

When Gordon Bott saw Flowers Cottage for the first time he described it as having zero curb-side appeal; it was his wife Ann Marie who had the vision to see how the cottage could be transformed into the home of their dreams.



Flowers Cottage for many prospective purchasers was ready to move into, yet its railway carriage configuration, having evolved over the years from three worker's cottages, resulted in a cramped living space with a dark interior.

They had already sold their five bed house, which in Gordon's words, haemorrhaged heat; the couple now wanted a house which would be energy efficient. They also enjoy travelling and so security was important to them, they

didn't want anything too isolated and enjoyed being part of a community. Flowers Cottage had the perfect location, nestled at the foot of Farnborough Church, with close neighbours, but not overlooked. Having lived in a village location with a good pub before, Farnborough on the border of Oxfordshire and Warwickshire, with its award winning gastro pub, felt like it could be home.

Indeed the local pub was where Ann Marie persuaded Gordon at least to consider the possibility



of Flowers Cottage, she saw the opportunity to add an extension to provide an additional bedroom and open up the living space downstairs. With three renovations under their belts, they explored the possibility with the building contractor they had previously worked with. He showed them houses with oak framed extensions, but it was clear if Flowers Cottage was going to be their long term home, the whole house would need to be transformed, a project beyond their experience.

Despite being a successful businessman, creating their new home was not about profit, but equally Gordon wanted to make sure they would not lose money. It was obvious to him, with a purchase price of over £400,000; the project would need to create a very special home, if the figures were to stack up.

Another issue was planning permission, the cottage was Grade 2 listed, in a conservation area and in an area of significant historic interest. The chances of securing planning permission were 70 per cent, according to their planning consultant who Gordon had worked with before.

He put them in touch with an 'old school' architect to draw up the plans. As an engineer, Gordon initially struggled with the illustrative approach and lack of CAD drawings, but what the Conservation Officer needed to see was how the plans for the cottage would sit in its beautiful surroundings and so the approach worked. With planning permission granted and spring fast approaching, Gordon was keen to press on with the build. But without detailed drawings to secure building regulation approval, the project couldn't proceed.



It was at this point that Gordon's stonemason, Ryan Groves, introduced Gordon to David Smith, with a view to building the green oak framed extension. Gordon and David hit it off immediately, exploring ideas and in working with the existing architect, it became clear that David could provide the detailed approach to the build which was now required.

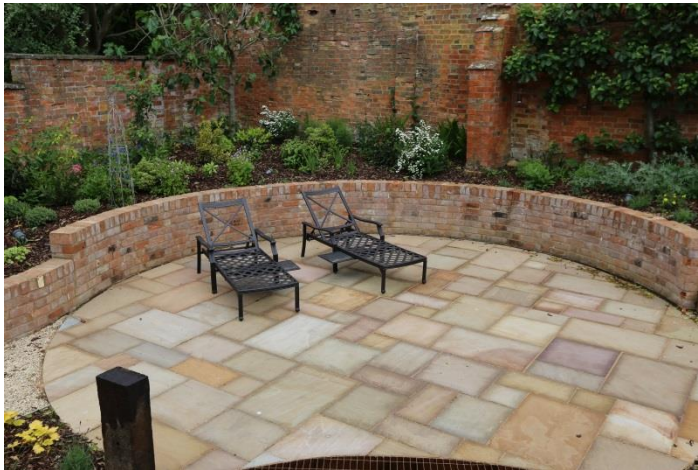
David Smith from the Design Centre is an architectural designer with extensive experience of working with listed buildings and providing green oak framed extensions. With a detailed understanding of the building process he understands the implications and costs of taking a vision through to a finished product. Gordon who describes himself as a fairly demanding client, recognised that this project was now taking too much of his time and he needed someone he could trust, skilled in every aspect of the project. "David spoke to me as a professional, translated jargon into something meaningful to Ann Marie and myself, flagged potential problems before they happened and came to us with a range of solutions that would work. At every stage he was there for us, on site every day and at the end of a phone when I wanted to speak to him.

"Our dream got bigger as we worked through the plans with David. This project was never about profit, it was going to be our home and we wanted something very special to make the most of our beautiful surroundings. The project took nine months to complete and now we wake up every morning with a smile on our faces. The end result couldn't have been better it has exceeded our expectations and more. And the process to get there has been an enjoyable one; with David and me discussing the next stages around one month ahead of the contractors doing the work, we could work out every issue in advance. Ann Marie and I wanted to be involved in the creative process



but needed someone who could not only think with us, but implement our ideas and meet our exacting standards.

“The space really works for us as a couple; I can be at my desk whilst Ann Marie is enjoying her lovely kitchen. It’s no ordinary desk of course, it’s sheet glass which floats in a corner of the dining area, one of the many ideas David suggested. The cottage is no longer a dark railway carriage, the different areas flow and the quality of light is very special, due to the clever use of glazing.



“Arguably the area where most value was added is the garden, where the steep tiny plot has been transformed into a series of levels which provide us with a number of sitting areas where we can enjoy the morning, afternoon and evening sun.”

Does the house live up to their expectations on energy efficiency? Yes it does and surprisingly it uses electric underfloor heating combined with air conditioning units, which also heat. Gordon ran the numbers and with no gas in the village, an aversion to oil or LPG, electric was the way forward. At just £100 a month for their total energy usage, the couple are delighted with the savings they are making, despite the lack of renewable technologies they could have used. Of course their home is super insulated, the windows and doors are fitted to millimetre tolerance and Gordon has tweaked every aspect of their energy usage to ensure a very comfortable environment.

And, what about profit? Well having had the house valued and despite paying top dollar for a ready to move into house which they then gutted, Gordon knows he could sell the house tomorrow and not lose money. Is it for sale? “I would never say never, after all I am a businessman, but this is our home and we couldn’t imagine living anywhere better.”