July 2006

This month: We meet our first builder, plus more house selling woes.
Sunday 2nd

In a bid to spruce the caravan up a bit, today we bought some cheap new carpet to replace the well-used original. I've never laid carpet before, so it could prove interesting ! Tuesday 4th

This evening we had our first meeting onsite with a local builder, to see if he is interested in the project, and find out more about him. The full drawings are not complete yet, so this was really just an informal chat to gauge reaction.

A neighbour works at a local builders merchant, and recommended a couple of local builders (and warned us against another!). One of them lives in the same village as our new plot, and as it turns out was responsible for a particularly nicely built large extension just up the road that we have been driving past for the last few months. So we thought we'd give him a try.
Neither of us have had much experience dealing with builders or tradesmen, and having heard all the advice about choosing a builder you could get along with, we wondered how our first builders meeting would pan out.

He made a good first impression by arriving exactly on time. And instantly we felt at ease, he seemed a genuinely nice chap, very chatty. We looked through his portfolio wallet which showed a good mixture of brick and stonework examples, and from conversation he seemed pretty clued up on the use of natural stone - being quite familiar with using stone from the local quarry. After looking at our plans and walking round the plot, we got the impression he would be very keen to take the project on as it would be a good local showcase for his work, and he would do his best to fit us in fairly quickly.

So an encouraging start; when the drawings are complete and the architects start getting quotes, he'll definitely be on the shortlist.Wednesday 5th

An early phonecall from our solicitor brings bad news. Our house sale - for which we were expecting to exchange contracts today and complete on Monday - has fallen through. Again. Unbelievable. There are 3 of us in the chain, and our buyer's buyer has pulled out, even though everyone had signed and were seemingly ready to exchange last week.

We are glad that we decided not to move anything into storage over the weekend, as we had been quite tempted to do so.

So a cautionary tale - don't take anything for granted until contracts are safely exchanged !

It might not all be bad news though; our buyers are in touch with their mortgage company to see if they can extend their borrowing and still go ahead with the purchase of our house, before they find a new buyer. Fingers crossed, we should know the outcome soon. Thursday 6th

A nervous wait for news of whether our buyers can proceed, or whether we are back to square one with the house sale.

Bad news - they can't proceed without selling. Back to square one - the house goes back on the market for the third time.

We retrieve a few boxes of stored items and begin to make the house presentable for viewings again.Friday 7th

Talk about a rollercoaster...

I rang the estate agents in the morning to check we'd be back on Rightmove by the weekend, only to find out our buyers have just accepted an offer from their neighbours, who want to buy their house as an investment !

So the sale is back on ! We think....Sunday 9th

I fix my first leak in the caravan roof. We spotted it a few days ago, when we decided to pay a visit during a rainstorm to check for leaks. Luckily it was directly over the bath. The first of many we suspect.

We paid a visit to the people up the road who had their extension built by the builder we met earlier in the week. We chatted for some time - they were full of praise, and showed us round his work, it all looks very good.Monday 10th

Another meeting with the architect tonight, to finalise a few points on the drawings. They seem to be progressing well now, and he's added some nice touches since our last meeting.

It's been a little while since we saw the drawings, and we leave feeling quite excited as it's starting to feel like a real house now. However, we also feel more nervous about what it's going to cost. It's a big house.

As our design is partly three storey, more stringent fire regulations come into play. We need to decide whether to use fire doors throughout the three storey section (expensive), or build in a sprinkler system (similarly expensive!). Initially the sprinkler option seems like a good idea, it leaves us with more door options, plus if ever there was a fire, it makes sense to knock it on the head quickly. I don't think they look obtrusive either, just small white circular discs in the ceiling.

The architect was hopeful he'd finish the drawings this week and get them submitted for building regulations approval. Things are moving at last ! Thursday 14th

I spoke to the estate agent today, looks like our house sale is definitely back on, we've all agreed a provisional completion date of Friday 11th August.Friday 15th

Receive confirmation from the council that we officially have an address at the new plot. Of course, the letter is sent to the new address - where we don't have any sort of letterbox for the postman to use and it goes to our neighbours. Another job to add to the list !Saturday 16th

It's going to be a hot day today, so we hire a carpet/upholstery cleaner, and clean all the seat cushions from the caravan so they can dry in the sun. Hopefully they'll feel a little fresher after 16 years of service in the caravan. We are reminded of the caravans holidaying past, when we find sand in the cleaners waste tank - it almost makes us want to live in it !Monday 17th

Received a copy of the drawings from the architects today. They are more or less complete now, just require some final input from the structural engineer. The house is looking good, but the likely build cost is concerning us. It's becoming quite apparent we need to do as much as possible ourselves.
Wednesday 19th

Had an update from the estate agent today. The people who are buying our buyer's house have bought all the search results, and (with our buyers permission) have already put it on the rental market. Gives us a bit more confidence that this sale will go through ! Wednesday 26th

With the approach of the house sale, I thought I better get organised and sort out the services to the plot.
So, I've booked the hire of a digger from Hire Centre for a couple of days in August.
Because we applied for Buildstore's Trade Card, we have an account with the Wolseley Group (Hire Center, Build Center, Plumb Center, Pretty-much-everything Center), so this is our first use of a trade account. The Trade Card also set us up with an account at Jewson.

Now here's a question. You've probably seen those big metal plates that utility companies put over holes in the road so people can still drive across. I need to get one of these, so us and the neighbours can still use the drive while still dug up, but had no idea what they were called, other than "them big metal plates what utility companies put over holes in the road so people can still drive across". Do you know what they are called ? Needless to say this didn't throw up many results in Google. Eventually I discovered they're called "road plates" - and so didn't sound too much of a novice when asking the hire company over the phone if they had any.

Now the digger hire is booked, it gives me a deadline by when I need all the ducting, and the underground service warning tape (by the way, if you've got any of this spare - please email me!!).Thursday 27th

The water pipe arrives. I ordered it online last week from www.easywatering.co.uk, a 50m reel of 32mm MDPE for main supply to the house, and a 50m roll of 25mm to run to the caravan.Friday 28th

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Picked up the electricity ducting from our area contractor (Morgan Utilities). 12 x 3 metre lengths on the roof, plus a 20m coil in the back - the Passat starts to earn it's keep !

Also spoke to the architect; the structural engineer has completed his final input, he hopes to have submitted our drawings for building regs approval by end of next week. Sunday 30th

I can't put off the carpet fitting in the caravan any longer. I follow Emma's suggestion to unscrew & remove all the seats in the living room, lay one large area of carpet, then screw all the seats back in place. This also allows us to remove the remaining manky bits of carpet that were previously tucked under the seats. The seats come out surprisingly easily; hopefully the Haynes tradition of "refitting is the reverse of removal" will apply !Monday 31st

Ordered a letterbox from www.postboxshop.com. Life doesn't get more exciting than this.