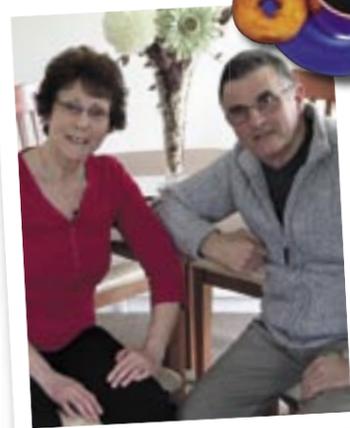


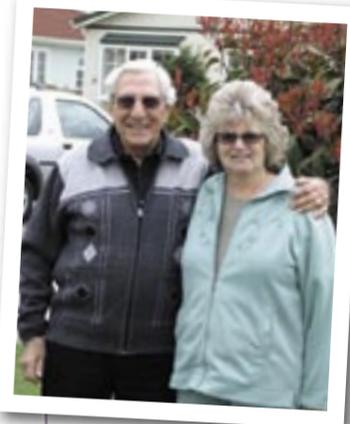
A king among parks

Anne Webb visits the impressive Kings Park Village at Canvey Island, England's largest park home estate

A QUICK CHAT OVER COFFEE



BARBARA AND ROY LEE moved to Canvey from Kent and chose their lakeside home over two years ago after searching for a local bungalow. They fell in love with Kings Park Village as soon as they walked through the gates.



MARYLYN AND TED NEWBERY looked at parks up and down the country but felt none compared with Kings. They opted to have a home designed to their own specification by Manor Park Homes and are delighted with it.

Living in style and safety for the over-50s' is the theme of the brochure promoting Kings Park on Canvey Island. As the largest park in the country, style is undoubtedly important. It would be very easy for such a large area to become an impersonal housing estate, but there's no way that will happen at Kings Park, thanks to its caring management and residents who are thoughtful and supportive of each

"Kings Park has teams of litter pickers and gardeners who work full time to keep it looking immaculate"

other – and really do know how to enjoy themselves!

Kings is an old-established park with a history going back to a time when it was a holiday destination, particularly for folks from the east end of London.

Its owner, Jack King obtained planning permission for it to be established for residential use in 1959 and since then it has never looked back.

Mr King decided to sell his lovely park, although he still takes a keen interest in it and lives close by. The successful bidder was Britannia Parks, which has steadily been acquiring parks across the UK over the past three years. The news that Britannia had bought Kings Park came hot on the heels of its acquisition of the Kingsmead Group of parks, bringing its portfolio up to an impressive 20 residential and three holiday parks.

Getting the geography right

First of all, though, where is Canvey and is it really an island? It's on the southernmost tip of Essex, on the Thames Estuary – the nearest major towns being Southend-on-Sea to the

Right: Cleanliness and tidiness was in evidence across the park

east and Basildon to the north-west. It is surrounded by water on three sides and a small river crossing the other side maintains its island status.

Back in history it was a mud bank but the land was reclaimed and is now a popular residential area and also a holiday destination because of its good beaches. It has very good road and rail connections to London via the A30 and A127 which links to the M25 and the whole of the motorway network. Benfleet

Railway Station is very handy for regular and fast trains to London and other destinations.

As soon as you arrive on Canvey Island you see signposts to Kings Park Village and as you drive up to the entrance you are immediately aware of the safety theme highlighted in the park brochure. You receive a friendly greeting at the park's security barrier (which is lowered at night) and referred to the adjacent office.

Reception staff offer an equally friendly greeting and can provide a host of information about the park, the lifestyle and homes for sale.



Above: Residents often hold celebratory parties on this area that extends into the lake

Beryl Craske handles the day-to-day management of the park. Having been associated with the park for more than eight years she has provided valuable continuity for the new owners. Her point of contact is with Britannia's general manager, Richard Sigsworth, who has overall responsibility for the park and who was delighted that the management changeover had been so smooth.



Above: New sales on the park are dealt with by Tracy Hodgson, who can liaise between customers and manufacturers

The importance of a secure environment

Richard stressed the importance of the community at Kings and the security that the residents get from the gate and patrols, which are carried out 24/7. There's also a security fence which encompasses the whole area of the park – a massive 70 acres (the equivalent of almost 50 football pitches).

On walking around the park you are immediately aware of its tidiness and attractiveness.

This is in part due to the regular teams of litter pickers and gardeners who work full-time to keep it looking

Left: Many of the neat plots have parking alongside

immaculate and in part down to the proud residents who have created such stunningly beautiful gardens around their homes.

The park has its own shop catering for most daily needs but the town is within walking distance where there are supermarkets and restaurants as well as sports and entertainment facilities.

There is a doctors' surgery less than a mile away and the park office runs prescription collection and delivery services. There is also a convenience store and post office a very short distance from the entrance to the park.

The park's lake is beautiful, surrounded by neatly manicured lawns with trees and seating scattered around. A small peninsula jutting into the lake is ideal for residents' celebrations and is well used during the summer for birthday and anniversary gatherings.

The lake also provides a haven for a variety of wildlife as well as being excellent for fishing and Beryl told me that there are some very large carp here.

Residents need a permit to fish this lake.

INFO POINT

» **PLOT FEES** These range from £157.49 pcm to £243.32 pcm depending on the size of plot.

» **WATER AND SEWERAGE** This works out at approximately £260.00 p.a.

» **ELECTRICITY** New development areas on the park have direct mains supply, billed by the utility company.

» **GAS** New homes on the park are all-electric. Some of the older homes rely on LPG.

» **COUNCIL TAX** Band A – currently £976.32 p.a.

» **PARK RULES** Residents to be 50+. Pets at park owner's discretion. No resident children.

» **HOMES FOR SALE** Full particulars of various new and previously occupied homes are available on application.

» **PARK OWNERS** Britannia Parks, Kingsmead House, Mytchett Road, Surrey GU16 6AE. Telephone 01252 512324. www.britanniaparks.com. Kings Park has its own website, too: visit www.kingsparkvillage.com.

Visit the park

Kings Park
Canvey Island
Essex SS8 8HE
Telephone 01268 511555



Another popular facility on the park is a heated outdoor swimming pool, which is well used both by residents and visiting grandchildren – a lifeguard is always in attendance when the pool is open.

Thriving social club

You could never be bored at Kings Park, nor lonely. There is a social club hall on the park and the residents' social committee works hard



Right: All homes and gardens are in tip-top condition

previously been sited. These will be demolished gradually and replaced with park homes.

Homes at Kings Park are much in demand (more than 30 enquiries are received each week) so this new area will help to meet this demand and bring the area up to the standards of the rest of the park.

'I'm the park's best salesman!'

That new development will give even more scope to resident Terry Higgins who jokingly reckons that he is the park's best salesman.

He and his wife Jacqui moved to Kings just over a year ago and are still over the moon with their home and the park.

They first saw the park when they visited with a cousin who was interested in moving here.

'We had both been very impressed,' Jacqui recalled, 'and when we got home Terry said, "we've got to have some of that!"' What impressed them most? It was the security, cleanliness and the friendly and sociable atmosphere.

'There's everything I want,' Terry said. 'I am here for the rest of my life and this to me is Utopia.'

'Four of our friends who have visited us here so far have put their



names on the waiting list for a vacancy.'

Jacqui and Terry live in a 48ft Homeseeker Fairford twin and opted to have some of the windows changed to bays and to have the kitchen altered, too. They are delighted with the result and had nothing but praise for the park

management and for the staff at Homeseeker who were so helpful.

The couple thoroughly enjoy the activities organised by the social committee – they can't believe how friendly everyone is, and how caring. 'We couldn't wish for better neighbours,' Jacqui added. 'No-one is intrusive, but we all keep an eye out for each other.'

Terry added that whenever you met someone on the park you stopped and had a chat – he said it

considerably smaller than the one they had previously. 'It still takes quite a lot of time to keep it in trim,' Terry said, 'but it is manageable and leaves us plenty of time to enjoy ourselves in other ways.'

They both appreciated the convenience of the park shop but also liked to shop in Southend. They have grandchildren living in Chelmsford so they go there quite often, too. Would they go back to bricks and mortar? They both

"No one here is intrusive, but we all keep an eye out for each other"

often took him over an hour to get his morning paper from the nearby shop!

They are both aware of the need to keep fit and use their bicycles regularly. They also go to a local gym and are very keen walkers – and there are plenty of lovely walks round about. Gardening is another interest and they are very pleased that their park home garden is

declared they would never do that. Having experienced this lifestyle they feel that it is far preferable to living in a brand new bungalow.

They appreciate that help and support is on hand if needed, not only from fellow residents but also from the office which is open six days a week in the winter and seven during the summer months.



Above: Looking towards the lake where a fountain is playing

Right: Canada Geese have made their home on the park's lake

Below: Beryl Craske handles the day-to-day management of Kings

arranging various evening and daytime activities. A social club newsletter is sent out each month and among the regular activities listed is line dancing (with instruction), a games night (darts, pool, cards etc), bingo, healing sessions, arts and crafts, golf and keep fit.

There is also a slimming club and regular visits by community nurses and advice from a pharmacist on medicines. Quiz nights, boot sales, and musical entertainment also feature regularly and various coach trips are arranged throughout the summer months.

On the day of my visit the line dancing class was meeting. There is instruction on one day a week and a general practice session later in the week. It was obvious that everybody was enjoying themselves hugely, and also that everybody knew the routines thoroughly as they moved in unison in their lines. There was one brave gentleman among the 30 or so ladies taking part, and he told us he just loves it – the music, the movements and the general atmosphere. In addition, it's



wonderful exercise for all ages – both physical and mental.

The park has its own small pub – The Jack Rabbit – which has undergone some changes and renovations recently. Britannia is still considering the future of this facility. The company knows that it is popular with residents and will be taking all views on board before making a final decision. It will

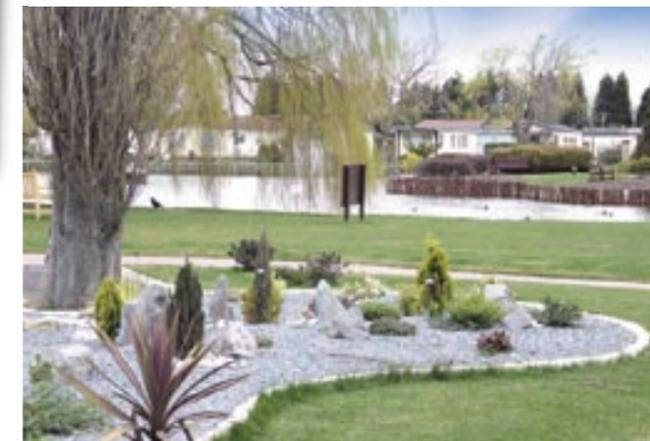
remain open for business as usual until the end of the year. Bingo nights are held there on Tuesdays and Thursdays, karaoke once a month and live entertainment on Saturday nights.

News about The Jack Rabbit was circulated in the first Kings Park Village newsletter to be produced under Britannia's management. It also flagged up a new park home development, which will occupy an area where holiday chalets had

Great days out!
5 fun days out close to Kings Park Village



FANTASTIC ESSEX COASTLINE
Kings residents are spoilt for choice for beaches. There's Canvey, Clacton, Southend and Shoeburyness nearby.



Above: There are communal garden areas and green spaces all around



GREAT SEASIDE ARCADES
As well as the marvellous estuary air, there's also the legendary slot machines on offer on the seafront. Bring your coins!



MARSH FARM COUNTRY PARK
Located in Woodham Ferrers, this working farm and park is a great place to take the grandchildren for a day out.



FOOTBALL FEVER BY THE SEA
As we went to press, Southend were pushing for promotion from football's third tier. Come on the Shrimpers!



WALKING IN EPPING FOREST
The largest public open space in the London area, it stretches 12 miles and 6,000 acres and it's partly in Essex.

GET IN LINE!

Among the most popular sessions in the club at Kings Park is line dancing. It is held twice a week, once with instruction and once for general practice. If your park has a clubhouse, why not try it?

DO I NEED SPECIAL CLOTHES OR SHOES?

No, you can just go along in normal clothes and shoes. You may have seen pictures of line dancers wearing cowboy hats and boots, but not many people go to this trouble or expense.

IS IT DIFFICULT?

If you love music (particularly country and western) and can move in time with it, you shouldn't find line dancing a problem. The main advantage is that you can dance and enjoy it at all levels. Perhaps the biggest challenge is to the brain cells – the routines require quite a lot of concentration. It has been said that line dancing is a work out for both the body and the mind – and can help to prevent the onset of dementia!

Line dancing is supported by a number of medical charities such as the British Heart Foundation and the National Osteoporosis Society.

Kings Park also holds a slimming club in its clubhouse.



Canvey Island's

fascinating history, heritage and folklore

CANVEY HEIGHTS COUNTRY PARK

Adjacent to Kings Park, this 'Greengrid' project aims to transform an old landfill site into a high quality sustainable country park that will promote environmental education and an increased awareness of the importance of the River Thames Estuary, its history, culture and environment.

The early history of Canvey Island is of mainly grazing land, since constant flooding didn't encourage habitation. It was not until the 17th century that sea walls were built and the island started to be reclaimed. In 1621 the chief landowner Sir Henry Appleton and a syndicate of other landowners, agreed to the drainage of the island's 4,000 acres, and the experts were called in. A Dutchman, Cornelius Vermuyden, completed the sea walls in 1623.

CONCRETE BARGE

Off Canvey Point, this looked like a boat made of concrete. It was believed to have been part of the World War II Mulberry Harbour, another part of which is still off Southend. Sadly, it was destroyed in 2003 because it was claimed to be an eyesore but is still fondly remembered by locals.

The Mulberry Harbour was built for D-Day in June 1944 to speed up the unloading process so that Allied troops were supplied as they advanced across France. Mulberry was actually two artificial harbours which were towed across the English Channel.

CASTLE POINT TRANSPORT MUSEUM.

A 1935 museum housing a collection of buses, coaches and commercial vehicles in restored and unrestored condition. Some examples of these vehicles are unique.

DUTCH COTTAGE MUSEUM

An early 17th century cottage of one of Vermuyden's Dutch workmen who was responsible for drainage schemes in East Anglia. It has an annexe containing articles relating to history, mainly Victorian.

GAS AND OIL TERMINALS

The site of the terminals at Canvey Wick has unexpectedly flourished as a home for an important diversity of wildlife, and consequently became the first major brownfield site to be designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

CANVEY ISLAND MONSTER

The Canvey Island Monster is the name given to an unusual creature whose carcass washed up on the shores of Canvey Island in November 1954. A second, more intact, carcass was discovered in August 1955.

The 1954 specimen was described as being 76cm (2.4ft) long with thick reddish brown skin, bulging eyes and gills. It was also described as having hind legs with five-toed horseshoe-shaped feet with concave arches but no forelimbs.

Its remains were cremated after a cursory inspection by zoologists who said that it posed no danger to the public. The 1955 specimen was sufficiently fresh for its eyes, nostrils and teeth to be studied, but no official explanation was given as to what it was or what happened to the carcass. Subsequent research indicated that locals believed it was an anglerfish and this was later backed-up by the Department of Zoology at the British Natural History Museum which thought its pronounced fins had been incorrectly described as hind legs!

GREAT TIDE OF 1953

The Great Tide of 1953 engulfed the island and 58 people died. When rebuilding started it was decided to build three feet above the pre-1953 level to protect the residential area and an extra two feet to protect farms.

More than half a million cubic yards of clay were deposited on the sea wall. 2,000 tons of interlocking steel sheet piles reinforced the five and a half mile frontage, 350,000 concrete blocks were added to the outer face of the wall and five miles of secondhand tramrail were used to reinforce the piling.



Above: Terry and Jacqui Higgins describe Kings Park as their 'Utopia', and four friends have been so impressed that they are on the waiting list

'We love the friendliness of the park'

Barbara and Roy Lee have a lovely home by the lakeside and have now been on the park for more than two years. They came from Chatham in Kent and think they are quite unique as most of their fellow residents seem to be from Essex or London.

Barbara and Roy had been looking for a retirement property but had found that most bungalows were out of their price range. When they were visiting Barbara's brother, who lives on Canvey, he suggested that they should look around Kings Park. 'As soon as we walked through the gates we fell in love with the place,' Roy said. They looked at

"As soon as we walked through the gates we fell in love with the place"

several vacant homes on the park and were delighted to find one on a corner plot with views across the lovely lake.

They were particularly impressed with the security and wide range of facilities on the park and, like Terry and Jacqui Higgins, couldn't believe the friendliness and co-operation, both of residents and management.

Naturally Barbara misses her two sons and their families back in Kent, but they see them regularly. They also get out and about quite a lot in the local area, mostly going to Basildon for their shopping.

There is a bus stop right outside the park entrance serving all the local towns and also the railway station at Benfleet.

Barbara and Roy use The Jack Rabbit pub fairly regularly and particularly enjoy summer evenings outside. 'It's so nice not to have to

Left: Friendly security staff operate the barrier at the park's entrance

worry about drinking and driving,' Roy added.

Residents' association representative

Marlyn and Ted Newbery have lived on the park since 2000 and are particularly proud of their home, which is a special made by Manor Park Homes.

Ted came from a mobile home park in Newbury and Marlyn had been in living in Canada. They had known each other for 27 years but have only been married for four.

Very romantically they ran off to Greta Green (Marlyn jokingly claimed that it was cheaper than having a big do and inviting all the

relations and friends!). They too mentioned the security provided at Kings but also felt that the maintenance-free aspect of park homes was also very important.

They had looked around other parks all over the country but nothing came close to Kings Park, and they were delighted that they were able to have a home built to their specification by Manor.

Among their special requests were two showers, higher ceilings and seven bay windows! Marlyn claimed that she didn't really want a kitchen in her home.

'I'm allergic to kitchens,' she joked, 'but Manor Park Homes insisted on putting one in.' This is why the couple eat out quite a lot.

'We don't smoke and we don't drink,' Marlyn added, 'but we always enjoy ourselves'.

They have found lots of nice restaurants for evenings out on Canvey Island and are particularly keen on Indian food.



Above: The park is well-lit and features attractive lamp posts

Left: A neat way of disguising the park's litter bins

and is always available to discuss any problems that might arise on the park and try to reach a resolution if possible.

Smooth changeover

I asked if there was concern about the change of ownership. She said that there had been quite a bit of concern at first but residents seem to have been impressed by the smooth changeover and Britannia's attitude. In her time as NAPHR representative she could never recall a problem having arisen between a



Above: Middles Supermarket on the park is very well stocked and caters for most residents' day-to-day needs

resident and management that she hadn't been able to solve by negotiation with Beryl in the office.

Tracy Hodgson in the park office handles sales of park homes. Anyone interested in a new home can call in and collect the keys to view one of the show homes at their leisure. There is also a previously occupied estate agency service where the park markets residents' homes for them.

Ground rent for new homes varies according to size. For example, 12ft-wide single units between 32 and 36ft long pay £147.49 per calendar month; 42 and 44ft 12-wides £178.43 pcm; small twins (32-36ft) £184.35 pcm and the largest twins (46-48ft) £243.32 pcm.

In addition there are water and sewerage charges which work out at about £260 per year. New homes on

the park are all electric and bills are paid direct to the utility company. All homes are in Council Tax Band A, which is currently £976.32 with the usual 25 per cent discount for sole occupancy.

My verdict

Kings Park was most impressive. It must be almost unique among parks in respect of the facilities it offers and especially in terms of its layout, cleanliness and security. It is easy to see why it is one of the National Caravan Council's Quality Award Parks. On the day of my visit it appeared very quiet and peaceful (even the line dancing music couldn't be heard outside the hall).

Currently around 1,200 people occupy the 740 homes sited on the park. Kings is most definitely a small village in its own right!



Above: The lake provides a lovely focal point at Kings Village