

# PROPERTY

## INVENTIVE LIVING 2

Trevor Baylis gives us a peek inside his home workshop

## NICE AND SUNNY 4

Discover a quieter Provence just behind the coastline

## CLUB HOUSE 7

Play a round of golf in your own back garden

## GOING OFF STAGE

Should your home for sale be dressed to impress?

# My place or yours?

When the builders move in, the birds don't have to move out. Now families can share their living space with wildlife



at is being employed in order to ascertain an



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# The great indoors, outdoors

Did you hear the one about the property developer who loves wildlife? It's no joke, says **Huma Qureshi**

If you go down to the woods at Lower Mill Estate in the Cotswolds, you will definitely be in for a surprise. They are teeming with deer, bee orchids, adder's tongue fern, owls, smews, woodpeckers, great crested grebes and golden orioles.

'It's like Swallows and Amazons,' says Jeremy Paxton, the developer who bought Lower Mill Estate 12 years ago. He bought the land after having a picnic in the grounds and going for a swim in one of its lakes.

Home to over 3,000 species of wildlife, Lower Mill is the UK's first residential nature reserve, situated a few miles south of Cirencester and spread over 550 acres.

The idea behind Lower Mill Estate is to live surrounded by nature. The nature and wildlife were there first, so we fit the houses around them, not the other way round. Nature comes first, houses second. It's a way of harmonising people with nature in a community,' he says.

At first, the idea of building inside a nature reserve might sound a bit like destroying it – but Paxton has taken great care to preserve wildlife in the estate. He spent three years studying alongside English Nature, WWF, the RSPB and ecologists to identify the best way in which to nurture wildlife and create a habitat where species could breed as well as live. The estate is now home to breeding nightingales and, for the first time in the area in centuries, breeding beavers.

There are 200 homes in Lower Mill Estate, mostly used as holiday homes. All are eco-friendly, built from traditional limestone materials, and each home is installed with a gadget called Planet Switch, which ensures lights are not left on unnecessarily.

Paxton says part of the inspiration behind Lower Mill was his own childhood in the New Forest. 'I grew up swimming in streams, playing in meadows, biking around, only going back



From inside the house at Lower Mill Estate, you can look out at the nature reserve. Sharing your environment with wildlife, such as deer and



home when I got hungry. It was a completely carefree existence – something children should be able to have.'

With this in mind, Paxton has created a nature club for residents' children, whereby kids get involved in outdoor activities like making charcoal, trout fishing and spying on the beavers with infra-red cameras. 'We want children to take notice of nature and engage with it – there is such a buzz about the place in the holidays, the kids are always running about outside.'

Over in the pretty little town of Wellington, in Somerset, there are more furry friends to be found. Kenmore Homes and developer Hydon are redeveloping Tonedale Mill, home to badgers,

Living closer to nature, you might find a curious otter in your back yard.

**'The wildlife were there first so we fit the houses around them, not the other way around'**

ers, bats, otters, and not-so-furry kingfishers and slow worms. Soon there will be over 150 homes for humans too, in the converted Grade II listed mill buildings.

'It looks like the set of a David Attenborough wildlife series, as opposed to a residential development,' laughs Charles Wilkinson, a director at Kenmore Homes.

The development is in its early stages and Kenmore Homes has spent £30,000 monitoring the wildlife at Wellington to ensure it is not disturbed or displaced. 'We want to provide a habitat for the animals, and it's important to do it properly,' explains Wilkinson.

He is no stranger to working with wildlife – in previous developments in Dorset and Somerset, Kenmore Homes stumbled upon long-eared brown bats in cottages. Kenmore then decided to build the bats their own homes amongst other residents.

In Somerset, they were given a sealed attic 'about the size of an ensuite bathroom' and in Dorset, one of the three-bedroom cottages was built with a specially designed loft to house the bats.

'In no way did the bats put the buyers off,' adds Wilkinson. 'In some ways, they add character to the place. They're not at all scary – they're only tiny and not very Count Dracula!'

Nigel Ford from Hastings has had his own experiences with other creatures of the night – he has a badgers' set on his front lawn.

'They sometimes, very occasionally, make little holes in the garden but it's nothing we've ever had a problem with – they tend to follow their own trails,' says Ford, whose house is for sale through Freeman Forman in Battle, Sussex.

The house is one of three new prop-

erties built within a larger estate at Grange Manor. The new houses were built on the condition that the estate was not disturbed.

Ford guesses that there are about 10 badgers foraging in his garden, even sometimes get a little leftover dinner put out for them, when they come out at nightfall.

'We see them every evening foraging around the back door and wandering around, but they scurry off as soon as there is any movement or if a light is on. Sometimes they come very close to you if you stay still – it's a real delight.'

## CONTACTS

Lower Mill Estate 01285 869489,  
www.lowermillestate.com (houses from £350,000)  
Kenmore Homes 01962 867474,  
kenmorehomes.co.uk  
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freemanforman.co.uk

