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Idyllic park home living on offer for the over-fifties at Swiss Farm

By Pat Bramley

PARK Homes suffer from an off-putting image. According to many who live on these developments, the widely held impression of shabby pre-fabs packed together is based on myths, not facts.

Deborah Scott remembers the first time she visited the park homes at Swiss Farm.

She'd lived in Henley for eight years. She knew nothing about the development of park homes for the over-50s on the other side of town until one day she came to the aid of an elderly man who had fallen over in the shopping centre.

She explains: "I helped him into my car and took him back to his home which was one of the bungalows at Swiss Farm.

"I took him inside. I was astonished. The rooms were wonderfully arranged, the fixtures and furnishings were high quality, I thought flippin' heck, this is luxurious, it's really swanky."

And that was that, Deborah thought no more about the incident until two years later when she decided she'd reached the age when she needed to look for somewhere single storey.

"The stairs were very steep in my two-up two-down which I bought when I'd downsized ten years earlier.

"In January this year I put my house on the market and sold it within three days which put pressure on me to find a flat or a bungalow, a place without stairs. I looked at a bungalow on a very nice small retirement development but I had a gut feeling it wasn't for me. There were several reasons why I could never have been happy there and then I had a eureka moment. I Googled park homes in Henley and up came Swiss Farm."

There are 100 architect-designed detached bungalows on the park homes development opposite the entrance to the exclusive Phyllis Court private members club on the Marlow Road,

To cut a long story short, Deborah says Swiss Farm "is the best kept secret in Henley".

She and her little dog Tasha love everything about the immaculate four-year-old two-bedroom two-bathroom bungalow they moved into three months ago. "I've never owned a dog before. I've had Tasha

for ten and a half years and she's changed my life. The other place had a funny attitude to accepting dogs.

"Lots of the residents here have a dog. It's such a friendly community, I feel safe here, it's peaceful and I love my bungalow. The living room is very spacious, the kitchen is the best I've ever had, the bedrooms are luxurious.

"The previous owners planted fruit trees in pots in the garden. I have apples, pears, blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, they're all producing lots of fruit – the first weekend I was here I picked cherries off my cherry tree. I can park my car in my little drive. I'm in seventh heaven."

It was much the same story from two other residents who volunteered to tell us what life is like at Swiss Farm.

Sue Carter (pictured) has lived on the development for ten years. She shares her home with her cairn terrier Poppy. Sue's mother died four years ago after she'd lived there for 21 years. "I bought my property after my husband died. That knocked me sideways. I'd visited my mother here and I knew how much she loved it.

"Don, the manager, and his wife are so kind. They're always there if you need help, so are the other residents. They're very caring people. There are mixed ages here, everyone is friendly but you don't feel put upon. Everything is within walking distance: shops, the library, doctors and dentists.

"It takes me eight minutes to walk to work – I have a part time job in Henley. It's also on a bus route and there's a station, you don't really need a car to get about."

Deborah and Sue's new friend Pauline Price moved in just eight weeks ago and already feels at home. "I lived in Marlow for 60 years," she says.

"It's so peaceful and friendly. My bungalow has two bedrooms and two showers. It's absolutely perfect for me. I first noticed Swiss Farm when I went by on a bus. The lady sitting next to me lived here so we talked about it.

"Next time I was in the car I was nosy; I pulled in to look at it. I was hooked. Haven't regretted it for a minute. One of the ladies here has a massive lounge. There were 21 of us gathered for a party one evening. She enjoys having friends round."

There are two new bungalows cur-



Site manager Don Hilton with long-term resident Sue Carter outside her detached bungalow

rently on the market priced from £425,000.

Don Hilton, the manager can tell you more. He's lived at Swiss Farm "for some 56 years." When he took on the management role in 1996, the development was still run by the founder Henry Morrison. He subsequently passed on the responsibility for the company to his two sons, Henry Jnr and Mark. The family have poured investment into Swiss Farm to the point where it won a prestigious award in 2015.

"With the £1,000 prize money Henry bought a defibrillator for the park, that's the sort of man he was. Sadly he died recently but the company ethos will remain the same."

For more details, look up the website www.morrisonparkhomes.co.uk.

