having its character dramatically changed. This environment supports a sense of community, neighbourliness and mutual consideration which can be lacking in residential areas that are more fragmented.



# What to ask when visiting a retirement village

There are some fundamental questions to ask, but nothing is more important than speaking to the people who already live there.

**W**hen you are ready to start visiting retirement villages, try to visit as many as you can so you get a good sense of what is on offer. You will want to get as much information as possible when you visit, so take along this checklist of key questions to ask – and make a note of the answers too. The best people to talk to are the residents, so make sure you get to chat with as many as you can to get an overall impression of the accommodation and amenities.

## Important financial considerations

- Are the village properties offered on a leasehold or rental basis?
- What is included in the service or maintenance charges?
- How often do any charges need to be paid?
- How often are these charges likely to be increased?
- What fees are payable on leaving the property?
- Is the reservation fee refundable should I decide not to purchase or rent the property?

## The way the village is run

- How is the village managed?
- Does the village have a residents' committee?

- How are the communal areas, grounds and properties maintained?

## The support residents receive

- Does the village have a member of staff on site 24 hours a day?
- Is there a nurse on duty?
- Is there an emergency call button or personal alarm system in each property?
- What levels of help and assistance are available to residents?
- What security measures are in place?

## The village's way of life

- Can family and friends come to stay?
- Are pets allowed?
- Is any transport provided?
- Does the village arrange any social events and activities?
- What does the local area have to offer in the way of services and leisure?
- Are there any on-site catering services?
- Can help within the home be arranged?
- Is there sufficient car parking?



# Jargon explained

Dealing with retirement villages and the associated paperwork is not without its jargon. Let us help you through the basics.

**H**ere are some terms you might read about in brochures or hear being used when you visit a retirement village. This list is not comprehensive and different retirement villages may use different terms or wording. If anything seems unclear to you at any stage, ask for further explanation from the vendor or your solicitor.

## Assignment Fee

This fee is payable by you to the freeholder of the retirement village when your home is sold and transferred to a new owner. It covers the freeholder's costs for arranging a new lease in the name of the new owner.

## Assisted Living

Retirement villages should offer a basic level of care and support, such as being able to contact someone 24 hours a day. Assisted living, or 'extra care', is the availability of add-on services you can request at any time. This can include having meals provided, access to laundry services or having a cleaner visit.

## Contingency Fee

This fee is payable to the freeholder of the retirement village to pay for any substantial

repairs or major improvements, such as adding a new communal building or replacing a roof. The fee is usually a percentage of the sale value of your property when it is sold.

## Service Charge

This charge covers a broad range of costs. It pays for all those things needed to run the retirement village, from repairs and maintenance to financing the administrative side of the business. Depending on the size and facilities offered by the village, this service charge will vary from development to development.

## Deferred Management Fee

This fee is paid when the lease agreement comes to an end. In the case of retirement villages, it pays for the provision of communal facilities. These provision fees are 'deferred' and are collected at the end of your residency. For example, your service charge may cover the maintenance of a swimming pool but it does not cover the cost of having it built. The Deferred Management Fee is like a 'use now, pay later' payment and should be fully explained before you sign a contract.

## Exit Fee

This fee is paid to the freeholder when your lease agreement finishes. It may be a flat fee or a percentage of the sale price of your property. The exit fee should be made clear before you commit to buying. The exit fee is also known as a 'transfer fee' or 'departure fee'.

## Freeholder

This is the person or company that owns the land and buildings of the retirement village.

## Landlord

This is the person who either owns the freehold or the head lease and with whom you have your lease.

## Leaseholder

A leaseholder owns a dwelling in the retirement village for a set period of time (eg. 99 years) under a lease agreement with the landlord.

# Your questions answered

Here are the answers to some common questions you might have about retirement villages.



## Is there a minimum age restriction for residents of a retirement village?

Most villages will specify a minimum age of between 55 and 60. These minimum ages will vary and can depend on local planning requirements or the village operator. Some may specify, if there is a couple occupying a property, that only one of them needs to be the minimum age.

## Will I own the property where I live?

Most retirement village properties are offered on a

leasehold basis, in a similar way to how flats and apartments are commonly sold. Some villages can provide properties to rent too.

## How does a leasehold work?

Unlike a freehold where you own both the building and the land it is on, a leasehold gives you the ownership of a building, or portion of a building, for a set period of time. Most flats or apartments, whether in a retirement village or not, are sold as leasehold properties.

## Can I sell my home if I wish?

If you are a leaseholder, you can sell your home. There are likely to be fees to pay when your property is sold. These fees should be clearly outlined before you agree to buy the property and fully explained to you by your solicitor.

## Am I responsible for my household bills?

Yes, you will be in control and responsible for all bills for household utilities such as electricity, water and gas.

## Can I make changes or improvements to my home?

Decorative changes may be allowed by the village's management. In some cases it is part of the contract to maintain good decorative order. It is unlikely that structural changes would be permitted. You do need to check this with your village operator or owner.

## What fees should I expect?

Every monthly, annual and one-off fee should be clearly outlined by the operator of the retirement village. As retirement villages offer more facilities than standard retirement homes, there are fees to cover the cost of the services and amenities provided. The more there are, the higher these fees are likely to be. As well as fees for the management and provision of services, there are fees charged at the end of your residency too such as 'exit' or 'deferred management' fees. The village's

operator should tell you all about these, however you should ensure your solicitor talks you through each one of them too.

## What is included in the monthly fee?

You need to investigate this thoroughly with the retirement village you have in mind. Generally, the fee covers such things as the maintenance of the buildings and grounds, the village administration, communal care cover and provision of basic village services. There may be other fees to pay for any extra facilities offered by the village and any individual care you have arranged.

## Can I bring my pet?

Most villages will welcome you bringing your pet with you when you move in. There may be some restrictions in certain areas, for example designated 'pet-free' apartments or communal areas such as restaurants and cafés.

The main motive for homeowners aged 55 and over to downsize was that their property was no longer suitable, due to stairs or a large garden for example (45%). Other reasons included: the property being too large for the needs of the occupier (33%) and the occupier needing more support and care – which could only be provided elsewhere (29%).

The Last Time Buyers Market: Downsizing preferences amongst older homeowners in England, Scotland and Wales, Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2014

What people would want an ideal retirement village to have...

- 86%** garden or outside space
- 67%** self-contained houses or flats
- 65%** allocated parking
- 61%** access to extra care
- 60%** café or bar
- 56%** communal areas
- 37%** restaurant
- 37%** gym
- 31%** hairdresser
- 21%** cinema

Knight Frank Residential Research Retirement Survey, 2014

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"Good retirement housing involves plenty of space and light, accessibility... a pleasing natural environment outside, balconies and more. And if the dangers of loneliness are to be replaced with opportunities for a good social life, there must be space for people to get together."

LORD RICHARD BEST  
Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group on  
Housing and Care for Older People

# Budgeting and purchase options

Calculate your outgoings before and after moving to a retirement village and the options you have when moving in.

## Purchasing options

The majority of homes in a retirement village are purchased as leasehold properties. Some village operators may offer a number of rental properties in addition to their leasehold homes.

You might be able to take advantage of a 'try before you buy' scheme or similar where

you can live for a week or so to experience the accommodation and neighbourhood.

Look out too for the option of 'deferred completion' which allows you to move into your home at the retirement village on a rental basis for a period of time until the sale of your previous property goes through.

## Budgeting

Use the table opposite to give you an idea of what you are spending on your home now and compare this to what your outgoings might be if you decided to move to a retirement village. Remember to leave a proportion of your income available every month for emergencies or extra spending.



In many cases, living in suitable housing can ensure people stay 'at home' for longer, in a sociable and pleasant environment. "Loneliness and homelessness, our two biggest problems, could be solved at once. Build beautiful, sociable places for the old and liberate inefficiently used family homes for the young."

JANICE TURNER. The Times, Downsize your home, Upsize your retirement, May 3rd 2014

# Monthly budget - *before and after*

Monthly income	Now	If you move
Income 1		
Income 2		
Income 3		
Total		
Monthly outgoings	Now	If you move
Home expenses		
Mortgage or rent		
Council tax		
Water – supply and waste		
Gas		
Electricity		
Telephone (mobile & landline)		
Broadband		
TV licence/satellite		
Building and/or contents insurance		
Service/maintenance charge		
Gardening and home maintenance		
Daily living		
Food		
Personal goods		
Clothes		
Other		

(Continued overleaf)

# Monthly budget - *before and after* (cont.)

Transport		
Petrol/diesel		
Car payments		
Car maintenance		
Parking		
Public transport		
Financial		
Credit card and/or debt repayments		
Other		
Leisure		
Hobbies		
Dining out		
Gym/club membership		
Health		
Private medical insurance		
Life insurance		
Care costs		
Miscellaneous		
Pet bills		
Other		
Total income		
Total outgoings		
Disposable income		

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