

**Planning
APPROVED!**



Nicola Thomas

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“You’ve Got to Follow it Through Because the Rewards are Amazing”

Nicola Thomas from ARCH-angels Architects explains how the practice helped one client achieve rare planning permission for an ‘outstanding’ home in East Hampshire countryside

When were you introduced to the site?

We were introduced to the project while working with a planning consultant in Hampshire who knew the client. The client had owned the site for a number of years — the landscape was stunning, and he got the idea to build a new house and retire here. He was aware it was going to be difficult to achieve planning and knew that he needed to trust us to produce something that

was architecturally outstanding in order to meet Paragraph 55 requirements (a clause in planning policy that allows homes of exceptional design to be built in open countryside).

He briefed us to create a building which worked with the beautiful landscape and would be as eco-friendly and low impact as possible while still being a family home. He left us to it and we had regular meetings to feed in ideas.



“The second planning application was refused too, despite the architect review panel commending the scheme”

We also had landscape designer Dan Lobb on board from the beginning, who was instrumental throughout the whole process.

Was the scheme well received by the planners?

We met with the planners on site early on to tell them what we were thinking of doing. It became clear that they were not interested and very much against the whole thing. We had to undertake public consultations and meetings with the parish council, which again took time. Initially the design we put forward involved the whole site and construction of an additional building for teaching schoolchildren about nature and low-energy building, but neither the locals nor the planners liked this idea and our original application was refused. For the second planning application we took everything they didn’t like out but that was refused too, despite the other architects on the architect review panel commending the scheme. Eventually we won on appeal, but the whole process took six years.

What was the thought process behind the design?

Paragraph 55 houses were originally seen to be large country houses built to look like they were 200 years old, but we wanted to create something outstanding and contemporary. We

wanted to use local materials and decided on the local Bargate stone, locally coppiced glulam timber beams, a grass roof so the house appeared as a continuation of the land, and building the walls out of rammed earth from the site — the idea being that there were no artificial materials.

The single-storey, two-segment design of the building, formed by the existing contours of the site, splits the house. The southern segment has a slightly larger surface area to include rooflights to bring light down into the home, as well as a curved glass wall which opens out on to the garden and terrace with its natural pool. On the east side of the house is the bedroom wing which houses five bedrooms, and then to the other side are the zoned open plan living spaces.

What advice would you give to other clients looking to take on a Paragraph 55 site?

People start off with a great deal of enthusiasm but when it starts to take time they get tired and concerned. It’s a leap of faith as there’s no guarantee that you’re going to get planning permission. Resilience and stamina are key — you’ve got to want to do it and have vision. It’s not something to take on if you just want to dip your toe in, you’ve got to follow it through because the rewards can be amazing. It’s a kind of architectural alchemy creating something from nothing, but if it works it can be worth it. **1**

Following the Contours

In order for the new dwelling to nestle within the landscape, a grass roof allows the house to appear as a continuation of the site, with the curved two-segment design - constructed of rammed earth, Bargate stone and glulam timber - built into the natural contours of the landscape.