

HPH333

Ben Adam-Smith 00:00

This is House Planning Help episode 333. Hi there, I'm Ben Adam-Smith and this is the podcast for you if you're interested in self-build or retrofit. I'm exploring what houses we should be building in the 21st century, and trying to break down the major roadblocks that may get in our way.

Ben Adam-Smith 00:18

Coming up in this session, my guests are Brendan and Ludka Powell, and we're exploring the One Planet development initiative.

Ben Adam-Smith 01:32

Parc y Rhodyn is our focus today and it didn't win a UK Passivhaus award, but it was in a tough category and I did wonder whether it was going to be a three-way tie. They actually decided, and this hasn't happened before, that there were two winners: Cannock Mill Cohousing and Ostro Passivhaus. But there is lots to love on this project, as we're going to hear. So, Brendan and Ludka Powell are the self-builders, and we're going to explore the One Planet development initiative. I started by asking Brendan how this all began.

Brendan Powell 02:15

In 2008, we found an old house which was a semi ruin, around the corner from where we are now in Hebron. So we bought that, it had a bit of land with it. It wasn't as much land as we really wanted, but it had a nice bit of land with it. And we spent three or four years doing that house up.

Ludka Powell 02:33

So basically, in the previous house, we have slept in every room of the house: we have moved from a bedroom to living room to the kitchen. Before we had children it was possible, we could take three years doing it room by room and as the money was coming. But then whenever we were there, we always thought about doing something more wholesome, bringing the life and the work a little bit closer to the land, back to basics and make it more sustainable. The house that we had was very expensive in running, it was expensive in heating, it was always cold and even though we'd done everything that we could, it was always damp. And there was nothing you could do about it.

Ben Adam-Smith 03:12

Who is researching here, because you both have a very high knowledge of sustainability? So how did that develop?

Brendan Powell 03:20

I think it's something that we've been interested in ever since we first met. We've always been interested in growing stuff, just in having a sustainable lifestyle in general. It's something that we've always been keen on. And it's something that we looked to do in our previous house, but we found that

the land we had was really more woodland, it wasn't really suited to growing lots of crops and that sort of thing. So then we started to think well, maybe we needed a bit more land. And we met somebody through one of the local schools where our daughter was going, who was doing a One Planet development. And soon as I learned a bit more about that, it just seemed immediately the right thing for us to do. It seemed like it's something that had to be done.

Ludka Powell 04:04

When we met, we were in contact with various communities. We were travelling around the world - we met in Australia - and we always wanted to find out okay, well, this is how we are living, but is it actually the best way to live? And can we find a different way what it's concentrated on outside a little bit more going back to basic making the things what used to make people happy?

Ben Adam-Smith 04:27

This is a great opportunity to find out more about One Planet. I know some basics, but fill me in. If we're looking at this, what is it all about?

Brendan Powell 04:36

To put it very basically it's a Welsh Government initiative that started in 2010, and allows you to get planning permission to build on agricultural land. It's designed to get people back to living and working in the countryside. As everybody probably knows that over the last 100 years, everybody wants to live in cities but there's still a lot the countryside has to offer, but we need to get people back to living and working, growing food locally. All these things are aspirations of the Welsh Government.

Brendan Powell 05:09

It also means that you've got to have a sustainable lifestyle, so with as low a carbon footprint as you can possibly manage. So we've got a zero carbon house, we also need to produce our own power on the site, so we've got photovoltaics for that. We need to deal with our own waste from the site, and we need to grow our own food.

Ludka Powell 05:31

Most of the people have waste exported, we don't export our waste, we have sophisticated composting system. So we have a wet toilet inside the house, but we actually are able to compost our solids, so our waste goes through separator and all the liquids go into double system of reedbeds. And the soil is just eroded down until they become compost, and we use them on the trees. So there is nothing what we have to export from here what it's no longer useful. And with family life, it is so important to be able to support the way how you live with your own food. So aspiration of the One Planet life is that you produce 60% of your food on site. There is a lot of things what we over produce, we sell a lot of salad to local shops, we sell our sauerkraut, so we grow cabbages, we ferment them, we jar them, and then we sell them. And obviously this is an income we can use this income too.

Brendan Powell 06:26

To meet our basic needs. Basic needs are things like your council tax, running your car, your IT, your phone bill, and the food that you can't produce on site is also part of your basic needs. So therefore, you've got five years to get your, your One Planet development up to scratch where you're meeting

your basic needs from the site. Having got halfway through, it is a pretty big ask, but we are on schedule to do it. We rely a little bit at the moment, because we're still finishing building and still finishing setting up, so we rely a little bit on having some help from volunteers who are great, who help us with looking after the veg gardens and things like that. But they also learn a lot about sustainable life and permaculture and they seem to get an awful lot from it too. So it's a two-way thing that works really well.

Ben Adam-Smith 07:17

Now I'm intrigued by this five years. What happens, you make it sound either like you're gonna get something at five years or there's a penalty to pay?

Brendan Powell 07:25

Well, I think that it's one of those things that's that it's very difficult to sort of quantify how you're going to be doing in five years time, you've got to make a business plan. Every year, you have to do a progress report. And at the end of five years, I'm sure that if you're on the right track, and you haven't quite reached all your targets by five years, then you write a second business plan and you say, Well, this is going to happen. And then we haven't got that yet. But this is how it works basically.

Ludka Powell 07:53

So we are talking at the moment about things what we can quantify. So we are talking about the percentage of our income because you have to quantify things in order to be able to see if it works or not. But we haven't mentioned the very important parts of the One Planet where we are actually trying to regenerate the land. So from the monoculture, and blanket farming having fields and fields of cows, or you know the same crop, we are trying to bring biodiversity, we are trying to grow crops along with the animals. We are farming organically, and we are not all the time focusing on profits. So some decisions we make are going to be beneficial in another 10 years. So we have planted big orchard and we try to work with the nature, we try to allow the insects to do what they are doing. And hopefully we can keep all the caterpillars off our cabbages by planting enough marigolds next to them, and we will lose some but generally speaking, we get really great cabbages, you know.

Brendan Powell 08:56

Yeah, and we've also planted an extra acre of woodland, which will attract wildlife. We keep bees to help pollinate. And we produce quite a bit of honey from our bees, too. So it's a holistic process to get the whole thing working properly.

Ben Adam-Smith 09:13

All of this sounds like a mammoth task. I know from my own garden, which is not very big. So looking at the word sustainable, is this something that is sustainable?

Ludka Powell 09:26

That's a good question.

Brendan Powell 09:27

I think it is sustainable. Having done it, I think doing it all in five years is a really, really big ask. Give us 10 years and I think that everything will be perfectly fine. You know, we might not be doing everything right. Everything is supposed to after five years, but certainly by the end of 10 years when we've got a really productive orchard and when a lot of the woodland has grown and we're attracting more and more wildlife then I think the whole thing will become much more sustainable.

Ludka Powell 09:56

There is also this whole concept of putting monetary value on things that you do. The difficulty with the world how we are functioning is that little people like us are competing against supermarket. So we can go to supermarket and buy a bag of salad for, I don't know how much because I grow it, but the locally sourced food starts gaining more and more appreciation. So I think people actually do come out of their way to come to people like us. And the more of us it's going to become, maybe people will be able to actually start thinking, Oh, hang on, before I go to the supermarket, why I just want to go and see what those guys down the road have. And then the whole travelling of the food will start going back to the basics and we are going to be able to grow.

Ludka Powell 10:43

So as Brandon said, 10 years, I think it's a lot more realistic target. And it is sustainable in this sort of way that we put a lot of energy into the land, but we get a lot of energy from it you know, it is very fulfilling job for us. But it is an awful lot what you have to do in a very short period of time.

Ben Adam-Smith 11:03

So the time aspect of this, have you got any other income? You clearly sell some of your produce, but how does that work? And we have to come and talk about the house in a minute, but let's just finish up on how you survive that we are in this fantastic house. But yeah, day to day living.

Brendan Powell 11:23

So day to day living, we spend most of our time working here on the land. But we also both have part time work, which we do outside. We run a small garden maintenance business and look after holiday cottage changeovers as well. And she has a couple of women that help her every week,

Ludka Powell 11:41

We basically one or two days per week out, more or less.

Brendan Powell 11:44

And we don't have expensive lifestyles. And we're lucky enough to have done all this without having a mortgage. So our outgoings are fairly low. But we're not into expensive holidays or anything like that. So we live a fairly modest lifestyle. And we're obviously we're aiming to meet all the requirements of the OPD basically,

Ludka Powell 12:03

It's not that we sacrifice. Our nature is that we are quite content with what we've got, we don't have other needs. And if we did have different needs, then we would look differently, but our home doesn't cost us because we are off grid, we have council tax to pay, we are living in Passivhaus. As long as we

make sure that we maintain everything working well within this environment, we actually don't need to earn a lot of money.

Ben Adam-Smith 12:27

So the planning permission side of this One Planet scheme, building a house in itself is a huge project. So can that be a slight distraction from what you've got to do outside? You've got to do two things at once.

Brendan Powell 12:41

It does take up a big part of it, and it's taken up a big part of our time over the last two years or so. A lot of people that do One Planet developments build houses under the caravan act. So they build a slightly different house, which means that they don't have to go through building regs. But we felt with our family we needed a bigger house, so that's what we did.

Ludka Powell 13:01

It is like starting two massive things. People say the biggest thing you have ever done in your life, it's build your house. And then you have to build your business and turn the piece of wasteland into ecological heaven. They are huge asks, but it seems that One Planet development attracts very determined people who are really driven, who really care about the future of this world. And if you have children, and you are living in this world, you think we really can't carry on like we are, there has to be different way. So maybe One Planet development policy, it's not perfect, but it's an experiment to try to take the society towards the right direction now to see how we can do it better. So we all need somewhere to live, because our ecological footprint for the environment where we live, it's one of the biggest ones. So we can make sure that that space what we live it's actually ecologically sound.

Brendan Powell 13:01

And also living on site helps you reduce that by not having to travel to where you're working every day. So that's a big difference. Also, as Ludka was just talking about, there's a One Planet Council, which has recently done a review of the whole One Planet system and how it's been working over the last 13, well 12 years, it was done last year. And they've shown that it can be very successful, that the existing One Planets, although there's not a huge amount of them, the existing developments have been successful and are doing a great job in trying to feed people locally, in sustainability, and in the ecology of their land, etc. But there's also several flaws in the whole thing, which needs to be addressed. And we need to attract more people to doing One Planet developments. And there's certain recommendations that they've made, which hopefully will be added to the legislation to you know, to help people coming along in the future.

Ben Adam-Smith 14:48

What are the pros and cons then of off-grid living?

Brendan Powell 14:54

Well off-grid living I think it helps us to be self-reliant. I think that's one of the main parts about it. We're self-reliant, we can't just go and switch on our electric oven at nine o'clock at night in December because we want to heat something up. We have to think about what we're doing.

Ludka Powell 15:09

And our children, they are growing up with thinking, we're going to have a bag of sweets, those sweets, they will create a pile of plastic, okay, what is going to happen with it, because we don't have throwaway culture in our house, whatever it is, it's here.

Brendan Powell 15:23

And by dealing with all our own waste, it's the same principle, it's very easy in a normal house just to go and flush the toilet and what's in your toilet gets taken away, and you'd never see it again, never think about it. We have to constantly think about what we're doing with our waste, we have to keep an eye on everything. It makes us more self-reliant, and it makes us think about what we're doing, which I think would be good for everybody.

Ben Adam-Smith 15:45

Any downsides that you've noticed?

Ludka Powell 15:50

It's labour intense. And our ratio, it's two grown-ups to three children, so we are outnumbered. And the children are great, they help with lots, but it is still our responsibility to make sure that everything is done, we have to keep on top of the things and if things get forgotten, they become bigger responsibility for us.

Ben Adam-Smith 16:10

Let's talk about the house then. And how this slotted in to the plan. So you had this old, traditional house that was cold and damp. Where do you go from there?

Brendan Powell 16:23

We wanted a house that was going to cost us very little to run, not need lots of heating. We could have made a house that was less insulated, but then we thought well, we'd have to be spending more of our time on our One Planet development creating firewood to burn in the house, which is also not great for the environment. That's right. But it also the time taken to chop down trees, chop it up, keep it for X amount of time before it's able to be burnt. By doing what we're doing, we've saved an awful lot of that. The amount of wood that we use is much, much smaller than, for example we were using when we were living in our temporary accommodation. We had a wood burner, and we were burning wood pretty much all day and half the night. And whereas here we only need enough with, in the winter anyway, just to cook our dinner on our cooker. And that gives us enough residual heat to heat water, etc, etc. So having minimal input into running the house was one of our main criteria in building it. And we decided that a Passivhaus would be the really the best way to do that.

Ludka Powell 17:28

We really like the idea of Passivhaus and we thought that this initial cost which you are putting, it's also obviously building materials. They have environmental costs, but the initial cost, it's really well spent because then you don't have actually any other carbon footprint, but also any financial outgoings. So then we tried to marry the two concepts. So One Planet life means sustainable materials or reused

materials. And then this is why we thought well straw bale Passivhaus it just seems like the solution to our problems. And the environment of the straw bale house is just so great that we thought this is the best way of going forward for us.

Ben Adam-Smith 18:09

Now, just to clarify here a second, so what utilities have you got coming to site versus generation and so forth?

Brendan Powell 18:17

We don't have anything coming to site. So we have our own water on site from, a borehole, we produce all our electricity from solar photovoltaics, we've got two separate systems. And we deal with our own waste through a composting toilet and reedbed system.

Ben Adam-Smith 18:34

Is that One Planet, everyone has to do this?

Brendan Powell 18:38

Yeah, basically. I mean, there are certain things that you can, if there's mains water on site, you can use mains water, for example, that's not really that much of a problem.

Ludka Powell 18:45

There are many different sustainable solutions, how you want, you can decide how you're going to deal with your waste and any of them are good, but generally speaking, not exporting your waste. It's one of the principles.

Ben Adam-Smith 18:59

Straw is something that they always make fantastic houses but not necessarily always high performance houses. So you are confident going into this?

Brendan Powell 19:13

We were confident. I mean that I think the Ecococon people that we were dealing with told us it would be like it is and in reality it's turned out to be exactly like they said it would so that's worked really really well. I think in a normal straw bale house to get it up to Passivhaus standards is quite difficult but with the Ecococon system there's the Steico wood fibre insulation which goes on the outside, which then brings the house is completely wrapped around like a winter coat and then that brings the insulation up to the required level.

Ludka Powell 19:44

After doing this panel system with the straw you follow all the principles of Passivhaus building so you are following all the airtightness principles you install all your windows with attention to detail to make sure that there aren't any air leaks. You do all the taping on all the junctions on all connections, so once the main structure is up, we are just thinking about it like a normal Passivhaus.

Brendan Powell 20:09

It's all in the detail.

Ben Adam-Smith 20:11

Now being off grid, I'm thinking about the MVHR now, so how do you keep it running?

Brendan Powell 20:17

Well, the MVHR uses very little power, actually, it only uses 20 to 30 Watts all the time. So there are a few days in the middle of December and January when there's not very much light, and then we'll run the MVHR in the day, and we'll switch it off at night. And it doesn't have any detrimental effects by doing that.

Ludka Powell 20:33

Over the last year, we have worked out that we have two inverters and we have one inverter what doesn't use much power at all, but it can't use our appliances. So this has been like a revolution in our life really last winter, because the big inverter can use almost one whole battery of power just by being switched on.

Brendan Powell 20:53

It uses about over two kilowatt hours per day just to run the inverter. So we fitted a smaller inverter, which still runs the MVHR and runs the lights and laptops, etc. But that only uses a very small amount of power, so we can just easily switch from one to the other. And yeah, that's revolutionised our ability to survive the winter without getting short on power basically.

Ben Adam-Smith 21:16

Let's go back to the design process of the house. What did you want from it to begin with? We know high performance is on the agenda. What else?

Brendan Powell 21:25

Ludka wanted a veranda. I think I wanted a veranda too. We've managed to incorporate a wraparound veranda, also dealing with the shading of the house in the summer.

Ben Adam-Smith 21:35

Was that intentional? Why did you want this veranda?

Ludka Powell 21:38

We wanted to have somewhere where you can live outside as Welsh climate, it's known for being not very dry. But when it's dry, it's hot. And it's overheating the room. So we wanted to have somewhere to live outside. But also we started thinking about the concept of overheating. And then there has been a lot of thought put into it to make sure that we actually incorporate the shading over the house into the veranda concept. So then the shading it's not too big, but not too small at the right angle to let the sun in when we need to get passive heating inside the house, but to not to get the house overheated in the summer. And this works just amazing.

Brendan Powell 22:19

This works really, really well. It's one of the most successful parts of the house.

Ben Adam-Smith 22:23

Ninja overheating strategy here that I always enjoy it when I can come and look at where the sun is shining. And I can tell it just well not even just it misses the windows.

Brendan Powell 22:34

And we're not even mid-summer yet.

Ben Adam-Smith 22:35

Exactly, exactly. And then you're quite pleased with when you start to get the gains again.

Ludka Powell 22:40

Last autumn we were in this house, we were just amazed how warm it continued to be when the air temperatures outside started cooling down. But we were getting so much sun inside. We've never even thought Oh it could be warmer, it never came across our minds.

Brendan Powell 22:55

A sunny day in winter, the sun shines through the windows, it warms the floor up and it keeps the whole house warm for till the next day. It really works.

Ludka Powell 23:04

And in the summer, we never think about opening the windows and the number of people who have visited us and they say, well, but how do you feel without opening the windows? Well, we never feel we want to open the windows.

Ben Adam-Smith 23:15

You can do!

Brendan Powell 23:17

We sometimes open the big doors here. And you know, when we're using the veranda.

Ludka Powell 23:21

If we want to we can open it we just never feel like there is need for it.

Ben Adam-Smith 23:25

That's fine. Yeah, if you look at it that way.

Brendan Powell 23:28

I was gonna say some other things that we wanted in the house.

Ludka Powell 23:32

Oh, yes. It was supposed to be very practical, almost like utility house, you know, a house that has to work for family. Everyone has to have their own space. But we need to have a big space where we can

all be together so everyone can sit, but everyone can have their own private space. We wanted to bring our working environment into the house so we can process all our vegetables and prepare them for sale, have office so we don't have to go somewhere and be frozen in a little cabin at the end of the garden.

Brendan Powell 23:59

Like in our last house.

Ludka Powell 24:02

So they were the main principles, so we could live altogether, bring our work environment into the life but have private space where we can rest.

Ben Adam-Smith 24:11

You used an architect who was a friend of yours - at a far.

Ludka Powell 24:17

It's very good friend of ours - Michal Rudnicki. I grew up in Poland and I met him when I was in university in Warsaw. He is Polish born but grew up in Canada and he studied architecture in Canada and then subsequently he came back to Poland and practicing architecture there. But our budget has been very small from the very beginning. We could not afford really to do what we aspired to do. And we were very determined to find a way.

Brendan Powell 24:47

And we were lucky we knew people like Michal who helped us for free basically.

Ludka Powell 24:51

So we called Michal and we said look, this is what we are going to do and if there's any other crazy person who will think that we can pull it off if it's going to be you, do you want to help us? And he said, Yeah, I will help you.

Brendan Powell 25:04

He didn't have much expertise in Passivhaus building, but his brother is a Passivhaus builder in Canada. So he, I think he used his brother a little bit for some of the ideas and help him with the technical aspects of it all.

Ludka Powell 25:19

The best thing about this was that he has asked us when we were starting to go into separate rooms, and both write a list of the most important things for us what we want from this house. And he said, and then we will definitely stick to number one on each list and everything else is going to be a compromise. It hasn't been everything, but it worked well. So we both had actually the veranda as number one or two on our list, because we thought it's just so crucial for our life. But our extravagance is the height here.

Brendan Powell 25:50

Double space height we really liked the idea of and the other thing that we wouldn't compromise on is that Ludka wanted a concrete floor.

Ludka Powell 25:57

It's just we have we live in a muddy field, sweeping any other floor all the time is just a nightmare, but this is just so easy to maintain for us. So it is again the practicality aspect.

Brendan Powell 26:09

And it also meant that when we laid the concrete floor, we haven't had to buy carpets or nice wood flooring or anything like that. It's just saved us a lot of money from that point of view.

Ben Adam-Smith 26:19

I get the impression that you've both been very engaged in everything, which is actually it's quite hard, you sometimes find one person is leading the way. So how have you achieved that? Or are you just both very passionate?

Ludka Powell 26:19

We have actually hand floated the floor, we wanted to have it properly polished. But again, it was the lockdown and it was all very complicated, and to get all the machinery people and everything together in one day it was impossible. And then a friend of ours, Ben Griffiths, he said, Don't worry, I think we can do it guys. He came here with floats. And Brendan was helping as well. And we have come up with this floor and we love it.

Brendan Powell 27:01

We haven't quite battered each other to death yet! So we've had a few problems along the way.

Ludka Powell 27:07

Michal, who has helped us to design this house, he said, the biggest achievement for any architect is if the clients will stay together until they pay the invoice. Obviously, we didn't pay Michal but we're still together, and sort of starting to be able to laugh about all of this! It has been incredibly intense.

Ludka Powell 27:30

I think what we have learned, we have run businesses together for a number of years. We have learned to delegate, so I don't deal with carpentry as a general rule. I do the wet things. So I have done a lot of clay plastering. All the clay here it's pigmented, so the top coat I have mixed all the natural pigments into it. And when I was mixing it to start with, I asked Brendan, do you like this colour? He was just like, you know, just make decisions. Just do it. And this is how we have done it. There were certain things which Brendan decided about, there were certain things I decided about, and certain things what we both said, Okay, I feel strongly about this.

Brendan Powell 28:08

We both need to do this bit.

Ludka Powell 28:08

Yeah, we have to ask actually each other's opinion about it. I think we also had, by this time, enough trust in each other's ability.

Ben Adam-Smith 28:16

And Brendan, what have you done on this project versus when you thought someone else should be doing this?

Brendan Powell 28:22

I haven't really thought that anybody else should be doing it. There's a few things that I thought blimey this is a lot of work for one person to do! Ludka and I have been involved in pretty much everything right from the ground works up to the finishing touches. All the interior woodwork we've done, foundations. We had obviously we had help from builders with putting the main structure of the house together.

Ludka Powell 28:45

But you still were helping.

Brendan Powell 28:46

But I was still working with those guys. Even with putting the tin roof on I was helping with that.

Ludka Powell 28:51

Plaster boarding - there's far too much plaster boards or boarding the walls with whatever board you are boarding.

Brendan Powell 28:59

I worked with one other guy and we did all the interior boarding just the two of us. And that was a long tedious job.

Ludka Powell 29:06

And decorating, I have decorated myself.

Brendan Powell 29:10

And Ludka has done all the painting.

Ludka Powell 29:10

There's a lot of ceilings when you have to paint them.

Ben Adam-Smith 29:15

One aspect of this that's quite interesting is you're in rural Wales with no mobile phone signal. So has that caused any complications?

Ludka Powell 29:25

Well this was actually from my point of view, this was the biggest complication because there is no mobile signal anywhere around here. So in order to answer a mobile phone, we would have to drive a

mile out from here and we didn't have the phone connection or internet connection and those were very hard to get here.

Brendan Powell 29:44

It took forever to get BT to come and connect up a temporary line to the to one of our sheds.

Ludka Powell 29:50

It was over six months before we could get anything here. So we were basically building a house without being able to talk to people who needed to contact us in order to find us. It was just absolute nightmare.

Ben Adam-Smith 30:04

Just coming back to One Planet as we round off this conversation. So when we've got the house and you're developing it as a Passivhaus, are there any other aspects that One Planet feeds into the project?

Brendan Powell 30:20

One of the main things is the use of recycled materials wherever possible. We've used recycled foam glass in the floor, we've obviously got straw panels, which we've already mentioned, the roof is insulated with cellulose, which is basically recycled newspaper.

Ludka Powell 30:37

Wood fibreboard is also the waste.

Brendan Powell 30:37

Wood fibreboard is also made from wood fibre. But inside the house, we've also, for example, used a kitchen that was taken out from another house because they were getting a new kitchen, and we've managed to make that into our kitchen. We've done the same with some of the bathroom fittings, and somewhere else as well. With the utility room. The utility room we've used a recycled sink and recycled units. So we've done a lot of things. It's also saved us quite a bit of money. These days they cost a fortune and it's cost us next to nothing basically to do a quite nice kitchen.

Brendan Powell 30:43

So how have you worked out when is a good time to spend the money versus when is a good time to save? What are your cost savings?

Ludka Powell 31:20

Construction was always been the most important thing for us. We have spent money very carefully on construction, but we always went for the best solution we possibly can. Because this is something that we can't replace.

Brendan Powell 31:33

And hopefully we will never have to replace. A kitchen we can replace.

Ludka Powell 31:36

But a kitchen, it really doesn't matter. It is already a recycled product. So if we have to replace it, it's not the end of the world. It's very easily solvable. We can build something, repair it. But if the construction is not put right, it's very difficult to correct this.

Ludka Powell 31:54

With going to the One Planet also we haven't talked about using local produce. So all the cladding it's made of local larch from within 10 miles of here. All our architraves they are made of local ash, there are windowsills what we have made out of little pieces and oak what we have from various random places. So all of this is locally sourced, what is another very important principle of One Planet development.

Ben Adam-Smith 32:20

Do you have any advice if someone is looking at this framework and thinking I'd like to go down the One Planet route?

Brendan Powell 32:30

I think you need to be quite strong minded.

Ludka Powell 32:34

Resourceful.

Brendan Powell 32:35

Resourceful. That's the word I was looking for, resourceful, yeah.

Ludka Powell 32:38

Dedicated. Never underestimate how much you have to do. Never give up. And there is solution to everything. Someone has told us when we started, that we are entering a neverending problem solving exercise.

Brendan Powell 32:53

And this is exactly what it is, and we've become really good at researching and solving problems.

Ludka Powell 32:59

And whenever we come to the point where we think God, there is no way out from this one, we think, okay, so what are the options? And quite often is we start with the options, just forget about it all and just let's start again and say okay, and what is the next option? And what is the next option? And actually, very quickly, we find the option what is actually very doable, very possible and not so hard. And you know, we can move forward.

Ben Adam-Smith 33:22

I like it. Finally, what has it been like living both in the house and on the land?

Brendan Powell 33:29

Living in the house is great. I think the whole process has been strenuous to say the least to start with. But we're only halfway through our five year plan so we've still got plenty of time left to get everything going. And we're hoping that things will get easier as we move along.

Ludka Powell 33:46

It's the hardest thing I've ever done. And I've done a few things before, but it also has brought a sense of integrity to life. And to you know, you have to continuously pick yourself up from failure because crops fail, buildings don't go the way how you do but somehow it all makes sense at the end.

Brendan Powell 34:06

And also there's a big sense of community within the One Planet movement itself. You know, we recently held a spring gathering here and many of the other OPDs came and we spent an afternoon together discussing how we were getting on and problems etc. So there's a big sense of community.

Ludka Powell 34:23

And to care for environment for the way how we live, for the way how the future will live. It makes us feel we are the people who need to take responsibility. And somehow it feels that we are working really our best to take our own responsibility. So this makes it worth it. It's hard but it makes it worth it.

Ben Adam-Smith 34:41

Well Ludka and Brendan, thank you very much.

Ludka Powell 34:44

Thank you.

Brendan Powell 34:44

Thank you.

Ben Adam-Smith 34:47

Head online to take a look at the show notes that accompany this session: houseplanninghelp.com/333. Review the key points, you can also check out the short video to get some visuals on the product. I just think they made a lot of good decisions. I was wondering whether some of that might be to do with how far down the road they were on sustainable living anyway. It's clear that they knew a lot about it to begin with, so when it comes to building a house that give you an advantage. And they'd clearly done renovation and things like that before.

Ben Adam-Smith 35:19

I also want to highlight the shading, because I've visited many passive houses over the years and few of it get the summer comfort spot on. They all do well, my house included, will not go over 25/26. But, there's a but there. I have to do the night cooling. And so there are still some gains during the day. And I think that this is so impressive that they do absolutely nothing and they get those really low temperatures in there. And it's all the design of the house, no electronic blinds, no intervention, it's just having that external shading. And I think Juraj Micurcik behind how it precisely starts to get its gains at the right time of year. Clever, clever stuff. And I was standing in there thinking, if I do this, again, I'm

going to go down this route. Because this vernacular, or this way of making the building do the work, you still get all the light coming in. That still looks good, but you don't get the sun. And there's a big difference. And as a Passivhaus dweller, I just think that's the next level up. The summer comfort is a huge benefit, particularly as we go into these turbulent years ahead.

Ben Adam-Smith 36:33

If you've got a comment, or you'd like to ask a question, you can do that in the show notes. We'll also link you to people like Huff and Puff Construction, Ecococon, One Planet development where you can get more information: houseplanninghelp.com/333.

Ben Adam-Smith 36:49

My call to action is to check out The Hub. And this is our membership community that we've been running for many years. We've recently had a knowledge share, one of our hub members, Paul Ashby, has installed some solar PV and that involved a lot of researching and then specifying so we've had a chat with him about what he's learned. Also some exciting news. We've got our first regular expert and what that means is Es Tresidder who is our man is going to be here every three months. All sorts of interesting skills that you might have heard of him already. He's a Passivhaus consultant, he has tackled his own retrofit, he upskilled in DIY. But every quarter we're going to have a chat with him, you can pose your questions. And if this goes well, we may well onboard a few other specialists in different areas as well. So that in The Hub too, we've got our courses, we've got the forum, our live training sessions with guest experts: houseplanninghelp.com/join.

Ben Adam-Smith 37:47

That's it for another day. Thank you so much for listening. The House Planning Help podcast is produced by Regen Media: content that matters.