

A RACE AGAINST TIME

Despite a lengthy planning process, Lesley and David Lennox have built a timber frame home that combines contemporary design with traditional details — completing the build in less than a year in time for a very important event

Timber Frame Replacement

The new timber frame house replaces an old 1950s bungalow on the site, which was almost completely hidden under 12-foot high brambles.





The homeowners

Lesley and David Lennox

The project

Timber frame self-build

Build time

Dec 2015 - Aug 2016

Size 325m²

Plot cost £525,000

Build cost £420,000

(plus £100,000 for garage)

Value £1.7 - £1.8million

Sloping Site Solution

Due to the heavily sloping nature of the site, an expansive deck has been constructed – around 60-70m². Having had balconies on their previous house, Lesley and David were keen to include them on the new one. The balcony on the rear elevation (RIGHT) also works to prevent the living room below from overheating. The toughened glass balustrades have been covered with a vinyl wrap that means from the balcony you can see out perfectly, yet from the other side, no one can see in.



untouched for three years – it ended up being their home for the next two years.

“It was in an awful condition,” says Lesley. “We moved in during winter. The central heating system had been condemned but thankfully a local heating engineer got it going eventually. We spent that first winter sitting with blankets over our knees.

“We also discovered that there had been some little four-legged creatures living here too. The rodents had chewed all the woodwork and the kitchen was completely infested – the whole thing had to be ripped out and replaced with temporary facilities.”

Lesley and David also found that the bungalow’s foundations were moving, leaving gaping holes beneath the skirting boards.

The Planning

“We knew that planning wasn’t going to be easy as we are in a conservation area, but we were hopeful as other new properties had been built in the village,” says Lesley. Having applied twice, unsuccessfully, for planning – the second time with plans that the planners had led them to believe would be acceptable – Lesley and David came across timber frame specialist Potton.

“We hadn’t realised that you could have a completely bespoke design from Potton,” says Lesley. “As soon as we met the designer, Sean, we had a good rapport, plus he had experience of conservation areas and knew the local planning department.”

Working alongside Sean, Lesley and David came up with a brief for their new home. “Because of the village setting, we didn’t want anything outrageously modern. But we also didn’t want a replica of what we had built before,” explains Lesley.

“We felt that as we were building from scratch, we wanted the house that we want- ➤

Having previously built a house in 2009 and finding that they thoroughly enjoyed the process, Lesley and David Lennox decided they wanted to do it all again.

“We knew we wanted another building project,” says Lesley. “But nothing that suited us was coming up, so we expanded our search area and found our plot.”

Extending to one acre and hiding a run-down 1950s bungalow beneath 12 foot-high brambles, the plot was set within a pretty Hampshire village, in a conservation area and had formerly made up part of the garden of a 19th-century manor house.

“A group of bungalows were built in the garden in the 1950s and ours was the only one left untouched,” explains Lesley. “It was just a little bungalow in an acre of wilderness – but we could see its potential.”

Lesley and David took the brave decision to live in the bungalow, which had stood

ed, not what the planning department wanted — we didn't want to build a box! We were keen to have five bedrooms, all with en suites, as we like to have guests. We also wanted an open, sociable kitchen."

On the advice of Sean, Lesley and David went for pre-approval planning, submitting a basic design. They then went in with their full plans and, after some tweaking, the plans were sent to the local area committee and finally approved in October 2015.

"We were working to a deadline," says Lesley. "Our eldest daughter was getting married in October 2016. She lives in Hong Kong and needed somewhere to stay, along with some of the wedding guests. Our deadline was a year to the day we received planning permission."

Although Lesley and David both work full time, they decided to take on the sizeable task of project managing the build.

Once the old bungalow was demolished, they moved into a caravan on site — their home for the next nine months.

"There were a couple of challenges that we were faced with early on," says Lesley. "Firstly we had to recycle 90% of the materials from the demolished bungalow. Secondly, with the plot being so close to the river and because of the soil type, we had to include six-and-a-half metres of piling beneath the new house.

"Also, as the new house is a prefab type of construction, the site needed to be as level as possible, so it [the foundations and ground floor slab] was raised at the rear."

Even before the demolition, Lesley and David had made decisions on all the internal fittings, as well as the layouts. "We have found that the further you get into a build, the more stressful it becomes, so by deciding on the finer details early on, the fraught decision-making process was removed. The footings went in in December 2015 and the delivery date for the timber frame was February 2016."

Despite falling two weeks behind over Christmas, Lesley and David "took the bull by the horns" and got it all back on track.

"We thought the house would take some time to construct, but by the end of the first day we were walking around the foundations, seeing where walls were and even looking out of the new window apertures.

"Our 325m² house was built in 12 working days by five men! Within those days, the roofers had begun felting the roof and the house was watertight within a month."

The new house has been clad using a combination of through-coloured render and larch, while the slate roof and brick 'dwarf wall' that runs around the base of the perimeter adds a more traditional feel.

Reflecting the sloping nature of the site, to the rear of the property is an expansive timber deck — it's around 70m² in total.

Two balconies add both interest and a practical feature to the rear elevation. "We like being able to have a covered external space," explains Lesley. "We asked for two balconies on our planning approval but were originally refused, so we were going to just have large windows.

"Then the conservation officer flagged up the fact that the living room bifolds could cause overheating, so came up with the solution of a balcony above that could act as a shade — the 5m wide bifolds in the living room basically dictated the size of the balcony above."

Internally, Lesley and David's desire for an open plan and sociable kitchen diner has been realised. "We could spend all our time in there," says Lesley. "There was a wall planned between the kitchen and dining area, but we got rid of it to make it all open."

A formal living space has also been included to provide a quiet separate space. The first floor is accessed by a grand oak and glass staircase, leading to a vaulted landing area with Douglas fir beams.

Although underfloor heating — powered by an air source heat pump — has been installed throughout, Lesley says that they only ever need it on low, even in winter.

"The house is so well insulated there is not much need for heating," she says. "We have the flue in place for a woodburner because we like the ambience they give, and we may add some photovoltaic panels at some point, too. We learnt from previous projects, so there isn't much we would change."

And the October deadline? "We ended up moving in five weeks before the wedding," says Lesley. "We had a house full of people and it ended up being a base for family and guests from all over the world to stay." 

Dream Kitchen

Lesley and David's kitchen, from Optiplan, is a Shaker-style design. Along with the central island, with seating, the space is open to a large dining area and living space.





Social Spaces

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The kitchen diner also features a living area – “It is where we spend most of our time,” says Lesley; The Y-shaped staircase is made from oak and glass and was supplied by Potton; The main living room can be opened up to the large deck beyond through bifold doors.





Comfortable Spaces

A flue has been put in place for a woodburning stove in the living room (LEFT), but the house is so well insulated that heating is barely needed.



PROJECT NOTES

Suppliers

Groundworks (including drainage, large landscaping, decking, patios and driveways)

Houghton Crouch: 07884 313010 or 07810 291284

Bricklayer Paul: 07712 010616

Roofing Excel roofing: 023 8060 1112 / 07775 907579

Electrician MK Samuels: 07786 524984

Scaffolding

Damar Scaffolding: 023 8045 4117 / 07732 620895

Plumbing Heating and Cooling (Alan Hounsham): 01489 860667 / 07831210611

Plastering B & R

Plastering: 01264 338032

Building Regs and house-building insurance

BBS Building Control: 07432 674798

Tiling Andy Owens: 07726 90558

Fencing Borderline: 07790 735806

Carpentry Richard

Wheatley: 07977 591685

Muck away/gravel etc.

CW Aggregates: 07810 97911

Decorators Bell and Sons: 01489 895357

Bathroom flooring

Artisan of Dezives: artisansofdezives.com

Kitchen floor

Natural Stone and Timber: 02392 652923

Sanitaryware

Elliotts Builders Merchant: elliotts.uk

Windows

Bereco: 01709 838188

Carpets PJ Flooring: 02380 407041 or 07887 685107

Balcony

Expect Home Solutions: 0800 0469969

Hire items (Onsite WC and Heras fencing etc.)

Philspace: 01489 860606

Kitchen Optiplan Basingstoke: 01256 819889

Walk in wardrobe Wizard Wardrobes: 01489 885010

The Floorplan

The ground floor is largely given over to the open plan kitchen, dining and living area, while a separate living room and study provide quieter spaces. A boot room and utility lead off the kitchen. Upstairs, five bedrooms mean plenty of room for guests.

