Open Home: 51 Coppice Street

This house appealed to us because of the location and orientation: very convenient with (almost) level access to the town centre, not overlooked in front or behind, and with a south facing rear garden. However, we considered the house too small for two active retired adults who each needed space at home for our various projects.

Alterations

We explored the options for extending: a loft conversion, a rear extension, a garden office. In deciding what to do and how to tackle it we were influenced by:

i. What was permissible. Not only did we need planning consent. We also had to approach the Housing Association that now oversees the estate, our neighbours on either side, and Wessex Water because the terrace has a shared sewer running behind the houses.
ii. What would work for us into old age. Although a loft conversion offered extra space, we didn't want the second floor to be an integral part of daily living. We wanted twin handrails and standard treads/risers on all staircases. And we wanted ground floor living to be possible if needed.
iii. Sustainability. We wanted our compact home to work for us and to be energy-efficient. We aimed to reduce draughts; ensure good insulation; upgrade the windows; use healthy sustainable materials; incorporate ample storage throughout; and equip rooms to suit multiple purposes where feasible.
iv. Cost. Of course we had a limited budget for the works.

We opted for a timber-framed rear extension the same depth as the former wash-house which was to be demolished. It would have underfloor heating sourced by the existing, relatively new, gas combi-boiler and would eventually have a green roof. It would provide a flexible dining room / office and incorporate a w/c & shower, and would necessitate some remodelling of the kitchen. We also chose to have a modest attic conversion (without a dormer window) to be accessed by a standard staircase. The attic space was to be used for storage, occasional third bedroom, and flexible project or office space. The staircase meant there was no usable living space on the first floor landing but we were able to incorporate some large storage cupboards. All windows were to be replaced and the roof would be well insulated.

Builders / Materials / Providers

The plans were drawn up by Terry Pinto, a Frome-based architect, and the works were done by TL Builders of Sturminster Newton. Getting the necessary permissions and then having the works done took about 18 months – during which we lived in a rented house on The Maltings.

The solar panels were supplied and fitted in 2019 by Dorset Energy Solutions of Gillingham at a cost of £5100 (includes all labour, cabling and the inverter). We receive FIT payments of around £200p.a.

The replacement windows were supplied by Newglaze of Blandford: cost led us to choose relatively high spec (A+ energy performance rating, 1.3u), UPVC double-glazing with a high proportion of recycled plastics. Roof windows are all Velux and fitted with blinds (some solar powered) so that we can shield against the sun's heat or reduce light pollution at night.

Fitted and free-standing pine storage cupboards, bookcases, kitchen units, wardrobes were all made to our specifications by Gillerson Pine of Trowbridge.

The kitchen worktop was manufactured and supplied by Diamik Glass in Leeds and includes a high percentage of recycled glass. At around £2.5K this was a bit of indulgence!

We managed to retain, reuse, or obtain 2nd hand: paving slabs, internal doors, kitchen sink & flooring, some appliances and furniture.

We chose to use synthetic carpet on upstairs floors and stairs because of a previous bad experience where carpet moth attacked a wool carpet.

The sedum for the green roof was supplied by Sedum Green Roof of East Knoyle (cost £1300). It arrived in trays which we fitted ourselves.

Living here

Water Use: January 2020 to January 2021 water usage = 46 cubic metres, or 123L daily use for 2 people. (Wessex Water quotes daily average for single person household:181L)

Our gas & electricity provider is Good Energy.

- Gas Use: June 2020 – June 2021: 589 units … approx. 6592 kWh. Good Energy estimate is 6860 kWh. Nationally, Ofgem suggests the average for a 1-2 bedroom (low usage) household is 8000 kWh.
- Electricity Use: June 2020 – June 2021: 1883 kWh. Good Energy estimate is 1815 kWh. The national average for 1-2 bedroom (low usage) household in 2020 was 1800 kWh.

Solar PV generation: June 2020 – June 2021: 2816 kWh (compares with estimate 2666 kWh pre-installation). Income from Feed-in-Tariff about £200p.a.

Wood burner: We lit it three times last winter. We have a limited supply of seasoned wood but can't replenish it out of our own garden. We have doubts about whether it's carbon neutral for us and we also have concerns about air pollution (indoors & out).

We got rid of one car when we started living together. Now we find our single 15-yr-old car doesn't get heavy use. We're lucky to have parking in front of the house so we could charge an electric vehicle there if we had (or shared/rented) one.

We grow various fruit & veg (2021: apples, raspberries, strawberries, salad leaves, beans, peas, courgettes, tomatoes, herbs) and Rachel participates in growing at the community farm (Shaftesbury Homegrown). She's also just remodelled our wildlife pond. We enjoy the mature trees behind our plot and delight in the sparrows that are numerous on Coppice St.