

American Dream



After this it took another 12 months, with the aid of local architect Elspeth Beard, to obtain planning permission. The planners were not averse to the style of house, but they did scale down the application. Barbara had originally intended to have her own sitting room, but this would have enlarged the footprint and was not permitted. She now has an en suite ground floor bedroom.

“When I look back, although the planning was the most stressful part, I realise that the planners were quite generous really.”

Although Karen had undertaken extensions before, it was her first complete self-build, and she found it very stressful. “There were all sorts of frustrating delays, plus the fact that when we purchased the property we weren’t sure whether we would get planning permission for what we really wanted,” she says. “And to be honest, we were not sure what that was. I have always wanted to live in a barn conversion but as there was no barn to convert and we had a pretty limited budget, we decided a softwood prefabricated post and beam frame was the next best thing. It was my mother who found Timberpeg, and when we saw their prices for a bespoke house to suit our needs we realised that English oak framing would be far more expensive. When we approached Jonathan Cobb, Timberpeg’s UK representative, he was very positive and proactive from the outset.

“We decided to take this route, but it was all very fraught. We realised that if we should fail in our application, we would have to sell. If this had happened we would almost certainly have got what we paid for the site, which I still consider we bought for a bargain price, but we would have lost two years and gone through an awful lot of unnecessary stress.”

However, Karen has no regrets about the house system and Timberpeg. She still has no garden, and her spiral staircase irritates her as it is positioned incorrectly, but Barbara and the girls love the house and location, and their horse training business is established. “We realised early on, as five women, one quite elderly, that once we gained planning permission we would need a house that could be completed rapidly,” says Karen. “We were ▶



TOP LEFT: The view from Karen’s bathroom through the ‘circle top’ window is amazing.

BOTTOM LEFT: The house features many useful mezzanine levels.