June 2006

This month: More planning permission fun, plus the static caravan arrives !

Saturday 3rd

It's the long awaited caravan moving weekend. We drive up to Doncaster to help prepare the caravan for moving so there are no delays tomorrow. Steve (the seller) had already disconnected the water, electric and sewage, so the main task was to get it off the blocks with the aid of a trolley jack and pray the 16 year old tyres didn't go pop when we lowered it back down. Gingerly I pumped the tyres up, the gaping cracks in the sidewalls were a bit of a concern, especially given the markings suggested they should be pumped to around 50-60psi...I bottled out around 40 psi fearing for my life. Slowly with gritted teeth we lowered the caravan down, and miraculously the tyres seemed to hold. Would they still be like that tomorrow morning ?

Somehow we had to get two 47kg propane gas cylinders home - one empty, the other full and rather heavy. The idea of them rolling round inside the caravan didn't seem a good one. Turns out they strapped down quite nicely in the back of a Passat estate with the seats folded down, although we're not sure if it was completely legal to do so, and I drove very carefully home with a nervous eye on the rear view mirror whenever we slowed down !Sunday 4th

An early start up to Doncaster this morning, to meet the haulage company when they arrive to collect our static caravan.

We chose a company called Cranage Haulage (01477 535279 or 07966 512267) from Cheshire, as we really needed someone who could do the tricky manouevring onto our new site - most transporters will only deliver to the roadside. Cranage said they would bring a small tractor, and sure enough - they arrived with a vintage tractor on the back of the truck.

Extracting the caravan from it's existing position was tricky, only a few inches manoeuvring space as it was being backed out onto the road. But as the haulage company said - if it went in, it'll come out - it's the destinations that are the worry !

I got the role of "traffic management", as the fairly busy road was blocked temporarily, and then down to one lane for some time.

The caravan was eventually strapped down on the truck, fitting very snugly behind the tractor, and departed for its next home. We chucked all the wooden blocks in the back of the Passat, said goodye to Steve and his dog, and rushed home ready for its arrival.

Cranage parked up a few hundred yards down the road from our plot, where the road was wide enough. The caravan was offloaded, hooked up to the tractor, and towed through the village to our driveway, whilst traffic queues built in both directions. Traffic chaos ensued as the caravan turned off the road, we beat a hasty retreat to let the two queues of traffic converge on a narrow village road with parked cars down one side....

The next stage was where Cranage really earnt their money. Getting the caravan down our driveway was as tight as it gets - only millimetres to spare with a wall on one side, and a stout tree on the other. Inch by inch it came through, with one of the Cranage chaps underneath the caravan placing wooden blocks under the tyres to lean it in away from the wall and trees.

Eventually it was through, and full credit to Cranage - undamaged too, they have obviously done this many times before, inch perfect all the way.

We took quite a few photos - see the photo section.
Wednesday 7th

Found out that planning application will have to go to committee after all, in July. Yet another delay we could do without. We've been told there are two objections, preventing a straightforward delegated approval. According to the planners, the Parish Council are objecting to the revisions, on the basis that the house will be overlooking other properties (untrue) and it's out of keeping - even though the application is just a very minor revision to the existing detailed planning permission. Also the Conservation Advisory Forum are objecting to the general principle of revising the house, saying it should be redesigned from scratch. A little odd, considering we have altered the design to the conservation officers wishes !

On the upside, our application has recommendation for approval by our (senior) planning officer.Friday 9th

We hear from our neighbours (who sold us the plot) that our planning application is on the Parish Council meeting agenda - on Monday.

Decide we will go to the meeting to hear what the Parish Council have got to say. We've never been to a Parish Council meeting, should be interesting ! Monday 12th

The evening of the Parish Council meeting. We arrive at the village hall, walk around the kids wrestling class and into the cosy committee room. I say cosy, because it is a small room just big enough for a table and chairs, with no windows, and it's a hot evening.

One by one the councillors turned up, they all said hello and seemed friendly enough, easing our nerves (slightly). In the few mintues before the meeting starts, members of the public are allowed to speak, and we were duly asked if we wanted to - so I just introduced us as the new owners of the plot, and outlined that our application was a minor revision just to make the room layout more useable. I felt it important to make clear the house wasn't getting any bigger.

Once the meeting was underway, and we'd got past the contributions of the local policewoman and MP, the councillors suggested bringing our application up the agenda so we didn't have to wait all night (and we got the impression these meetings really do go on all night...).

Here we go, we thought, and braced ourselves to hear their opposition - remembering that we are not allowed to speak once the meeting is underway.

Imagine our surprise when not one of the councillors had anything against our plans ! We were invited to join in the discussion and we were filled in on the history of the previous applications and issues. But there was a unanimous acceptance of our present application, which was a complete surprise but a very welcome one.

We go home feeling happy, but confused why the planners think there was an objection in the first place. I write an email to the Parish Council clerk asking if he could write to the planners and confirm their acceptance - in the hope it could prevent our application from having to go to committee.Tuesday 13th

John, the Parish Council clerk rings me up to say he'd got my email, and would immediately email the planners to say they have no objection.

Shortly afterwards I ring the planners, who confirm they've received the email. When asked whether this means an approval could be granted without going to committee - I was told they would consider it again and let me know.Monday 19th

Got a phonecall from the planners today. Our application has been approved, and the approval letter would be in the post shortly.

A landmark day. I immediately tell Emma the good news, and ring the architects to let them know they can finish off the drawings.Wednesday 28th

After getting the verbal go ahead last week, the long-awaited planning permission approval letter has arrived at the architects. Hurrah ! Friday 30th

I spend some time this afternoon removing the old carpets from the caravan, and replacing a section of floor.

Today also saw my first selfbuild injury - a comedy "miss nail, hit finger, swear loudly" hammer incident. I'm sure it won't be the last !