

Country in the City

Beautiful architecture, energy efficient & deeply connected with nature

Meet your hosts: Ian, Sue & Sophie

We have lived in Cambridge for many years, and we had upgraded our existing 1930's house to improve its energy performance. We wanted to live more sustainably - in a different environment, and with more beautiful architecture.

However, after looking for land elsewhere, we decided to build in our own back garden, seeing this as an opportunity to make a step-change. We wanted to create an exciting, beautiful, low energy house which reflects our wish to reduce our impact on the environment.

Design and Construction

We were granted planning permission on our first application in January 2008. The design needed to address the issues around trees, cars and the visual street scene. Interestingly, sustainability is not an issue in planning terms, as long as the new development "preserves and enhances the Conservation Area".

The natural world is important to us, so we have made strong connections between the house and garden, which is managed for wildlife; there is a sedum roof, wildflower meadow and pond.

The house is timber-framed, oak clad with exposed wooden beams to support the roof structure. The foundation is concrete piles, with steel beams reinforced with concrete containing recycled fly ash. This design minimised concrete use and also impact on the roots of nearby trees.

Insulation

There is 350mm of expanded polystyrene insulation in the floor. The external walls contain 100mm of hemp insulation and 120mm of external wood fibre insulation. They are faced on the inside with Smartply board, which has no formaldehyde resins. Internal walls are [lbstock](#) clay bricks which provide thermal mass.

The roof has 250mm of foam insulation and part is covered in sedum for biodiversity and to enhance the appearance. The house is well sealed to eliminate draughts.

Glazing

All windows and doors are high-performance double-glazed. The house faces south to maximise passive solar gain which on sunny days in the winter halves the heating requirements.



www.openecohomes.org

Country in the City, Cambridge – 2020

Open Eco Homes is a [Cambridge Carbon Footprint](#) project. Charity number 1127376





Lighting and appliances

We make the most of natural light, with full-length windows and doors. There is plenty of natural light streaming through the full length windows and doors. In the internal bathrooms light is reflected into the house by mirrored roof windows. Most lighting is low energy, a mix of LED spotlights and circular CFLs. There are energy-efficient appliances throughout. We have a smart meter which monitors our electricity usage and helps us avoid wasting energy.

Heating and energy

Natural materials used include low VOC paints, wood, stone and [Marmoleum](#) floors. The underfloor heating is supplied by a ground-source heat pump and domestic water is heated by a solar thermal collector on the roof. We have a whole house heat recovery system which provides controlled ventilation in an energy efficient way.

Air is extracted from the bathrooms and kitchen and passes through a heat exchanger where it warms the incoming air, supplied to all rooms. We keep the thermostat low in the living room and use the wood-burning stove for supplementary heat in the evenings. The stove's design is very efficient and suitable for a smokeless zone.

Water management

Rainwater is collected off the roof and stored in a 4250 litre underground tank, and supplies garden taps, low-flush toilets and the washing machine. Inside taps are aerating to save water. We use 55 litres of water/person/day.

Performance

We use around 9.5MWh per annum, which is slightly under 30% of consumption in our old home.

Our top tip:

“paying attention both to creative ideas and innovation are great, but should be supported by thorough attention to detail”

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Key Specifications:

Property age: 2010

Type: Custom built, detached

Wall type: Timber frame

Floor area: 210 m²

Project timescale: Planning 3 years; building 2 years.

Cost of Build: £600,000

Occupants: 4 adults

Energy Usage compared with old home (also 210m² area)

	Energy kWh/m ² /year		Carbon KgCO ₂ /year	
	Electricity	Gas	/m ²	/person
Old	53	143	53.2	2792
New	41	none	20.8	1092

New home: 200kg pa logs burned – zero carbon rated

Insulation & Glazing

- External Walls: 100mm hemp + 120mm wood fibre
- Underfloor: 350mm expanded polystyrene
- Thermal Mass: clay brick internal walls
- All windows & doors: high performance double glazed

Lighting

- Natural light: full length windows & doors
- Internal bathrooms lit by mirrored roof windows
- LEDs, circular CFLs

Heating

- Passive solar gain
- Ground source heat pump
- Underfloor Heating
- Solar thermal panels
- Whole house heat recovery & ventilation
- Woodburner

Water

- Rainwater harvesting for toilets, laundry & garden

Sustainable materials

- Wood, stone, Marmoleum

Key Contacts, Products & Costs:

Architect: [Mole Architects](#)

Builder: [Cambridge Building Company](#) 01223 324 105

Heat Recovery System: 50w system [HRU 4](#) from ITHO £5k

Ground-source heat pump: [Kensa](#) + 6x40m boreholes £15k

Solar hot water: [Thermomax](#) DF100 30-tube evacuated tube system; 1633 kWh/year. £4.5k including cylinder

Woodburning stove: [HWAM](#) £2.5k

