

“We self-built our first home”

Lucy Newton and Sam Hopkins defied the planning odds and achieved their home on a tight budget, thanks to an energetic can-do attitude



OAK FRAME SELF-BUILD

HOMEOWNERS
Lucy Newton and Sam Hopkins
LOCATION York
HOUSE SIZE 142m²
CONSTRUCTION METHOD
Oak frame with SIPs encapsulation
BUILD TIME Jan 2018 - Aug 2019
BUILD ROUTE Subcontractors and DIY
PLOT COST Gifted
BUILD COST £267,000
VALUE £375,000



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Along with many of her family members, Lucy Newton has lived on a picturesque 50-acre smallholding close to York for much of her life. Her great grandfather bought the land nearly 80 years ago; it is now managed by her parents, who live next to her grandma, who is, in turn, neighbour to Lucy's aunt and uncle. "I loved growing-up here and, apart from a few years living away at university where I met my partner, Sam, I've never wanted to live anywhere else," says Lucy. "Sam and I want to take over the smallholding one day, but we needed somewhere to live. We hoped to build our own home but we had to find a way to navigate planning first."

AN OAK FRAME DESIGN

Lucy and Sam had their eye on a street-facing, unsightly asbestos shed next to her parents' 1930s house, the original property on the smallholding. Flat open fields extend for miles around them with a lake and woodland that Lucy's grandfather spent his lifetime nurturing. However, with the location half a mile outside the village, the couple faced a major

problem. "We're not in the development zone so we knew there was a high chance planning would reject our application," Lucy explains.

After the couple graduated university in the summer of 2014, they decided to begin turning their dream of building a home on the site into a reality, and moved in with Lucy's parents. Sam, who'd studied design in his Building Services Engineering degree, produced the drawings, supported by retired architect Ron Illingsworth, a friend of Lucy's parents.

"We wanted an energy-efficient house and had been inspired by oak-frame designs we'd seen in magazines, but we thought this might blow our budget," says Sam.

Not one to give up, Sam progressed an oak-frame design, with structural insulated panels (SIPs) and clad in chestnut. The street-front elevation was designed to look modest compared to the rear, which features two glazed gables facing the views. Sam also found a solution to planning department's ridge height restrictions by designing a tempered pitched roof: a 11m flat section runs through the middle of the roof, meaning the ridge height is kept low, but the interiors have high ceilings in most rooms.



SECURING A MORTGAGE

By spring 2016, Lucy's parents had handed over ownership of a 400m² parcel of land where the asbestos shed was sited; Lucy and Sam had also decided to employ planning consultants, KVA Planning. "We didn't have a lot of money to play with but our consultant was knowledgeable and empathetic," says Lucy. "I don't think we'd have got planning without her advice."

At the end of 2016, planning permission was approved but the couple needed to source suppliers and arrange a mortgage, so building work didn't start until early 2018. By then they'd accrued £30,000 in savings to put towards their £250,000 budget.

"Only two lenders agreed to lend on a timber build, which meant we had to accept a variable interest rate, which was expensive," says Lucy. "Fortunately, Mansfield Building Society allowed us to offset the first payment against the land, which got us watertight before we needed more funds."

Sam took on the role of project manager. "I costed out the entire design, packaging up key stages to get quotes," he explains.

"We found a supplier willing to help us find a way to afford an oak frame within our budget. The impact of oak has turned our design from ordinary into a home with character"



NATURAL CONNECTION

An air source heat pump (above) provides the house with hot water and underfloor heating. The French chestnut cladding will weather while the bifold doors connect the house to the beautiful countryside.



THE KITCHEN
The Fairford Slate Grey Howdens' kitchen contrasts with a hardwearing dark grey limestone flooring from Doga Natural Stone. The white quartz surfaces from Belgravia Stone and pink splashback tiles from Porcelain Superstore provide a delicate balance.

BUILD TIMELINE

Hired a planning consultant	MAY 2016
Planning application submitted	JULY 2016
Planning application approved	DEC 2016
Secured a mortgage	DEC 2017
Broke ground	JAN 2018
Oak framed erected	MAR 2018
Structural insulated panels	MAR/APR 2018
Roof finished	APR 2018
Septic tank installed	JUNE 2018
First and second fix	AUG 2018-AUG 2019
Moved in	AUG 2019

With their hearts still set on an oak frame, the couple approached local firm Parker Oak, who agreed to tailor their oak frame design to one they could afford.

"Then we got SIP Build UK to supply and install the SIPs," adds Sam, "but we hired a telehandler and crane ourselves. Creating packages of work saved us a fair bit of money."

GETTING STUCK IN


Lucy and Sam were keen to be hands-on during the build along with invaluable help from Lucy's dad, John, a skilled bricklayer, tiler and joiner.

One snowy day in January 2018 they began the footings, but digging proved challenging in the sandy-clay soil. The trenches collapsed and filled with water, but they had to press on to meet Parker Oak's schedule to erect the oak frame.

"We poured the ground floor slab with just five days drying time," says Sam. "We were worried frost would crack the concrete so we laid plastic over the top, held down with ladders and planks." Within a couple of months, the house was watertight and the couple turned their attentions to installing the septic tank. The challenge was filling the tank with water at the same time as filling the surrounding hole with concrete to secure it in place.

"This was the most stressful part of the entire build," Lucy recalls. "We struggled to get the water in fast enough and the tank rose too high. We cut our losses as it would've been impossible to get out, and began again with a second tank — with more success this time!"

The couple spent the next year painstakingly working through the very long list of jobs to complete their new home, using trades only when necessary, and juggling their full-time jobs. The big day came on the 31st August 2019.

"We'd lived and breathed the build for so long that for the first few months living here felt surreal," says Lucy. "We both feel a huge sense of achievement now we're finished and feel very lucky as we couldn't have done this without my parents' help or Sam's skills." 



THE GROUND FLOOR
A woodburner from Stovax sits at the heart of the largely open-plan living area and supplements the underfloor heating, supplied by Pro Screed, on chilly winter evenings. Meanwhile, fixed panels of triple glazing (left) with e-coating reduce solar gain on the south-west rear.

KEY SUPPLIERS

PLANNING CONSULTANT
KVA Planning: www.kvapanning.co.uk
DEMOLITION Nigel Jagger:
www.njagger-demolitionandplanthire.co.uk
DAK FRAME AND CLADDING
Parker Oak: www.parkeroak.co.uk
SIPS SUPPLIER
SIP Build UK: www.sipbuilduk.co.uk
ROOF Ben Dowker Roofing: 07974151814
FASCIAS AND SOFFITS
AH Fabrication: www.ahfabrications.com
WINDOWS AND DOORS
All Things Glass: www.designbifolds.co.uk
PLASTERER
Daniel Hurd Plastering: 07837379770
AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP CGE Plumbing & Heating: www.cgeplumbingandheating.co.uk
UNDERFLOOR HEATING
Pro Screed: www.proscreed.co.uk
STAIRS Pear Stairs: www.pearstairs.co.uk
KITCHEN AND INTERNAL DOORS
Howdens: www.howdens.com
BATHROOMS
Victoria Plum: www.victoriaplum.com
FLOORING
Doga Natural Stone: www.dogastone.co.uk
WOODBURNER Stovax: www.stovax.com

THE KNOWLEDGE

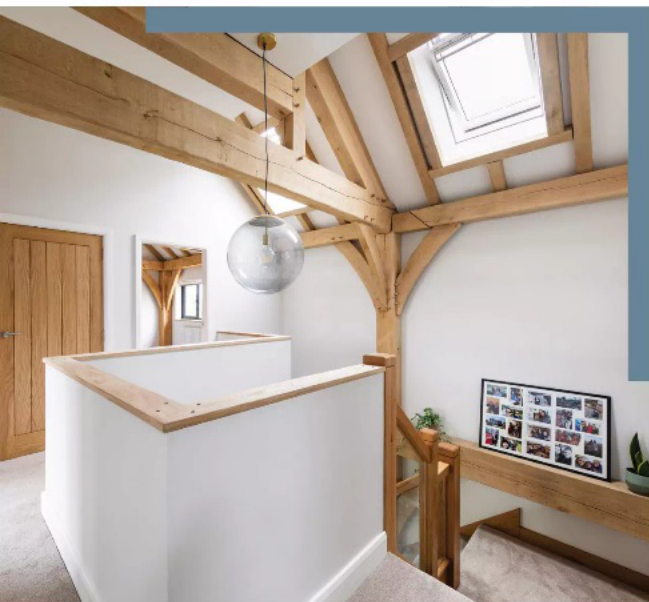
BUILDING OUTSIDE THE DEVELOPMENT ZONE

"My parents' smallholding is about half a mile from the village. Their shed, which we wanted to replace with our new home, fell outside the local development zone," begins Lucy. "We knew getting planning would be a challenge so we hired KVA Planning consultant, Katie Atkinson. Our rationale for building was three-fold: the asbestos shed was dangerous and an eyesore from the road; we needed to live on the smallholding because we planned to take over the business one day; and we wanted to build an affordable home.

"As we approached the end of the eight weeks when the planning officer was expected to respond with a decision on our application, Katie was advised we were heading towards a refusal, despite having nothing but positive comments from the village. She suggested we get in touch with our local councillor, who sat on the planning committee. Lucky for us, he supported our application and 'called it in' to the committee so we had a chance for everyone to hear our application. We had to get onto the councillor quickly because an application can't be 'called in' after permission has been refused.

"In September 2016, Sam gave a four-minute speech to the committee on why we wanted to build, and then we listened to them deliberate. The main problem seemed to be a concern that we'd sell the house on. In the end, we won approval with a 8-4 vote – it was a big day for us!

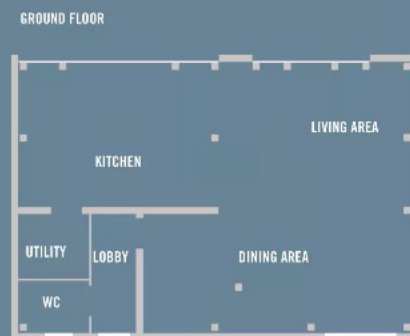
"We were so glad we'd spent time planning the design as there were no conditions and we were able to build exactly to the plans we'd submitted."



DIY DECORATING
Lucy and Sam painted the house themselves, protecting all the oak with a breathable membrane fixed with Walter Strong Cleanroom construction tape, which doesn't leave a residue when removed.

THE FLOORPLAN

Placing the staircase along the front of the house on the north-east elevation allowed for a large kitchen-living-dining room. Floor-to-ceiling glazing in this open-plan space faces south-west to maximise light and capture long-reaching rural views. Upstairs, bedrooms sit around a central stairwell with the master en suite overlooking the countryside.





BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Fees (structural engineer, planning, legal and insurance)	£11,303
Preliminaries	£3,000
Foundations	£27,960
Oak frame and SIPs (including brickwork, windows and cladding)	£131,428
Roof structure and tiles	£21,555
Floor, wall and ceiling finishes (including plastering, decorating, carpet and tiles)	£17,074
Joinery and fittings	£11,031
Plumbing and heating (including air source heat pump, woodburner, bathroom and kitchen)	£31,426
Electrics	£9,895
External works	£3,074
TOTAL	£267,746

THE BATHROOM
 Sam designed the layout for the plumbing work and fitted it with the help of Lucy and her dad, testing all the pipes before the finishes went in. The sanitaryware is from Victoria Plum.



THE BUILD



THE ORIGINAL ASBESTOS SHED ON SITE



THE COUPLE'S NEW HOME HAS VIEWS OVER THE FAMILY'S SMALLHOLDING – INCLUDING AN ORCHARD

THE GROUNDWORKS AND OVERSITE



THE OAK FRAME IS ERECTED



THE SIPS ENCAPSULATION SYSTEM



THE FIRST FLOOR INTERIORS TAKE SHAPE

