

## Retirement

## RETIRE TO ROMANCE

What better place to find love in later life than at the heart of these villages?

**D**AME Judi Dench's late husband, the actor Michael Williams, used to buy her a single rose every Friday. For them Valentine's Day was every week.

When he died 19 years ago, the Oscar-winning actress never imagined that she would fall in love again.

But nine years later she met conservationist David Mills, 77, who has been at her side for the past decade. 'I wasn't even prepared to be ready for it,' said Judi, 85. 'It was very, very gradual and grown up. We got together, in a way, through the animals. It's just wonderful.'

According to the Office for National Statistics, the number of brides and grooms aged 65 and over went up 46 per cent in a decade, from 7,468 in 2004 to 10,937 in 2014.

And the number of dating websites for older people has risen, too, and include: *sagadating.co.uk*, *ourtime.co.uk*; *avenues dating.co.uk*; and *drawing downthemoon.co.uk*

But your chances of finding love

in later life are enhanced if you live in a retirement community.

Ken Harding, 79 and Dorothy Blackham, 81, first exchanged glances across the landing of Viewpoint, a McCarthy & Stone (*mccarthyandstone.co.uk*) development in Gosport, Hampshire.

'A first date in your 80s compared with a first date at 18 couldn't be more different,' says Ken. 'Late-blooming love is more considerate. More tender. You take your time with it. You don't rush it. You build

a relationship first based on friendship and trust.'

The couple, who are both widowed, married last month, just a year after meeting.

It is not surprising that retirement communities are 'hotbeds' for romance, with their communal lounges, menu of activities and pretty gardens.

Some developments such as Richmond Villages' Letcombe Regis in Oxfordshire, Retirement Villages' (*retirementvillages.co.uk*)

Grade II-listed Cedars Village in Hertfordshire and Audley Villages' (*audleyvillages.co.uk*) charming Binswood in Leamington Spa, ooze romance with their cosy libraries, restaurants and bars, and relaxing spa areas.

'I often hear lovely stories about Churchill owners who have some romance back in their lives since making their move,' said Churchill Retirement chairman Spencer McCarthy. 'It helps that all our developments host social activi-



**Date night:** The bar at Audley Binswood retirement village, and right, companions Dorothy and Phil at Hedingham Place



ties in the owners' lounge, a friendly space that makes it easy to meet new people.'

One-bedroom apartments are for sale from £226,950 at Spitfire Lodge in Portswood, Hampshire, *churchillretirement.co.uk*

While romance can blossom in your 80s, many older people are happy to settle for friendship.

Retired secretary Dorothy Franklin, 92, rents an apartment in Hedingham Place, a Girlings retirement development in Sible Hedingham, Essex. The former secretary

moved there five years ago. Then she met neighbour and fellow Arsenal fan Phil Adams, a retired accountant in his 80s.

'Since moving I've been lucky enough to discover this wonderful friendship that I never thought I'd find again,' says Dorothy.

A one-bedroom apartment costs from £725 per calendar month, via *girlings.co.uk*.

Some developments are even prepared to go the extra mile to foster romance.

Lisa Fisher, manager of Castle View retirement village Windsor (*castleviewwindsor.co.uk*), says: 'From the library to the garden or restaurant, the café to the Sky Lounge and sundeck, there's no shortage of quiet corners where our owners can get together.'

**JANE SLADE**