

NOVEMBER 2010

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4 SEMI-RURAL WONDER PARKS

BEST FOR TOWN & COUNTRY SITES

PLOT FEE RISES

Our ground rent has shot up. What shall we do?

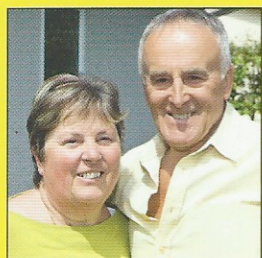
PARK HOME SALES

Must we pay 25% on our holiday home sale?

HUNTING DILEMMA

Can we stop our site owner fox hunting?

COMMUNITY PARKS



● Top tips on settling into the park way of life

● What we love about our friendly neighbours



**MONEY
SAVING
TIPS**

DIY Dave

Expert help on...
Beating the winter chill



+ LETTERS... NEWS UPDATES... MONEY MATTERS



Oak Tree Farm, Warks

Oak Tree Farm is perfectly positioned for both busy city life and the peaceful bliss of the countryside. Phil Tolhurst shows us around this lovely park home estate...

Everyone wants to be at the heart of things. It means you can have everything you want and need within easy reach. This is very important when buying a park home as it is somewhere you will probably be living for many years to come.

We all want easy access to goods and services, lots of shops

and amenities, frequent bus and train services, that will transport us wherever and whenever we wish to travel.

This freedom is important and one of the best ways of achieving it is to live in, or close to, a city. The trouble is that this can be a bit demanding with all the noise, stress and pollution that goes with city life.

The solution is to find an area close enough to allow easy access to all those amenities when required but just far enough away to be in a pleasant setting, protected from all that city hustle and bustle.

Best of both worlds

Earlswood, the location of Oak Tree Farm, has the best of both

worlds. On the one hand, this residential park home estate is only 12 miles south-east of Birmingham and located within the city's motorway ring road. Drive on to the nearby A34 or hop on a train at Earlswood station (one mile away) and you can be in the city centre in under half an hour. Head in the opposite direction for less than a

Great days out!

5 easy-to-reach attractions close to Oak Tree Farm



EARLSWOOD LAKES CRAFT CENTRE

Arts and crafts, tea rooms and a range of pretty walks.



HANBURY HALL

A beautiful National Trust house built in 1701. Enjoy the décor inside and parkland outside.



FORGE MILL NEEDLE MUSEUM

Discover needle and fishing tackle industry heritage.

INFO

● **PLOT FEES:** £141.22 per month

● **WATER & SEWERAGE:** £200 per year.

● **ELECTRICITY:** Billed by the utility.

● **GAS:** Individual bulk tanks (around 10 per cent of owners are on oil).

● **COUNCIL TAX:** Band A - £991.60 for 2010-11.

● **PARK RULES:** Minimum age 50. Pets: permissible at the park owners' discretion.

● **HOMES FOR SALE:** When we visited there were six vacant plots for 40ft x 20 homes with guideline prices starting at £140,000 plus a new 40ft x 20 Manor Classic priced at £160,000. A 1990 36ft x 20 Homeseeker Grampian was also up for sale at a price of £95,000.

● **PARK OWNER:** Hartley Park Homes, Lodgefield Park Office, Baswich Lane, Stafford ST17 0YE
Tel: 01785 256798
Email: info@hartleyparkhomes.com
Website: www.hartleyparkhomes.com

● **VISIT THE PARK:** Oak Tree Farm Park, Juggins Lane, Earlswood, Warwickshire B94 5LL
Tel: 01785 256798



Far Left: It's easy to forget that you're so close to the city at this lovely park home site

Left: The pretty gardens create a pleasing holiday atmosphere

Above: Each garden has its own individual design

The park gives easy access to the city but also provides a pleasant setting and protection from the hustle and bustle."

mile and you are at the heart of the country's motorway network, with no fewer than three motorways - the M42, M40 and M6 - at your disposal.

On the other hand, looking around Earlswood you would never guess that it was so close to a major metropolis. This is the heart of England - and it shows. The park is bounded by

woodland. There are nurseries and a farm craft centre close by, along with a trio of lakes that have been popular for fishing and walking since back in the Victorian times.

Enchanting countryside

The Stratford-upon-Avon canal passes through some enchanting countryside dotted with villages

and lies within easy walking distance. Just to the south-east is the Forest of Arden.

Oak has long been the dominant tree in this ancient forest. So it should come as no surprise, perhaps, that Oak Tree Farm is so named. Spread across six acres, this is one of seven such estates owned by Hartley Park Homes, a family business established by the late Tom Hartley Senior and now run jointly by his son Asa and daughter Helen.

There has been a park here for several decades. It was purchased by Mr Hartley in 1987 and in the past few years has had some major refurbishments. A series of old garages has been removed, the area landscaped, plots redeveloped and, just this summer, the access road was resurfaced and a rather impressive new entrance



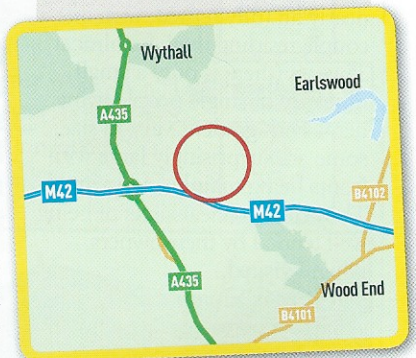
UMBERSLADE FARM PARK

Kids can bottle feed lambs and goats, and can hold chicks, rabbits and guinea pigs.



COUGHTON COURT

This magnificent Tudor house is not to be missed, not least for the stunning gardens.



constructed. Oak Tree is licensed for 70 homes in total but currently only 54 plots are in use, around 90 per cent of them are twins. Homeseeker is probably the most represented brand.



The oldest home dates back almost 50 years but, whether they're modern or mature, all properties here are in good condition. Nine out of ten have driveways for cars.

The residents themselves are nearly all fully retired, with one couple residing there for almost 35 years (there is only a small minority of single people living here). Park gardens vary in size, some are surprisingly large with fronts being mainly laid to grass. They showed clear signs of being well tended by their owners when I visited.

As this is a mature park, gardens tend to be clear cut with boundaries marked out by shrubs, small trees, leylandii and fences. A bank of mature trees marks the park boundary and emphasises the impression of a rural setting. One of the most impressive gardens on this park is that surrounding the home

owned by Mike and Janet Woodbury. Despite the long period without rain, which preceded my visit, their lawn looked like a bowling green, with

“Their lawn looked like a bowling green with each blade of grass seeming like it had been trimmed with nail scissors.”

each blade of grass looking as if it had been carefully trimmed with nail scissors.

Meeting the residents

Mr and Mrs Woodbury bought their 28ft x 20 Ercol in 1997 when it was already 11 years old, although you would never guess that it had been built nearly a

**Above: Each home has a pretty, well-tended garden
Left: A bank of mature trees mark the park's boundary, giving it a countryside feel**

quarter of a century ago. Prior to moving on to Oak Tree, Mike and Janet, who are both Brummies, lived in a bungalow in Solihull, just three miles away. 'We wanted somewhere offering peace and quiet and a sense of security,' said Janet, a retired lollipop lady.

'We looked at several other parks and chose this one because the homes were well spaced out and not jam-packed together. It's very nice here and we have good neighbours too.' 'Staying close to home so that we could still stay in touch with our friends was another reason for moving here,' added Mike, who admitted to being the one with green fingers.

A retired motor mechanic, he celebrated his 70th birthday in August. There was a time when Mike's birthday celebrations would have coincided with a trip to the park in North Wales where they owned a holiday caravan for many years. Instead this year the Woodburys marked the special occasion by visiting Mike's brother for a holiday together in Somerset.

Ron and Jill Morgan are another couple resident at Oak Tree and were also keen

QUICK CHAT OVER A CUPPA



BILL AND MARIE BURTON

moved into their 40ft x 20 Omar Sandringham last autumn and describe the park home lifestyle as 'like being on holiday'. ▼



RON AND JILL MORGAN

used to run a hotel and have been living in their Homeseeker 36ft x 20 for 15 years. They described it as 'marvellous' and the neighbours as 'smashing'. ▼



MIKE AND JANET WOODBURY

whose garden was a picture with a lawn like a bowling green, moved just three miles from their bungalow in Solihull to live on Oak Tree Farm Park. ▼



caravanners with a holiday home sited in Great Yarmouth. Like the Woodburys, the Morgans were also local and lived in Sparkhill. They bought a six-month-old 36ft x 20 Homeseeker for £47,000 some 15 years ago and



Above: Most of the residents are retired and devote much of their time to looking after their immaculate gardens
Right: A mix of homes gives the park a sense of character

have made various changes since, including pebbledashing and a new porch. 'It's marvellous here, handy for the shops and everything, plus our park home was such good value,' Jill told me. 'Another advantage is that the garden is much more manageable than in our old three-bedroom terraced house.'

'We've got smashing neighbours here too.'

Married 48 years with four children and five grandchildren, the Morgans used to run a hotel in Blackpool but, like the large majority of residents at Oak Tree, they are now retired.

A recent arrival among their fellow residents are Bill and Marie Burton who bought their new and stylish 40ft x 20 Omar Sandringham in November last year for £145,000. They previously lived in among the suburbs of Birmingham, just ten miles away to be exact. Staying in the area was important because they wanted to be near their family: three children, seven grandchildren (three of whom they brought up for seven years) and seven great-grandchildren.

But there are other reasons why they chose Oak Tree: 'The people here are so friendly,' Marie says, 'It's like being on one long holiday.'

Like the Woodburys and Morgans, Mr and Mrs Burton also used to be caravanners.

“It's marvellous here, handy for the shops, plus our park home was such good value, and we've got great neighbours too.”

These days they prefer to take things easy at home, not least because Bill, a former bricklayer who retired because of ill health, recently had heart surgery. That, however, hasn't stopped them working wonders with their garden, which was truly a picture to behold.

Local area

There is currently no resident manager on the park but the



residents' association fills the gap by producing a newsletter to keep everyone informed of what's going on, including occasional outings. There are no on-site communal amenities at Oak Tree but a number of natural meeting places can be found locally. They include a bowling green nearby and the Horse & Jockey pub a mile down the road. A little further on alongside the A435 is Becketts Farm which boasts a cookery school along with a bakery, a butcher's, restaurant and delicatessen. There are also a couple of mini-supermarkets within a radius of about a mile. For a full-sized supermarket, you can choose between three Sainsbury's in Maypole, Marshall

Lake or the nearest major shopping centre, Redditch, all under four miles away. Redditch is also where you will find a hospital with A&E.. GPs and dental surgeries are much closer.

You can catch a bus near the park entrance to Redditch or Solihull, services operate once a day except Sundays.

Keep-fit enthusiasts will appreciate the sports centre in Hollywood, about two miles away. Golfers will be even happier because there are four courses within a one-mile radius of the park.

These activities are an ideal means of keeping the old ticker healthy while living in a park home that's perfectly placed, at the heart of things. ●