

FAST FACTS

Property value: £140,000

Share bought: 50% for
£70,000

Monthly rent: £184.57



LAURIE SKINNER, GRAYS, ESSEX

Shared ownership homes are usually the preserve of first time buyers. But when Laurie Skinner was both divorced and forced into early retirement by a chronic back injury in the space of three months, she yearned for a smaller, more suitable home.

"In 2005, my husband and I were living in a three-bedroom house in Chafford Hundred, Essex," says Laurie, now 44. "When we divorced I had to downsize and my bad back meant I needed somewhere closer to the shops and other amenities."

The couple resolved to sell their house and use the equity to buy separate new homes. But Laurie couldn't find anything suitable on the open market that didn't need lots of work.

Then, a few months later, she saw Kingfisher Heights: a NewBuild development being built in Grays, Essex – and only ten minutes from Chafford Hundred. Laurie took a closer look at the development and set her heart on a two-bedroom, ground floor apartment that seemed to be tailor made for her needs.

She chose it specially to reduce the strain on her back, which is so bad she can't stand straight or walk upright for more than a few minutes at a time. The home's central location – with the supermarket only two-minutes walk away – was a massive plus point.

Laurie was thrilled to discover that Swan Housing Association was selling the homes on a shared ownership basis, which allowed her to buy what she could afford and pay subsidised rent on the rest.

Because of her new circumstances, Laurie was accepted onto Thurrock Council's Housing Register, which meant that she qualified for a shared ownership property. She attended a financial assessment and her plans to buy the property were approved. "I was so happy, I paid the holding deposit

there and then," says Laurie.

The home had a market value of £140,000. Laurie bought 50 per cent, using half the equity from her old house, some of her lump sum ill-health retirement payment and a got a small mortgage. She now pays monthly rent of £184.57, which includes a £34.07 service charge.

"This place has opened up a new life for me," says Laurie, who has a disabled train and bus pass. "Although my old place was in a lovely area, this is much better for me.

"I can do things on my own without relying on other people," she says. "Before I had to rely on family and friends acting as chauffeurs because I don't drive. But now, when I have a pain free day, I can get to and do everything I want."

Her weekly routine includes visiting her mum in her nursing home in Upminster. "Now I'm close to the railway station, I can visit her alone and meet my friends at Lakeside shopping centre, which is only a ten-minute bus ride away."

Laurie is ecstatic with her new home's size. "It's very spacious, with a huge front room and the spare bedroom means friends or family can stay to help me when my back is at its worst," she says.

"This place is great value for money. I love that the communal gardens are tended and my windows are cleaned as part of the service agreement because I can't do these things myself," she adds.

"My old house was beautiful, but I never really felt at home," she says. "Here, I've chosen the decor and all the furniture myself. I feel content and safe: there are electric gates at the car park entrance and an intercom entry system too. I've never been happier and I love living here." ■

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