

CENTRE STAGE

TOWN IS THE NEW COUNTRY FOR LIVELY DOWNSIZERS WANTING TO BE NEAR THE ACTION, SAYS CHERYL MARKOSKY



CHILTERN PLACE, MARYLEBONE W1 FROM £2,000,000

Buzzing bars and bistros, Michelin-starred restaurants and Regent's Park on the doorstep of 55 apartments and a four-storey townhouse, which feature marble bathrooms and bespoke Italian kitchens.
www.savills.co.uk

Once upon a time a typical retiree sold the family house in the Big Smoke, to move out to a cottage in the deepest countryside and while away the hours gardening.

Now, urban and rural living is changing for over-55s. After years of operating as the kids' chauffeur and feeling you're missing out, today's downsizers are choosing to live in the heart of London or Home County towns.

Instead of unwaveringly pruning the roses, many attend the latest West End plays, blockbuster films and must-see art exhibitions. Lingering at a café and trying a new restaurant is more engaging than trimming the privet.

Strutt & Parker's new Housing Futures report on the platinum generation reveals that 32% of Baby Boomers want to live in towns and cities, compared to only 12%

desiring a secluded life in the country. Being close to restaurants, culture and shops is high on wish lists, according to Stephanie McMahon, Strutt & Parker's head of research.

"People want life to be easy. That means smaller and more central accommodation with lower running costs so you can see the new Matisse show or go tour the Gold Coast of Australia," she says.

Even those who enjoy the outdoors don't want to spend hours looking after it, points out the Hadley Property Group's James Taylor, who reports strong interest from retirees desiring a dynamic city lifestyle at Chelsea Island.

"We've incorporated spacious balconies and a communal roof garden designed by Belgravia florist Neill Strain, providing downsizers with the ideal space for entertaining or outdoor exercise, such as yoga or tai chi."

As visits to London's finest eateries and events are essential for residents, the Thames Clipper at Chelsea Harbour offers easy access to the Royal Opera House, National Gallery and Covent Garden.

The decision to shift inwards from the country or suburbs is taste-driven, rather than age-driven, according to Clare Bacchus, PegasusLife's customer experience director.

She's discovered that if younger downsizers find the right place they're happy to relocate earlier than anticipated, to "keep thriving" and help create a new community.

At Hampstead Green Place – near Hampstead Heath – and No 79 Fitzjohn's Avenue in Hampstead Village, PegasusLife provides well-appointed kitchens and large entertaining spaces, while reducing the size of bedrooms.

Clare suggests this is because purchasers of all ages don't want to be "boxed into downsizing – instead, they're rightsizing".

Availing oneself of everything the capital has to offer is key to high-end project Battersea Place. Nigel Sibley, CEO of LifeCare Residences, says buyers are returning expats or suburbanites moving closer to central London.

"We're just over the bridge from the King's Road in Chelsea. Our residents like to wine and dine, and go to the theatre, ballet and opera, and cricket and tennis matches."

In an 'experience economy' – where people spend less on buying things and more on doing things – Nigel notes over-55s also like to stay connected to family. "When life's advancing, people don't want to be isolated."

Isolation isn't a problem in a two-bedroom flat at Vista, costing £1.3 million. Views



from the front terrace are over leafy Battersea Park; edgier scenes out back are of criss-crossing railway tracks and Battersea Power Station.

Simon Howard, London sales director at Berkeley Homes, says the project's success is down to its "close proximity to stylish cafés, bars and boutiques on Sloane Square, as well as the greenery of the adjacent park. Vista truly offers the best of both worlds."

Lisa Ronson, commercial director of Ronson Capital Partners, says downsizers from Notting Hill and overseas want a base at Chiltern Place in Marylebone, with its mix of inner-city and "village" chic.

She believes people are as concerned about the practicalities of the apartments as they are the aesthetics. "Car parking and storage are issues – where you put suitcases, golf clubs and long dresses."

The practical meets the truly urban at Blake Tower in the City of London, where Redrow Homes and the Conran Design Group have transformed a former YMCA hostel at the Barbican into uber-cool apartments.

Along with retaining original concrete walls in the listed building, 21st-century versions of Barbican brass ironmongery, integrated wooden seating and alcove shelves add character to what could have been a predictable scheme.

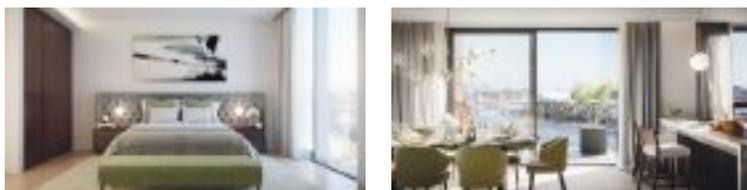
Even though the architecture's a bit Marmite – you either love or hate the Barbican – Redrow's Simon Halfhide says, "You're in Zone 1 and can look out and see history."

There are views of Smithfield Market, St Paul's and of the Barbican Estate gardens. And when Crossrail opens at nearby Farringdon station next year it will take only four minutes to ride to Bond Street.



THE W1 LONDON, MARYLEBONE W1
FROM £4,100,000

Call on your inner DJ at this boutique 19-home scheme in the former headquarters of BBC Radio London, near the art galleries and indie shops of Marylebone Village.
www.knightfrank.com



CHELSEA ISLAND, HARBOUR AVENUE SW10
FROM £935,000

Rock it on the King's Road and then come home to a riverside apartment or penthouse in this new Thames-side location at Chelsea Harbour.
www.chelseaisland.com



KNOWLE HILL PARK, COBHAM, SURREY
FROM £1,825,000

Seven grand houses and 22 apartments on a country estate just outside Cobham, with on-site gym, gated driveway and 45 acres of secluded woods and parkland.
www.knightfrank.com



BLAKE TOWER, FANN STREET EC2
FROM £710,000

Rediscover London in a restored building of 74 one- to three-bed apartments and penthouses on the Barbican Estate. Smithfield, Clerkenwell and Spitalfields are all within walking distance.
www.redrow.co.uk



ELMBRIDGE VILLAGE, CRANLEIGH, SURREY
FROM £430,000

When you tire of the restaurant, bar, library, concert room, and landscaped gardens with allotments, croquet lawn and fish pond, you can head for Cranleigh High Street.
www.retirementvillages.co.uk



BATTERSEA PLACE, BATTERSEA SW11
FROM £574,950

Luxe one- to three-bed apartments in this retirement scheme on the Thames, with concierge and chauffeur service, indoor pool, cinema, billiards room, a la carte restaurant, library and courtyard garden.
www.lifecareresidences.co.uk

Similarly, the benefits of being only minutes from Cobham's smart high street and 12 miles from Heathrow aren't lost on downsizers purchasing homes at Millgate Homes' Knowle Hill Park.

Simon sums up the new townie way of retiring. "New place, new furniture and room for the grandkids – but we're being selfish. We're going out to shops, art galleries and the theatre." And there's not a gardening glove in sight.

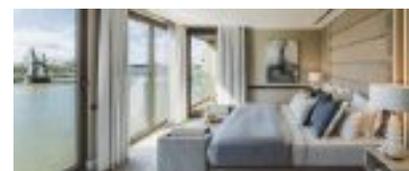
Surrounded by 45 acres of private woods and parkland, the private country estate's handy for catching a plane, and gaining access to delicatessens, gastropubs, the farmers' market and Waitrose.

Strutt & Parker's Jane Brabyn says purchasers looking at retirement homes in and around Ascot "want to be able to walk to Waitrose and the station."

She notes this central locale's so hot that mature couples are happy to wait for the unit they want to come up for sale – "it's a market sweet spot for competing downsizers and upsizing young professionals".

TOWN MOUSE VS COUNTRY MOUSE

- Macchiato and brioche in a cafe vs mulching the flower beds
- *Watching Girl from the North Country* vs being the girl in the north country
- Deliveroo takeaway vs driving 10 miles to a fish 'n' chip van
- Free Oyster card travel when you reach 60 vs 60 quid to fill up the car
- Catching a new film in the art house cinema vs waiting for it on Netflix



QUEEN'S WHARF, HAMMERSMITH W6
FROM £1,150,000

Only eight apartments and penthouses left in this scheme for culture vultures – the theatre, bar, restaurant, cafe and cinema of Riverside Studios are all on site.
www.mountainvil.com