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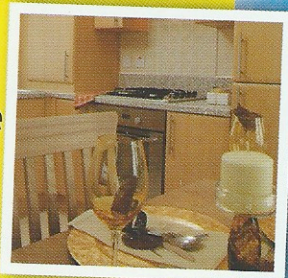
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4 RETIREMENT PARK GEMS

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+ GARDEN ADVICE... BUYING TIPS... LETTERS

Help me find a park home near... Stafford



**BUDGET
£150k**

Barbara Shawcross

"Since my husband died, I have found my existing house and garden simply too big to manage. I don't need all that space any more and would like to move closer to my family."

It is just over a year since Barbara Shawcross's husband, Jim, died and he is sorely missed. Barbara thinks that now is perhaps a good time to start thinking about moving home. These days, she doesn't need all the space in her three-bedroom house on the outskirts of Crewe in Cheshire. The garden is also becoming a bit of a burden. And, having everything all on one level would make life easier.

So, Barbara is thinking about buying a park home. She first heard about them from some friends, who themselves have visited a number of parks with a view to purchasing.

Barbara is well supported by her family, who are quite close knit. There are three children, nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She would like to be nearer so that she could see more of them.

Moving to Stafford would make life easier for them, as well as for herself. They could visit more easily. And, it would provide the perfect opportunity to downsize.

I want...

I would prefer a brand-new home. One bedroom would be sufficient, although a second would allow me to have some of the grandchildren to stay overnight. I don't want a big garden – it needs to be easy to look after. As I don't drive, I'm not worried about a garage or parking but there needs to be some shops within walking distance as well as a good local bus service.

I can afford...

I have only a little set aside in savings, so I will need to finance the purchase from the sale of my house. Ideally, I would like to be able to put some money in the building society after completing the purchase, so as to help supplement my pension. Allowing for that, and given what I expect to make on my house, I reckon I can probably run to £150,000 for a park home. After paying moving expenses, that will still leave a reasonable sum left over.

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT THE AREA?

- ✓ As the county town of Staffordshire, Stafford has all the amenities you would expect from a major centre in terms of shopping and other services.
- ✓ Close to the town is Cannock Chase, an area of woodland and heath covering 26sq miles, which is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- ✓ Given its proximity to the M6 and M54 motorways, Stafford is well placed for easy access to Birmingham, Manchester and Wales.

OUR EXPERT



Alex Melvin
Editor Alex has been with the magazine for over four years, during which time he has developed an extensive knowledge of residential parks.

HIS SHORTLIST



1 Lodgefield Park

With 120 plots, positioned on a number of different levels, Lodgefield Park looks out across the Staffs and Worcester canal, with views towards open farmland.



2 Cavans Wood & The Pines Park

This 130-plot park is really two residential estates which have been merged into one. It is situated on a hillside, with direct access to Cannock Chase.



LOCATION 1

Lodgefield Park

Next to the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal, Lodgefield is part of the seven-strong Hartley Park Homes group

Take the A34 Cannock road from Stafford and, after one and a half miles, a left turn leads you across a road bridge to Lodgefield Park. Its access road is shared with that for an adjoining but unconnected residential park, The Saltings.

Spread across 11 acres, Lodgefield is a mature, well-maintained park bounded on one side by a railway line and on the other by the canal. Our first impression on arriving was of a mass of colourful flowers in the carefully-tended gardens.

Twin sources of fascination are the narrowboats, which ply the

canal, and the ducks and geese (including plenty of chicks when we visited) for which it is a magnet. The perch, pike and roach in these waters make this a fisherman's paradise. Many a tale must have been told at the two local pubs, the Lynton Tavern and the Radford Bank Inn, about the ones that got away!

There are pleasant views across the canal, to the farmland and hills beyond and plenty of the homes have clear sight of both. Some homes benefit from gardens which run right down to the water's edge.

Contact details

Lodgefield Park, Baswich Lane, Stafford, Staffordshire ST17 0YE
Owners: Hartley Park Homes
Tel: 01785 256798. Website: www.hartleyparkhomes.com
Contact: Asa Hartley

Less than 15 minutes away



IZAAK WALTON COTTAGE MUSEUM

The author of *The Compleat Angler* lived in this charming thatched 16th century cottage. It offers an insight into the history of fishing. There is a medieval herb and rose garden too.



STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTRY SHOWGROUND

There are all sorts of events held at this popular showground: toy fairs, dog shows, antique fairs, flower shows, dolls house fairs, motorcycling events, poultry shows, car events, all sorts.



MOSELEY OLD HALL

This Elizabethan farmhouse (and garden), cared for by the National Trust, is steeped in history. Legend has it that Charles II once hid here, perhaps using the concealed priest's hole.

TAKING A PARK TOUR



1 Facilities

- ☒ A bus stop near the park entrance has services into Stafford six days a week
- ☒ The nearest shop, a Spar mini supermarket, is within five minutes walk away
- ☒ There is a Co-op half a mile away, a post office one mile distant and a Sainsbury's and Asda two miles away
- ☒ A doctors' surgery is within 700 yards; the nearest dentist is one mile away
- ☒ The nearest hospital with A&E is just over a mile away

2 Community spirit

- ☒ There is an active residents' association which organises socials and outings, and also publishes a newsletter
- ☒ There used to be a social club with bar on site, but the building is now used for administrative purposes only
- ☒ The residents' association uses a nearby community centre for social events
- ☒ There is no resident manager at the park, but the park office is manned three days a week, so that residents can see someone

3 Park points

- ☒ Minimum age for residents is 50 years old
- ☒ Three quarters of residents are retired, with the large majority being couples
- ☒ Virtually all of the homes have parking for at least one car alongside but none has a garage on the plot
- ☒ Pets can be brought in by new residents but may not be replaced when they pass away
- ☒ The park is on a number of levels, with some sloping sections between them

4 Living costs

- ☒ Ground rent costs £99 per calendar month for a previously-owned home, £120 for a new one
- ☒ Homes come under Band-A for council tax, which costs £980 for 2010-11
- ☒ Electricity is billed by the utility company to each home
- ☒ Gas comes in individual bulk LPG tanks for each home
- ☒ Water rates and sewerage charges are billed by the utility, costing around £200 annually



HOMES FOR SALE



At the time of our visit there was one previously-owned home for sale, a 1987 36ft x 20 model (make unknown) priced at £140,000. Also for sale was a new £150,000 38ft x 20 Stately Tredegar Hartley Custom Special. There were also two vacant plots, both suitable for twins, with a guideline price of around £140,000.



CAPTIONS: AROUND THE PARK IN 6 STEPS

1 Barbara starts her tour by looking at some of the more established homes at Lodgefield Park

2 A new custom-built Stately Tredegar is currently for sale at £150,000

3 The canal at the bottom of the park is a great place to relax and unwind

4 Barbara thought the gardens of most homes were very well tended

5 The sloping site has lots of steps, making it slightly harder for older people to move about

6 Inside the pre-owned home for sale, a 1987 model priced at £140,000

5 'Green' qualities

- ✓ Residents at the park are keen gardeners and have won several Staffordshire in Bloom and Britain in Bloom awards
- ✓ General and recycled garden refuse, placed in separate wheelie bins, is collected fortnightly, with collections alternating
- ✗ There is a railway line on one side and a canal on another. The canal helps to bring a lovely rural feel to the park
- ✓ Fishing is possible in the canal, which is a natural magnet for ducks and geese

6 Homes

- ✓ Several homes have plots with canal frontage
- ✓ A significant number of homes have views across the adjoining farmland and hills
- ✓ Around 90 per cent of homes are twins, with Homeseeker being the most popular brand
- ✓ Plots and gardens vary quite widely in size
- ✓ There are currently three park homes available to rent, for £400-£550 per calendar month

WHAT DID BARBARA THINK?

My concerns...

'There are no amenities on site for the residents to use.'

'The railway line runs right alongside the park.'

'There is quite a noticeable slope down to some homes.'

But I love...

'The canalside setting, with some stunning views across the farmland to the hills beyond is lovely.'

'There is a mini supermarket just a few hundred yards away from Lodgefield.'

'Stafford town centre is easily accessible from the park.'

'I like the atmosphere at this park and the friendly residents.'



Turn over for our visit to Cavans Wood & The Pines

LOCATION 2

Cavans Wood & The Pines Park

This is two parks in one, with a grand total of 130 plots, on a hillside close to Cannock Chase, about a mile north of Cannock

Cavans Wood lies a few hundred yards up a side turning from the A34 Cannock to Stafford road.

There used to be a thriving coal-mining community here, but the area is now completely redeveloped. The park has a hillside setting, looking out across forest and farmland.

A gate, in the long, tall fence that stretches all the way round this park, gives residents the opportunity to ramble at will across the adjacent and extensive Area of Outstanding Natural

Beauty, which is known as Cannock Chase. They gain access using their own keys.

There used to be two parks here, hence the name, but now they have been combined into one. A couple who remember this are park managers Vic and Lee Wall. The Walls have lived in their Omar for 26 years.

It's just across the road from park owners Paul and Rose Smith's bungalow. The homes make an impressive focal point at the entrance to this park.

Contact details

Cavans Wood & The Pines Park, Link Road, Huntington, Cannock, Staffordshire WS12 4NP
Owners: Paul & Rose Smith
Contact: Vic & Lee Wall. Tel: 01543 462057

Less than 15 minutes away



NORTHCOTE FARM

The Tudor farmhouse, steeped in history, is just one of the attractions at Northcote Farm, which covers 90 acres and provides opportunities for viewing both wildlife and farm animals.



CHASEWATER LIGHT RAILWAY

This railway line, run by a steam-preservation society, is a train spotter's dream. It provides an opportunity to ride on both steam and diesel trains, with a round trip covering four miles.



BROWNHILLS COMMON NATURE RESERVE

Walkers, nature lovers and bird watchers will all enjoy Brownhills Common Nature Reserve, a 100-acre stretch of lowland heath, dotted with wild flowers and home to many species of birds and animals.

TAKING A PARK TOUR



1



4

1 Facilities

- ☒ There is a mini supermarket, post office, takeaway and pub within half a mile
- ☒ A medical centre with GP surgery and pharmacy has just opened within easy walking distance (the dentist is a mile distant)
- ☒ More supermarkets and shops are in nearby Cannock
- ☒ For a hospital with A&E you need to go to Stafford, just over seven miles away
- ☒ A greengrocer, milkman and window cleaner call weekly

2 Community spirit

- ☒ Residents range in age, right up to 98 years old, with quite a few living on their own
- ☒ Park managers Vic and Lee Wall, who live on site, are available during normal weekday office hours and can be contacted in an emergency
- ☒ There is no residents' association and no organised social events or newsletter
- ☒ The large proportion of residents who are dog owners socialise while making good use of Cannock Chase

3 Park points

- ☒ Minimum age for residents is 55 and most are retired
- ☒ Pets are allowed and dogs are quite popular
- ☒ The majority of homes have parking alongside (no garages) with the remainder of the residents using three communal car parking areas
- ☒ There is CCTV on site
- ☒ The park is set on a hillside, with some quite steep slopes
- ☒ There are some panoramic views across the surrounding hilly countryside

4 Living costs

- ☒ Ground rent for a park home at the park costs £112.98 per calendar month, which is inclusive of the water rates and also sewerage charges
- ☒ Homes at the park come under Band-A for council tax, which is currently £944.89 for the year 2010-11
- ☒ Electricity is billed direct by the utility, with homes having individual meters
- ☒ Gas, from the mains, is billed direct by the utility, again via individual meters



HOMES FOR SALE



As well as a vacant plot suitable for a 32ft x 20 home (guideline price, £100,000), there were several previously-owned models for sale when we visited. They included a 36ft x 12 priced at around £50,000; and four twins including two Omars and a Stately, with prices ranging from £70,000 to £89,000.



CAPTIONS: AROUND THE PARK IN 6 STEPS

- 1** Barbara was very impressed with the gardens at the park
- 2** She loved looking round some of the secondhand park homes which were for sale here
- 3** The large kitchen in this pre-owned home was very appealing to Barbara
- 4** Fair-sized plots give scope for green-fingered residents to really put on a good show
- 5** Even the newer homes on the park already look very well established
- 6** Barbara really enjoyed her time viewing homes and meeting residents

WHAT DID BARBARA THINK?

My concerns...

'The park is quite hilly, with some of the slopes rather steep to climb.'

'There were no show homes on site when we visited.'

'Some of the homes don't have direct car access.'

But I love...

'The closeness of Cannock Chase means that there is direct access from the park to some beautiful countryside.'

'Shops, a pub and buses seven days a week are all within easy reach of the park, so it is not at all isolated.'

'The outlook from the park, which consists of a mixture of woodland and open fields, is really lovely.'



Now find out which park is Barbara's favourite...

5 'Green' qualities

- ✓ Going by the superb condition of the gardens, residents nearly all have green fingers (with some being experts in topiary)
- ✓ General and recycled garden refuse, in separate wheelie bins, is collected fortnightly, with collections alternating
- ✓ The adjoining land is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and home to a number of deer. Residents make use of this land for walking
- ✓ There is no noise pollution from cars, trains or planes

6 Homes

- ✓ Stately is the most common make, but there are plenty of Homeseekers, Omars and Manors too
- ✓ Homes date back to the 1980s so there are not any very old models on site
- ✓ Most gardens are enclosed by fences or shrubs
- ✓ A number of homes share semi-detached sheds
- ✓ Among the models on site is a twin unit which was displayed four years ago at the Ideal Home Show



And now for my favourite...



Lodgefield Park

'Although the lower prices for homes at Cavans Wood were an attraction, it was the setting and atmosphere at Lodgefield Park which clinched it for me, plus the friendly welcome we received.'

OUR FAVOURITE BITS



✓ My grandchildren and great-grandchildren will love the ducks and geese



✓ The canal itself: we have some friends with a narrowboat who could visit



✓ The gardens are beautiful plus it's handy for shops and buses

OTHER PARKS WE CONSIDERED...

Castle Grange Park

It's very handy indeed for Stafford, being only a mile from the town centre. But, with only 15 plots in total, it's full and likely to stay that way for the foreseeable future. No room to get in!

Stationfields

With 60 plots, it's half the size of Cavans and Lodgefield, so choice is very limited. Also, Stationfields may be handy for Tamworth (a ten-minute walk) but it's too far from Stafford.

Ivy Cottage Park

This small park (30 plots) is well placed for Stafford, a couple of miles away, and located in a rural setting too. However, only one home is available for sale, and that is a few years old.

ALEX'S VERDICT



Cavans Wood is an attractive park in a pleasant setting and with a great deal going for it, not least its access to local services and amenities. It also provides great access for residents who wish to go walking on the beautiful Cannock Chase, perhaps taking their dogs with them. However, in choosing between these two parks, I can only echo what Barbara said. The canal is what really sets Lodgefield apart. Would that there were more plots available along the water's edge – any fisherman would think it was Christmas all year round. ●

WANT TO BE OUR GUINEA PIG?

Looking for your perfect park and want our help? Write to us at: 'Help Me Find A Park Home', Park Home and Holiday Caravan, Kelsey Publishing, Cudham Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham, Kent, TN16 3AG.

