

Why cities are luring retirees



THE older generation no longer yearn for the peace and quiet of the countryside.

'The spirit of retirement has changed,' says Clare Bacchus, of retirement property firm PegasusLife. 'We now have a 60-plus generation who want a "second adulthood".'

They also want more from their property purchases. That includes entertainment space and smart kitchens. 'Homes with swagger,' as Bacchus puts it.

Equally important is location.

'They want the buzz of urban life,' says Bacchus. 'That's why two of our planned new developments will be in Hampstead, one in Westminster, and another in Bristol.'

Bruce and Verena Closs, who

by Fred Redwood

moved to Audley's development at Chalfont Dene, Buckinghamshire, from Essex, over a year ago, are typical of today's retirees.

'Our social life is based in London,' says Bruce, 70, who ran his own printing business. 'Verena loves the shops. I watch all of Arsenal's home games and follow the cricket at Lord's. I also meet up with friends, so I'd hate to be stuck in the wilds.'

Chalfont Dene is close to Gerrards Cross, with its 25-minute train service into central London.

Pauline Ewasha, who lives in McCarthy & Stone's Springhill development in Willesden Green, London, loves the location.

'I have lived in the city for 40 years and don't want to move out,'

she says. 'I regularly go into central London for the shops. My husband even occasionally works as a black cab taxi driver.'

Apart from the city lovers who refuse to move out, a growing number of retirees are swapping the country for the city — a reversal of the migration we expect in later life.

LES ROBERTS, 77, a retired teacher, had lived in Upton upon Severn, in Worcestershire, for 20 years before moving to an apartment in Churchill Retirement Living's development in Sale, Manchester.

'Living in the sticks is far more difficult because public services are so poor,' he says. 'In Manchester, we can travel on the tram to

the city centre and visit places such as Bury market.'

A commission chaired by the former care minister Paul Burstow recommended that housing for the elderly should be incorporated into shopping developments, new apartment blocks and even universities to prevent retirees being cut off in 'care ghettos'.

This is already standard policy for some retirement developers. Churchill Retirement Living builds its communities within a 15-minute walk of a High Street.

Avonbank Lodge, in Newbury, Berkshire, due to be completed in March, is typical. Its 58 apartments are within half a mile of the town's new shopping centre and a little further from the market square, with its Corn Exchange theatre.

What does the future hold for retirement communities? Estate agent Strutt & Parker speculates

Stylish: Audley's Chalfont Dene development, just 25 minutes from central London

that we are about to see a growth in mixed-age communities — so-called Platinum Places.

The rationale is that young-at-heart retirees feel a stigma hangs over an age-specific development. So Strutt & Parker's researchers believe we will see developments that are open to all age groups.

There are even more imaginative schemes on the Continent.

In Deventer, the Netherlands, university students share the campus of a retirement development. They pay no rent and, in exchange, spend 30 hours a month helping the elderly residents.

Whether Britain's students and their grandparents are ready to live in such close proximity to one another is quite another matter.