

## THE ELLIS FILE

**NAMES** Brian & Loveday Ellis  
**OCCUPATIONS** Retired surgeon & retired practice nurse  
**LOCATION** Hampshire  
**TYPE OF BUILD** Self build  
**STYLE** Barn  
**CONSTRUCTION METHOD** Timber frame  
**PLOT SIZE** 0.85 acres  
**LAND COST** £525,000  
**BOUGHT** 2014  
**HOUSE SIZE** 376m<sup>2</sup> (incl. 81m<sup>2</sup> garage)  
**PROJECT COST** £759,155  
**PROJECT COST PER M<sup>2</sup>** £2,019  
**TOTAL COST** £1,284,155  
**VAT RECLAIM** £5,100  
**BUILDING WORK COMMENCED** September 2014  
**BUILDING WORK TOOK** 12 months  
**CURRENT VALUE** £1,500,000

# Living in a barn



Reading self build magazines convinced **Brian and Loveday Ellis** that creating their own dream home from scratch in a quiet Hampshire village was the way forward WORDS RICHARD WEBBER PHOTOS COLIN POOLE

**B**rian and Loveday Ellis had known for years that their top priority upon retirement would be to move away from London's noise and traffic to a peaceful rural setting. But it wasn't until Brian read an article about self building that their thoughts turned towards creating their own property.

"I started buying all the magazines, including *Build It*, and became increasingly enthusiastic about the idea of constructing our dream home," says Brian. "It seemed to be the only way to end up with something we really wanted at the right price. Plus, in

nearly every article I read, the project cost was invariably way below the finished market value. So it seemed the logical way to go."

## Bespoke plans

It took six months to source the right plot, and it actually happened by chance. "I think the estate agent sent the paperwork to us by mistake because we hadn't specified this corner of Hampshire," says Brian. "Mind you, I'm glad they did because it was exactly what we wanted – quiet, the right size and surrounded by mature hedges



**Build in progress**

The foundations were laid without a hitch, even though the team unearthed a 75m deep well



Once the site was prepared, the timber frame was delivered and quickly erected



With the full skeleton in place, the couple could clearly visualise their new home

“It’s rewarding knowing that we have a bespoke house, made to our exact requirements”



and trees. An added bonus is that we can enjoy watching beautiful sunsets, something we could never do at our previous house.”

The plot cost £525,000 and was financed, together with the build itself, through savings and the sale of their last home. The land came with a tired 1970s bungalow and lapsed planning permission for a four-bedroom, two-storey dwelling. But the Ellises didn’t want to make use of either, because their sights were firmly set on Potton’s Wickhambrook Barn design – a four-bedroom property combining contemporary interiors with a traditional barn-style exterior.

Brian and Loveday fell in love with this scheme after visiting the company’s Cambridgeshire show centre. Although the firm can work alongside self builders to create completely bespoke schemes from scratch, the Ellises were keen to tweak this specific design to meet their own requirements. “Potton were really easy to work with, especially Sean Adams, their architectural designer. The firm has many designs and they are proactive in making sure they tailor spaces to their customers’ requirements,” explains Brian. “With this route, you’re not buying an off-the-shelf package; yes, the basic structure might be identical, but it can be altered to match your individual needs. We started with a mirror image of their show home and then moved walls around. We also opted for a smaller

kitchen in order to increase the size of the utility and plant areas. Plus, we made the living space and three bedrooms larger, as well as utilising the big roof above the garage, turning half of it into a spare bedroom, which has already proved useful.”

**Expert help**

Rather than trying to negotiate their own way through the planning process, Brian and Loveday employed Potton to represent them. Securing permission took five months. “Considering the size and location of the site, the application was relatively straightforward,” says Brian. “This was largely down to Sean Adams, who oversaw the process. He engaged with the planners from an early stage, submitting a pre-application prior to formal submission just to gauge the local authority’s reaction – it makes them feel involved from day one and is definitely worthwhile.”

Brian recommends other self builders ask professionals to navigate the planning process for them. “Sub-contracting to an expert saves hassle and money in the long run,” he says. “Potton offered a package to deal with it, which was worth every penny.”

While the local planning department didn’t object to the size of the property (which was nearly 50% bigger than the original



The entrance opens onto a double-height space that hosts the Ellises’ grand dining suite, positioned directly below the bridged landing



The purple kitchen units make a striking and colourful statement



bungalow) concerns were expressed about the hard landscaping. One worry was that the driveway would look disproportionate to the space available. But these elements were quickly resolved with minor design adjustments.

**Change of plan**

Brian had his sights set on project managing the build until tragedy struck, when he was diagnosed with bowel cancer and underwent radical surgery. “I started eight months of chemotherapy,” he says. “Loveday said that I should not even consider running the project, so instead we engaged James Ross and Nigel Browner from Haygarth Ross to take care of the entire build.” The pair worked closely with Brian and Loveday, keeping them involved throughout. They also helped shape the Potton design to meet the Ellises’ needs.

Although he couldn’t oversee the build, Brian still wanted to keep abreast of progress so convened regular Tuesday morning meetings with the builders. “Being around was a valuable part of the project for me. It involved making endless cups of tea, handing out industrial quantities of biscuits and even offering Friday pub lunches for everyone working on site,” he says. “Establishing a close relationship with our trades was very worthwhile.”

**A few bumps**

The couple moved into a nearby rented property to allow the project to begin. Unfortunately, they faced a delay right at the start, as work demolishing the pre-existing bungalow had to be postponed when the local authority requested a bat survey, costing £300. They hired a registered expert, who spent the night sat in the garden, trying to establish if any of the small creatures were living in the existing property. But thankfully there were no sightings or evidence and the demolition could proceed.





Expansive glazing fills the house with lots of daylight



You can see straight through to the kitchen from the entrance hall

garden. Brian is glad they did because it's the one area of the budget he underestimated. "If we'd purchased that amount of mature shrubs brand new it could have set us back about £10,000," he says. "But even that many plants wasn't sufficient for the space, so we spent £6,000 populating the extra beds we dug. That's where I came unstuck in terms of finances because I'd only allocated a tiny amount for landscaping when, in fact, we needed much more to pay for things such as levelling, irrigation and sowing grass."

#### Efficient setup

A 16-panel, 4kw solar PV array was unobtrusively added

Laying the foundations went fairly smoothly, even though a Victorian well was unearthed during the demolition process. "It was lined in flint and was 75m deep," says Brian. "Sadly, it wasn't in a position to be useful so had to be filled in. That took five lorry loads of rubble, but we had that amount left over from the demolition. Not having to get rid of it at the local dump saved us a lot of money."

Among the most rewarding aspects of the build for Brian and Loveday was seeing the first section of the timber frame being erected. Again, no problems were encountered and 16 days after the first panel was put in place, the whole house's skeleton was standing. The rest of the build moved along at a steady pace.

When it came to landscaping, the Ellises preserved pennies by bringing five lorry loads of shrubs with them from their previous

within the garage's slate roof. It provides enough energy to power much of the house. An Ochsner evaporator air source heat pump (ASHP) was installed to feed the underfloor heating (UFH).

The upstairs radiators run off the same circuit, but are oversized to make them compatible with the lower flow temperature provided by the ASHP. "I spotted the heat pump company at an eco home exhibition in London and was immediately impressed," says Brian. "Although the product is classified as an air source heat pump, it's actually an evaporator and therefore works a bit differently to a standard system. It uses a horizontal fan and extracts moisture from the air, thus capturing the latent heat of vaporisation. Quite a lot of water drops off the fan when it's working, which then goes through the gravel to a soakaway. Overall, we're very pleased with it because it



#### WE LEARNED...

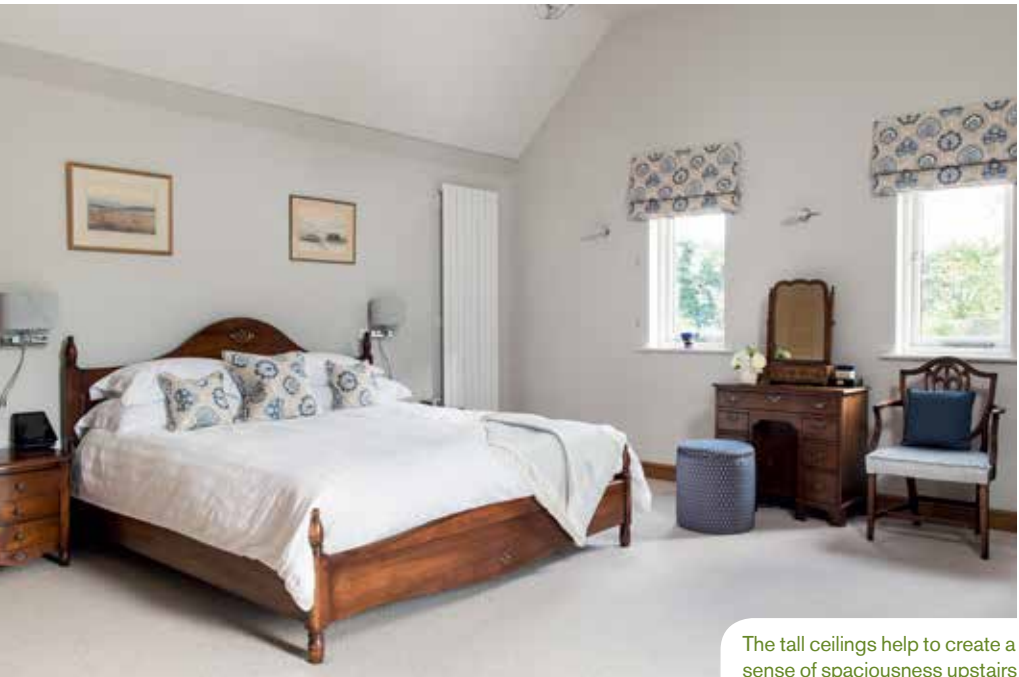
**DOCUMENT EVERYTHING** and always set up a concise filing system because it keeps everything organised and saves time in the long run.

**FILL YOUR PLANT ROOM** with as much of your home's clobber and tech as possible. Our AV cabinet is in there with all the heating, alarm boxes, irrigation controller and even a ceiling-mounted Victorian style airer/dryer.

**GET ROOM SIZES RIGHT.** We spent significant time tweaking the plans to the standard house design that we'd chosen and it was definitely time well spent.

**BUILDERS AND TRADES** usually give optimistic estimates for the time it'll take to complete a job. We generally believed them, but often we shouldn't have, as it took much longer.

**TAKE PLENTY OF PHOTOS** showing where wires and underground pipes run. Looking back, it would've been helpful to have images of every wall and ceiling before the plasterboard went on.



The tall ceilings help to create a sense of spaciousness upstairs

and garage. "All the lighting equipment, hi-fi, and CCTV is wired back into an AV cupboard (located in the plant room) where all the audio-visual and home automation equipment is based. The heart of the setup is a Control4 hub," explains Brian.

#### Forever home

Now the build is complete, the Ellises have no regrets. Downstairs, they have a kitchen, sitting room, study-cum-cinema area, snug, dining zone in the hall, separate utility and plant space. There are four bedrooms (two ensuite) upstairs, plus a family bathroom.

Ample daylight fills the entire house, partly thanks to the inclusion of rooflights. Brian and Loveday were keen to have flush-fitting units, so were delighted to come across the Neo range from The Rooflight Company. Featuring low-maintenance, self-cleaning glass as standard, the overhead windows have a concealed jamb motor,

preserving an uncluttered view. Sitting flush with the roofline, the edge-to-edge glazing offers a frameless appearance – just one of many design touches throughout the property that the couple love.

Another is the solid wood front door. "Adam Rose, of Cattle Lane Carpentry and Construction, produced this for us – we consider it to be one of the defining features of our house," says Brian. The entrance is surrounded by solid oak beams and a host of large windows that pour light into the large, tall hallway.

They wouldn't hesitate to self build again, but Brian and Ellis are quick to point out that this is a home for life. "It's rewarding knowing that we have a bespoke house, made to our exact requirements," says Brian. "Yes, it's based on a standard Potton design, but it has been adjusted to meet our needs and we couldn't be happier."



## closer look

## Space and light...

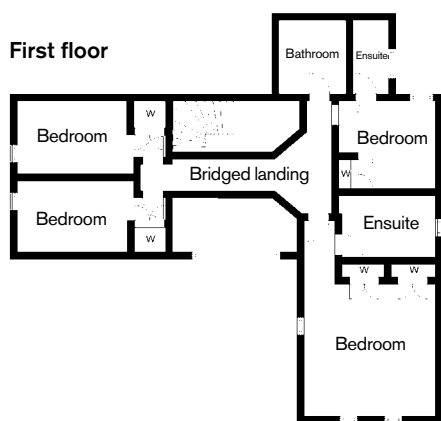
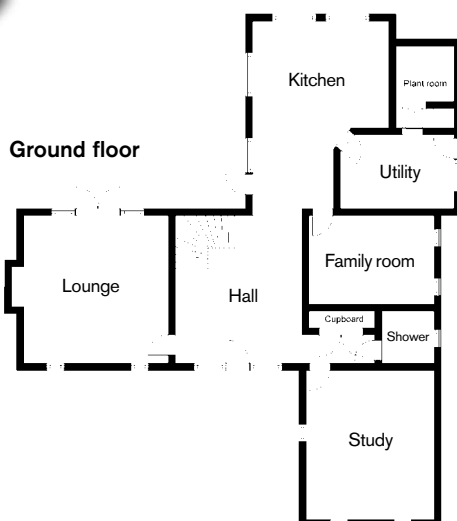
Among the many striking features in the Ellises' home is the natural illumination and sense of volume emanating from the vaulted hall and internal bridge, which is framed in Douglas fir and features glazed balustrading. This helps to create a real wow factor as soon as anyone steps through the front door. The setup produces a tremendous feeling of space, accentuated here by the light flooding through the windows surrounding the large oak door. "We asked Sean, Potton's designer, to make some adjustments to the standard Wickhambrook Barn design. In the show home, as you look along the gallery on the landing, only one side splayed open at 45°," explains Brian. "We wanted the hallway widened and for both sides to open out at this angle to make it symmetrical. We certainly made the right choice because it looks fabulous."



Internal bridge



### Floor plans



House plans re-created using  
Build It 3D Home Designer software.  
[www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware](http://www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware)



### TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m <sup>2</sup>	Cost %	Total cost
Preliminaries (incl. demolition)	£66	3%	£25,000
Foundations & drainage	£120	6%	£45,000
Timber frame	£293	15%	£110,000
External walls & windows	£253	13%	£95,000
Roof covering (structure in timber frame)	£120	6%	£45,000
Floor, wall & ceiling finishes	£148	7%	£55,500
Joinery & fittings	£66	3%	£25,000
Plumbing & heating (incl. bathroom & kitchen)	£300	15%	£113,000
Electrics	£141	7%	£53,200
Decorating	£48	2%	£18,000
Garage block & room above	£120	6%	£45,000
Site fees	£251	12%	£94,455
External works	£93	5%	£35,000
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>£759,155</b>

### Useful contacts

HOME DESIGNER **Potton** 01767 676400 [www.potton.co.uk](http://www.potton.co.uk) MAIN CONTRACTOR **Haygarth Ross** 01264 712152 [www.haygarthross.co.uk](http://www.haygarthross.co.uk) FRONT DOOR & OAK FRAME **Cattle Lane Carpentry & Construction** 01264 710779 WINDOWS **Salisbury Joinery** 01722 337040 [www.salisburyjoinery.co.uk](http://www.salisburyjoinery.co.uk) ROOF LIGHTS **The Rooflight Company** 01993 833155 [www.therooflightcompany.co.uk](http://www.therooflightcompany.co.uk) KITCHEN DESIGN **Saxon Designs** 01264 773333 [www.saxondesigns.co.uk](http://www.saxondesigns.co.uk) BATHROOMS **Wave Bathrooms** 01722 333553 [www.wavebathrooms.co.uk](http://www.wavebathrooms.co.uk) HEAT PUMP **Eurotech** [www.eurotechgroup.ie](http://www.eurotechgroup.ie) AV & HOME AUTOMATION **Ugot** 023 8025 3399 [www.ugot.co.uk](http://www.ugot.co.uk) LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS **Dellam** 07787 494143 [www.dellamltd.co.uk](http://www.dellamltd.co.uk) LANDSCAPE DESIGN **Mary Woollett Garden Consulting** 01264 731201 [www.marywoollettgardens.co.uk](http://www.marywoollettgardens.co.uk)