

Park of the Year winners!

Our winner is Pant Mawr Residential Park, in Harlech, North Wales. **Steve Rowe** reports on the awards ceremony, when Editor Alex Melvin and Paul Baker, from award sponsors Towergate Insurance met the residents...

For readers who aren't familiar with our annual Park of the Year competition, we ask residents from all over the UK to nominate their park, if they feel that it is a top site which deserves some recognition. All the entries are then considered by our panel of judges, including Editor Alex Melvin and leading park home industry figure Paul Baker, from Towergate Insurance, which sponsors these awards. Once the winning entry is decided, the resident who wrote the most compelling nomination receives £500 as a prize. In addition, the park owner receives £500, to be spent on the park and its residents. The magazine is pleased to announce that this year's award goes to Pant Mawr Residential Park, in Harlech, North Wales.

The presentation of this year's award took part in two separate stages. At the first of these, we met residents Christine and Roy Wildgoose, a couple who live on the park,

and whose nomination was the winning one in this year's competition. They were on holiday when we planned to visit the park to present the award, so we met them earlier, at October's caravan show at Birmingham's NEC, which they were attending, along with *PH&HC* Editor Alex and representatives from Towergate Insurance, who had a show stand.

An excellent nomination

Having presented the couple with their winning £500 cheque, along with the park's manager Neil Collis plus Shiv Kalia from Towergate Insurance, Editor Alex sat down to chat to them about the park and why they nominated it.

Christine, 55, and Roy, 69, have lived at Pant Mawr, in Harlech, for three years. The couple moved to the park from Sheffield, where Roy had a job in local government for 28 years, before spending the final decade of his career working with trade unions for

Park
of the
Year



1

the Department of Education and Skills. Christine was a doctor's receptionist for five years before taking early retirement when Roy finished work, aged 65. Before this, Christine worked as a receptionist for Sheffield Council.

The couple had been considering a number of retirement options and began to research park home living after a chance internet search. They went into their search with open minds and no preference for a particular area.

To Christine's surprise, Roy soon revealed a yen for coastal living – something he hadn't ever mentioned before!

The couple discovered Pant Mawr ("Little Hollow" in Welsh) after leafing through a copy of *PH&HC* and spotting a small advert. After visiting the park, Roy and Christine fell in love with the stunning location. Christine said, 'It's a real wildlife haven and such a beautiful place. We both knew we'd found our dream park. Straight away, we could imagine living here and going for walks with our Yorkshire Terrier, Harvey.'

'We were really impressed with park owner Neil Collis, too. He's a hands-on owner who explained everything clearly – even stuff about tricky areas like park home legislation.'

'It's a relatively new site – it opened in 2006 – and we were really excited at Neil's plans. All the homes are sensitively positioned around well-spaced plots. Homes are not all in regimented rows like on some parks. It's clear Neil has put a lot of effort into creating this special park.'



2



lovely Omar Excel show home when we first visited. We loved the home but we wanted to make some changes to customise it to our own individual tastes.'

With Neil and Omar's help, the couple helped create the 44ft x 20 park home of their dreams. It boasts an open plan layout and vaulted ceilings throughout, which lend an all-year-round holiday feel to the property. This holiday vibe goes hand-in-glove with their lifestyle at Pant Mawr.

'Best thing we ever did'

Roy enthused, 'Moving here was the best thing we ever did. We just wish we'd discovered it sooner.'

Christine echoed her husband's sentiments, 'It's so beautiful here,' she added. 'There can't be many prettier parks in the whole of the UK. We enjoy the best of both a countryside and coastal setting and the park's just a two minute walk into Harlech, a picturesque and well appointed little village with a historic castle and lots of great restaurants and pubs.'

'When you add the sense of security and community to this, and the fact that Neil is such a great bloke and excellent park owner, we just had to nominate the park.'

That sense of security and feeling of camaraderie on site is one of the main things that attracted the couple to park living. Roy commented, 'Back in Sheffield, we were burgled twice and barely knew anybody on our street, just our immediate neighbours. It couldn't be more different at Pant Mawr. It's like going back to the 1950s as everybody stops to say "hello" and smile.'

Much of the credit for fostering the great community spirit at Pant Mawr - a park of 17 plots and 31 residents - must go to Christine. In 2011, she established a social club on the park, explaining, 'When we came here there were just 10 homes. I decided to form a social club as a way of getting to know everybody.'

This tactic has clearly worked as, after just two years, every park resident is now involved, or has been in some way. The group gets together at least two or three times a month and enjoys a wealth of different activities, such as Wii games nights and even a fish-and-chip night with bingo!

The fun-loving group have even bought two mini marquees, which they use for parties and celebratory events (like our Park of the Year do!). Other highlights include trips to the theatre and an eventful day out on the nearby canal network on a barge.

Park owner Neil gets involved too, regularly joining the residents at social events. Neil has even joined the Wildgooses on holiday, accompanying the couple on a Warner's holiday break. There can't be many park owners who can say the same about their residents!

On top of co-ordinating the social club's activities, Christine also has a regular spot on the Pant Mawr website, keeping residents abreast of all the social shenanigans. From reading Christine's entries on the site, it



1 Paul Baker (centre), from Towergate, hands over the trophy 2 A stunning view from the park 3 Towergate's Shiv Kalia (far left) with Pant Mawr residents Christine and Roy Wildgoose, PH&HC's Alex Melvin and Pant Mawr park owner Neil Collis

Christine then remembered, 'When we got home to Sheffield, after seeing the park, I was so happy I cried.'

'Dream come true'

But there was still a lot to be done. The Wildgooses had to sell their terraced Sheffield home in the midst of a global recession and property slump. Christine explained, 'Once we decided we wanted to move to Pant Mawr, everything seemed to move so fast. I retired in March 2010, shortly after my husband.

'Then, we sold our bricks and mortar home in September of that year, before moving into our dream park home at Pant Mawr just before Christmas.

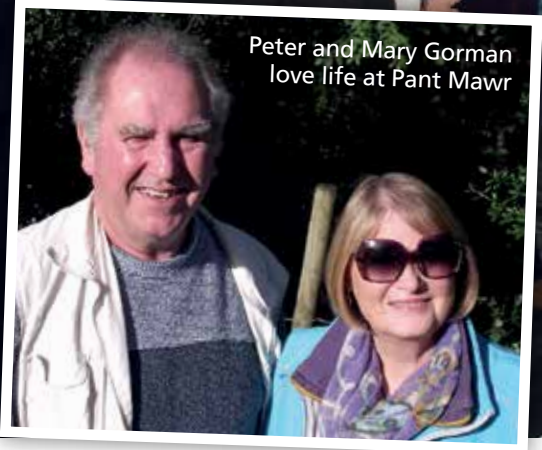
'It was snowing when we moved in but everything went really smoothly.

'We spent a wonderful Christmas Day strolling along the snow-covered beach next to the park. It was perfect!'

The couple might have unearthed a pearl of a park, but getting the ideal home took a little longer. Roy explained, 'Neil showed us a



Residents celebrate their competition win with a fabulous spread of food and drink



Peter and Mary Gorman love life at Pant Mawr

becomes immediately clear that she has a real way with words. In fact, it was her purple prose that caught our judges' eye when it came to selecting the winning nominee for Pant Mawr and recipient of a £500 cheque from competition sponsors Towergate Insurance. To give you an example, here's just a sample of what she wrote on her entry: 'Pant Mawr is a happy and lively park, there's always something going on. There's a great community spirit and lovely neighbours who always take time to look out for each other and are happy to have a chat. We are also in a wonderful coastal setting, with both mountain and sea views.'

Roy enjoys gardening, playing golf and watching football. He plays regular rounds with four other park residents at the Royal St David's links course, close to the park. Despite playing off an impressive handicap of 16, Roy finds the championship-standard course something of a challenge. Maintaining the couple's beautiful garden is a little easier for Roy! In fact, the couple plan to spend their £500 Park of the Year cheque making garden improvements. Roy said, 'We plan on redesigning our garden plot by adding Astroturf. Plus, I am currently designing a mini Harlech Castle to take pride of place on our plot.'

The park owner's perspective
After the awards ceremony at the park itself, we took time out to have a chat with park owner Neil Collis, to see how he came to own the park and what his plans are for the future. Formerly living in Derbyshire, where

he had run a variety of different businesses over the years, including a large pub with letting rooms and a transport company, Neil bought the park 10 years ago. At that time it was a holiday caravan park with 38 holiday caravans, but Neil wanted to make better use of the site.

Learning curve

He explained, 'I continued to run it as a holiday park for a few years, at the same time learning all about the parks business, as I had no previous experience of owning and managing a site. Taking advice from industry experts, I found out that it would be very unlikely that I would get permission to expand the holiday caravan park, but was told that the unique location would probably make a wonderful residential park home site.'

'Being in a National Park I wasn't sure that I would get permission to make many changes at all, but a look at the original 1955 licence for the site showed me that there was no restriction on the nature of the occupancy of the site, for up to 30 units. These could be used for either residential or holiday accommodation. After I had consulted with them, the National Park and the local council were actually fine with the change to a residential site.'

When did Neil start work on the new development? He added, 'The first residential home was sited in 2006 and there are now 17 homes sited and occupied. When finished the site will have 30 homes, and we currently have six completed bases to take the home of a new resident's choice. In addition, I have

ordered a new two-bedroom Omar Accent, 42ft x 20 show home, which should be here early in the New Year, with a price tag of around £180,000.'

Neil continued, 'I am now really happy with the way the park has developed and I think it's in the perfect location for a residential site. It's walking distance from the local shopping centre, and yet in a secluded location surrounded by trees, within a National Park! The park home owners here have come from all over the country and there's a really friendly atmosphere, with the residents including me in their social activities, which is really great.'

What will Neil spend the £500 winnings on? He concluded, 'The residents' social group is really active on this park, so I plan to give the £500 to them, to spend on whatever they want. They have already bought two large marquees to use for social events, so perhaps they will spend it on something to use alongside this.'

'We looked at more than 80 park home sites!'

While at the social gathering for the award ceremony, we also took time to speak to some of the other residents, including Peter and Mary Gorman, who lived in Norfolk, before buying their Wessex home here in 2008. Mary commented, 'We were only the third people to move onto the site and had been researching park home living as a retirement option for 10 years. In that time we had visited more than 80 parks, all over the UK. During this period we had lined up about

parks

champion park

eight parks that we would consider living at, but none seemed absolutely perfect for us. Then, friends who live in Barmouth suggested that we come up and stay with them. While there, we checked out this site and looked round the two show homes that were here at the time. We loved the location, with sea views as well as views over towards Snowdonia.

'We also liked the fact that it was a new residential development, so all the homes would be new, and we could choose our own plot right on the edge of the site.'

'Before our first visit, we were getting a bit fed up with our search for a park home site we liked, and this was actually going to be the last park visit we ever made, before choosing to search for a traditional style home instead. So, we're now very glad we came to have a look, and are really enjoying our retirement



Davina and Kevin Price moved to the park from Looe, in Cornwall

here, with a great home and a great social life with fellow residents.'

'We moved here from Cornwall'

Davina and Kevin Price used to live in the charming seaside town of Looe in Cornwall,

before relocating here and buying a new home at the park in 2011. We asked them why

Pant Mawr enticed them away from Cornwall, which is already a dream retirement location for many?

Davina enthused, 'We had been thinking about park home living as a retirement option for quite a while, even drawing up a list of requirements, such as the fact that we wanted a small site, with less than 50 homes.'

'We first read about this park from an ad in this very magazine, and then decided to book a local bed and breakfast so that we could come and have a look round.'

'We then came up to the site, had a good look round and found a plot that we really liked. We spoke to owner Neil and then reserved the plot, plus we were able to take advantage of a home part-exchange scheme for our old home, meaning that we didn't have to go through all the trouble of selling it in the depressed housing market of 2011.'

'So, we were able to move in to our new Omar home here fairly quickly.'



All you need to know

Pant Mawr Park information at your fingertips

LIVING COSTS

PITCH FEES

From £146 per calendar month

WATER AND SEWERAGE

Water and sewerage supplied via the park owner and billed monthly

VISIT THE PARK

Pant Mawr Residential Park, Old Llanfair Road, Harlech, Gwynedd, Wales LL46 2SS
Tel: 01766 780226
W: pantmawrpark.co.uk
E: info@pantmawrpark.co.uk

All prices correct as of 06/11/13



ELECTRICITY

Individually metered to each home and billed by the park owner

GAS

LPG storage tanks, with gas billed via the park owner

COUNCIL TAX

Homes fall into Council Tax Band C, currently £1,100 per annum

FOR SALE

AVAILABILITY

At the time of visiting a new show home was set to be delivered. This will be a two-bedroom Omar Accent, measuring 42ft x 20 and priced at around £180,000. There are six plots currently waiting for the home of a buyer's choice and most of the homes are from manufacturer Omar. All of the homes on the park are twin-units and used homes sometimes come up for sale, priced from around £150,000.

OTHER

PARK RULES

The park is for residents over 50 years of age. No resident children are allowed (visiting children are fine). Pets are allowed, at the discretion of the park owner.

"We love it here, people are very friendly and the park is a great little community"

Welcoming community

What do they think about life on the park home estate, now they have been here for a couple of years?

Kevin concluded, "We love it here, people are very friendly and the park is a great little community. It's like a small village in its own right. It is also an extremely secure place to live, so you don't have to worry when you're away on holiday."

A great park and a great awards party!

After enjoying a lovely spread of food prepared by the residents, with drinks courtesy of park owner Neil, we left Pant Mawr knowing that was a truly deserving winner of the Park of the Year award.

We challenge anyone to find a park in a better location and with a set of residents who are so happy and enthusiastic about their life.

Another bonus is the fact that park owner Neil actually lives at the entrance to the park, so he is always on hand to help residents with any problems, as well as joining in with social events too.

If you're looking for your dream retirement location, we'd advise you to put Pant Mawr on your list, and perhaps have a look at the site fairly soon, since there are only a limited number of plots left for new homes and, with the property market now recovering, these could start to go very quickly! 🌸