

In brief

PROJECT New build
LOCATION Dorset
PLOT £186,000
SPENT £560,000
WORTH £800,000+

The best-laid plans

It took first-time selfbuilders Linda and Frank Stocks time and patience to gain planning approval for their new SIPs home in a sensitive village setting.

STORY: **DEBBIE JEFFERY** PICTURES: **PETER BOOTON**

As a semi-retired planning officer, Frank Stocks knew exactly how to progress when he and his wife, Linda, decided to build their own home. Despite his expertise and knowledge, however, the location they chose made getting consent for a new house on the plot problematic, and the process took several years.

The couple had been living in north London but had connections with Dorset and began actively looking for a plot of land back in 2008. "We would travel down and spend weekends getting to know the area," says Linda. "Our dream was for a country home, close to amenities. We wanted a more rural lifestyle but didn't want to feel cut off in our retirement."

The property they eventually decided to buy came without planning consent and stood in a Conservation Area, in an AONB. "You can see 30 miles away to the Isle of Wight and the views sold it to us," says Frank. "The house on the plot was little more than a shack and was one of three timber properties built in the 1920s. It would have taken around £100,000 just to make it habitable as it was exceptionally basic, with an incredibly tiny kitchen and bizarrely connected rooms."

Frank and Linda bought the house at auction in 2014 for £186,000 and made their own pre-planning application before contacting Western Design

EXTERIOR

Approval was granted to demolish an uninhabitable 1920s house in a sensitive setting and replace it with a modern vernacular design, clad in timber and brick, with a standing seam zinc roof. The new home is in a Conservation Area, next to two similar houses.

Architects in September 2015. The award-winning Dorset practice is located just five miles from the couple's plot and, as accredited conservation architects, has a reputation for producing exciting, creative designs which are sympathetic to local context.

"Practice director Matthew Witt visited us and we were able to see some of their designs in the area and speak to previous clients," says Linda. "We also consulted another architect in Exeter but then heard that the council had applied to Historic England to get the three timber properties listed. Thankfully, there were no grounds to warrant a listing."

Linda and Frank knew that Western Design had extensive experience of working with their planning authority and felt that engaging a reputable local architect would bring a number of benefits.

We did loads of research, read magazines and visited self-build shows," says Linda. "Until now, we've always lived in traditional Victorian houses so we wanted a complete change. Our brief was for a contemporary, highly energy-efficient home, but we didn't want to take the Passivhaus route." The scheme evolved through several planning applications, including two approvals over the course of two years and intensive negotiations between the conservation office, the architects, and the Stocks, to reach a design that was favourable to all.



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“To lock in the principle of demolition, we designed a traditional house we didn’t want and then – when that was approved – applied again for a more contemporary style,” explains Frank. “It took until August 2017 to finally achieve approval but each knock-back only served to make us more determined.”

Western Design Architects sensitively designed the new home to reflect the neighbouring properties and the relationship with the two remaining timber-clad cottages was achieved by maintaining the same roof pitch, stepped ridge height, timber cladding, metal roof, and street scene.

At 187 sqm, the new house is 85 per cent bigger than the original property, with the additional floor area sited predominately in the roof space and to the rear to maintain the scale of the front facade. “Many of the other houses in the village are of red brick construction, so we chose a similar brick with a contrasting banding detail to reflect this,” says Frank. “Originally, we applied to build a barn-style home with a large gable, but the planners wanted the new house to replicate the old as much as possible, so the design was modified.”

BEFORE

Approval was granted to demolish the uninhabitable 1920s house.

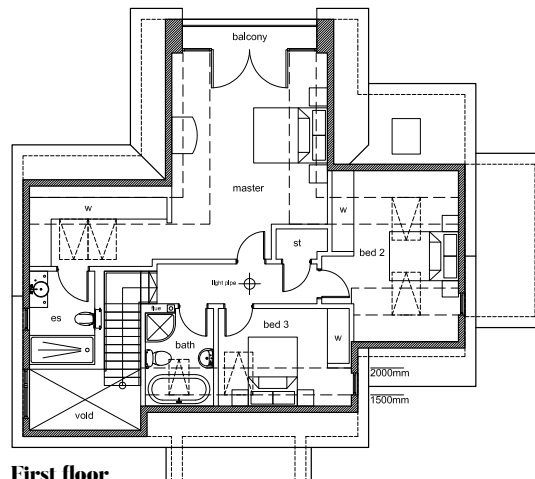
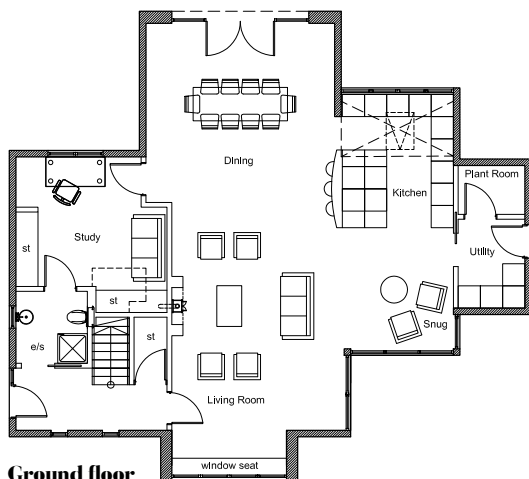


NEW HOME

The new house is a modern vernacular design, built with SIPs and designed to tie in with existing buildings through roof pitch and choice of cladding materials.

With planning approval granted, Western Design Architects went on to produce drawings for Building Regulations, but Frank and Linda’s problems were still not over. “We needed a bat survey and employed an ecologist, who told us we had bats roosting in the loft of the old timber shack,” says Linda. “Later, when the droppings were analysed, they proved to be from a pygmy shrew but we still needed to jump through various hoops and obtain a bat licence to be allowed to demolish the building, which held up progress even more.”

By February 2019 the couple were finally able to tender for a building contractor, but even this process did not run smoothly. “We just couldn’t get a builder to come back to us with a price. In the end we approached Matrod Frampton, who were able to fit us in and proved exceptionally well organised,”



Floorplan

The ground floor is mainly open plan, with a living/dining/kitchen/snug and a separate study, plant room and utility. On the first floor are three bedrooms, a bathroom and en suite.



“It’s our dream home and in some ways the delays and planning battles mean that we appreciate it even more.”

says Frank. “We had already signed with Kingspan to construct a SIPs frame, but we needed a builder to carry out the groundworks first, then come back to finish the build once the frame was erected.”

With the old shack demolished and concrete strip foundations completed on the chalk site, the frame could be erected on a brick plinth and took just five weeks to build. “Finally, things were happening, after waiting so long,” says Frank. “We chose a SIPs frame for its thermal properties and build speed. The Kingspan ULTIMA closed panel walls and TEK roof give us an impressive U-value of 0.14.”

The couple rented locally for a year and were able to visit the site on a regular basis. “Our builders started work in June 2019 and were open and honest throughout, handling all aspects of the process,” says Linda. “They pride themselves on the quality of their work and that made it a pain-free experience.”

After some debate, triple-glazed aluminium windows and roof lights were specified throughout the house, and the SIPs shell has been clad with untreated Western red cedar, in addition to the red brickwork.

Internally, the couple wanted to install underfloor heating in an insulated concrete slab, beneath engineered hardwood and floor tiles. Purbeck limestone was laid in the kitchen, which was chosen from a quarry and features Jurassic fossils.



**LIVING/
KITCHEN**
Linda and Frank both enjoy cooking and wanted a sociable open-plan ground floor layout with views in all directions.





FEATURE LIMESTONE

Purbeck limestone flooring featuring Jurassic fossils was laid in the kitchen, with a limestone hearth beneath the raised wood-burner.



A mechanical ventilation and heat recovery unit was installed, and the heating is a hybrid of an air source heat pump and gas system boiler. Additionally, the couple needed to renew the ancient septic tank on site, which also served the other two properties and all three now share a new sewage treatment plant.

"We're very organised and didn't change anything along the way, which helped us to stay on budget and schedule," says Linda. "Everything was thoroughly researched, and it was a dream fit-out – we couldn't fault our builders and the monthly meetings kept everyone on track."

A Howdens kitchen was fitted and Ikea cabinets were used below the limestone hearth in the living area as an inexpensive storage solution. Most of the sanitaryware



came from Ideal Standard, although the couple chose more expensive Duravit for their own en suite bathroom.

“The project has taken far longer than we’d anticipated, due to the years of planning delays,” says Frank.

“Fortunately, we managed to move into the new house just one week before the first lockdown in March 2020, and really couldn’t be happier living here. It’s our dream home, and in some ways the delays and planning battles mean that we now appreciate it even more.”

In detail

PROJECT

Architect Western Design Architects (WDA):
westerndesignarchitects.com

Building contractors

Matrod Frampton:
matrod-frampton.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Wall and roof systems, sewage treatment plant
Kingspan: kingspan.com
Colorcoat Urban (TATA Steel) standing seam metal roof installation

Jade Aden Services Ltd:
jade-aden.co.uk

Triple-glazed windows and sliding doors Bournemouth Glass & Glazing: bggco.com
Triple-glazed conservation rooflights Fakro Group: fakro.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Daikin Altherma hybrid air source heat pump, gas combi boiler, underfloor heating PowerNaturally Ltd:
powernaturally.co.uk

MVHR Nuair: nuair.co.uk

Engineered oak hardwood floors Living Floors:

livingfloors-online.co.uk

Spangle Jurassic

Purbeck limestone flooring (hall, kitchen and hearth)

Haysom Purbeck Stone:
purbeckstone.co.uk

Greenwich kitchen (Super Matt) and Graphite Caldeira compact laminate worktop

Howdens: howdens.com
Iroko island worktop

Worktop Express:
worktop-express.co.uk

Sanitaryware Ideal Standard: idealstandard.co.uk; Duravit: duravit.co.uk

Showers Mira: mirashowers.co.uk

BESTA units, hearth Ikea: ikea.com

Resin-bound permeable drive Colourstone Paving: colourstonepaving.co.uk

Iroko sliding gate

John Bright: johnbrightfencing.com



VIEWS

Extensive triple glazing has been installed to take advantage of the rural views.





BEDROOMS

The vaulted master bedroom was designed with a glazed gable opening onto a covered balcony, overlooking fields. There are two further bedrooms on the first floor, lit by conservation roof lights in pitched ceilings.

BATHROOMS

Ideal Standard sanitaryware was chosen for the family bathroom, with Duravit in the first-floor master en suite, where a curved shower has been installed.



Final word

What was the high point of the project?

Winning the plot at auction and then finally receiving planning permission and being able to demolish the timber shack. We were particularly impressed with our builders, and they even completed a week early!

...and the low points?

Our three-year battle with the local planning authority and the failure of the tender process.

Your best buy?

IKEA items: light fittings, and the cabinets underneath the Purbeck limestone hearth.



Biggest extravagance?

The 5kW wood-burner, because we didn't need it as a heat source but wanted the focal point.

Your top tip?

Be organised, be flexible, and don't change your mind during the build.