

When Isobel and Peter first bought their barn which nestles in the foothills of Warwickshire's Burton Dassett country park, the only financial institution brave enough to give them a mortgage on a renovation project that incorporated a massive basement extension was the Ecology Building Society. And as their name suggests, a key criteria of their build was the energy efficiency of their home.



Like many self builders, they had a set of architects and building control drawings, but they soon realised if they were to achieve the criteria required to attain a reduction in their mortgage interest rate offered by the Ecology, there would be a lot more work required. Unfortunately for Isobel and Peter they were well down the build process and were trying to recover from a disastrous basement build which had left them badly out of pocket.

Peter said, "We were caught between a rock and a hard place, we needed to bring the build costs down if we had any hope of getting the barn, let alone the basement completed. That's when, following a conversation with David Smith of The Design Centre, David offered to take a look at their plans to see what could be achieved."

David designed out all the stainless steel fitch beams which supported the entire south and east facing glazed sides of the barn and instead incorporated a green oak frame, which helped to reduce the cost.

Isobel and Peter are delighted with the look of the oak framed roof and so too are the locals. "You don't expect the local farmers to be complementary but the work David and his sons have done to build our oak framed roof is first rate. We chose Hill Barn Saw Mills to manufacture the oak frame as we wanted a more authentic look and David worked with them to ensure they were able to deliver what we needed. The attention to detail on achieving airtightness has been impressive. The design allows for movement of the green oak while ensuring the massive glazed elevations are protected and air tightness isn't compromised."



Isobel and Peter's advice to other self builders is extensive:

Make sure your architect or architectural designer is as passionate and experienced in eco-building as you need for your build, most aren't!

Most architects' plans don't incorporate the level of detail required to ensure you achieve exactly what you set out to do in terms of finished look and budget. In most cases a builder will interpret for you and that might not always be what you had in mind.



There is a big advantage in having a complete service from concept through to completion as there is one guiding mind throughout the process, The Design Centre are unusual in that they are builders as well as designers, so they understand what design elements cost to build.

By opting for a project management service and using individual trades as you need them, although you have to pay a project management fee, you don't pay for the contingency or profit a builder will add to your fixed price and so overall you not only save money but you get what you wanted with a high level of quality control.

And a final word from Isobel and Peter: "As self builders, with experience of several renovations, we didn't know what we didn't know! Having an experienced project manager working with you to keep you on the straight and narrow is worth every penny as it saves you from costly mistakes."

