

'It's like a mini Centre Parcs!'

Imagine a community where you like your neighbours. You share meals and your children grow up together.



- This place seems a long way from Britain in 2010 – more like a Scandinavian village, or something left over from rural life in the 19th century. It is, in fact, Britain's most successful cohousing project: Springhill in Stroud, Gloucestershire, home to 85 residents ranging in age from infancy to their 70s. Springhill is a development of 35 homes, ranging from five-bedroom houses to one-bedroom flats, inhabited by a collection of families, couples and single people (some younger, others retired). Although they have their own homes and their back gardens, residents also share a "common house" for communal meals, as well as a large garden, a chicken-run and a vegetable plot.
- 15 "What we've got is an old-fashioned neighbourhood without cars and with a parish hall where we get together on a regular basis," says Jo Bryden, 40, whose sons, Ciaran, 10, Sean, 7, and 16-month-old Malachy are out enjoying the sunshine. "My husband and I came to live here six years ago. Here you've got your privacy when you want it and there are other people around when you want them, too. "
- 20 Sarah Lunnon, 45, says Springhill is a great place to live when you've got small children – hers are 4, 12 and 13 – because there are other parents around to talk to during the day; it's also great for older kids, who can hang out in the common house when they want to get away from their parents. "And the shared meals are terrific – four nights of the week you don't have to cook if you don't want to. The deal is that everyone has to cook, once a month – and there's a rota for that – but it's not bad getting 15 meals made for you, for every one you have to cook yourself."
- She moved to Springhill in 2003 from Wales. "I loved the idea that it was car-free. Lots of people here have cars, but they're in the car park at the back of the

30 common house, not outside the houses.

The children, say Sarah and Jo, love Springhill – and so do their friends when they visit. "Some children who came here recently said it was like a mini Center Parcs," says Sarah. It's ideal for single children, too. "It's great for Dylan, who is 11," says his mother, Karen Doe. "If we lived in conventional housing he'd be on his own a lot as he's an only child. One thing I've noticed here is that everyone parents everyone else's kids – we all look out for them, and we all tell them how to behave if they need it."

Felicity Warden, 73, moved here about five years ago. She lives alone, but is never lonely. "The shared meals are wonderful for a single, retired person like me – I don't have to cook for myself and there are interesting people to talk to. It's a much more natural way to live than alone on a street where you know no one.

Springhill was the brainchild of David Michael, a property developer who is – naturally – one of its residents, living with his wife, Helen, in one of the five-bedroomed houses.

45 David was inspired in his vision for Springhill by two Californian architects, Katie McCamant and Chuck Durrett, who call themselves the founders of the modern cohousing movement. They are in Britain to promote cohousing – a conference last weekend brought together representatives of more than 30 embryonic cohousing groups, with projects planned all over the UK. With surveys finding that 84% of Britons say they hardly know their neighbours, and one in three people now living alone, they could be on to something.

"It's more and more obvious to people that families have become estranged, that children are being driven miles to playdates, that family units are too isolated and that there isn't enough neighbourly sharing in our communities. The key is always balancing it so that residents have privacy as well as opportunities for community. The truth is that it's easier than a lot of people realise." he says.

Joanna Moorhead - The Guardian, Saturday 1 May 2010

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/may/01/cohousing-community-stroud>