

# 21st century update

**Mark and Stephanie Fernandez** have transformed an outdated bungalow into a contemporary masterpiece fit for modern family life

WORDS EMILY SMITH PHOTOS ANTHONY COLEMAN



The original bungalow



**W**hen commercial property developer and chartered surveyor Mark Fernandez was badly hit by the financial crash in 2008, he turned his eyes from big projects to domestic ones. “We ended up selling our house, pulling our three kids out of private school and almost had to start again,” he says. His first new venture came about in 2011, when his wife Stephanie spotted a fish and chip shop for sale. “We converted it into a four bedroom house, semi-project managing it ourselves and learning from all the usual mistakes along the way.”

Their next undertaking was an eco self-build, which featured an airtight structure and renewable tech. “I had a desire to do something green and went as far as I could with my budget – we were very close to being zero carbon,” says Mark. So when they came across a 1960s bungalow for sale ripe with renovation potential, they knew they had the skills needed to transform it into something special. “My wife has an eye for design detail and I’ve got

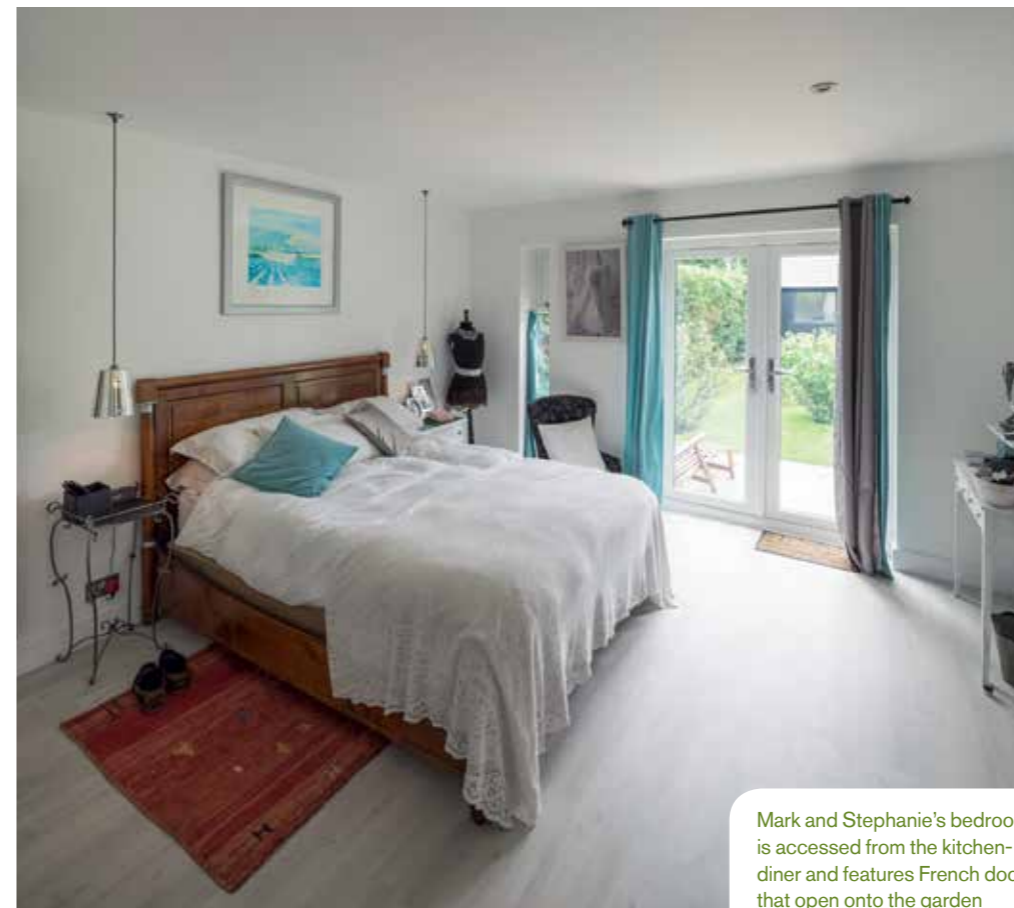
my property background, so we’re quite a good team,” he says. “We wanted a decent sized plot in a semi-rural location – this was perfect.”

## Coming up with plans

The previous owner was an architect, who put his stamp on the building in the late 1980s – but it was now looking dated and the layout didn’t suit the needs of 21st century family life. The entrance hallway was small and the kitchen was located in one of the front north-facing rooms, with two living rooms and a conservatory to the rear. “We gave it a lot of thought as a pair,” says Mark. “I sketched out our ideas and then Stephanie took it away and shared her thoughts.”

The internal layout was to be completely changed to create more of an open-plan scheme, the heart being a spacious, light-filled kitchen-diner at the rear. This was maximised thanks to a new extension and a wide span of glazed doors opening the room onto the garden. Towards the front of the house, a bathroom and WC

“ My wife has an eye for design detail and I’ve got my property background, so we’re quite a good team ”



Mark and Stephanie's bedroom is accessed from the kitchen-diner and features French doors that open onto the garden

**THE FERNANDEZ FILE**

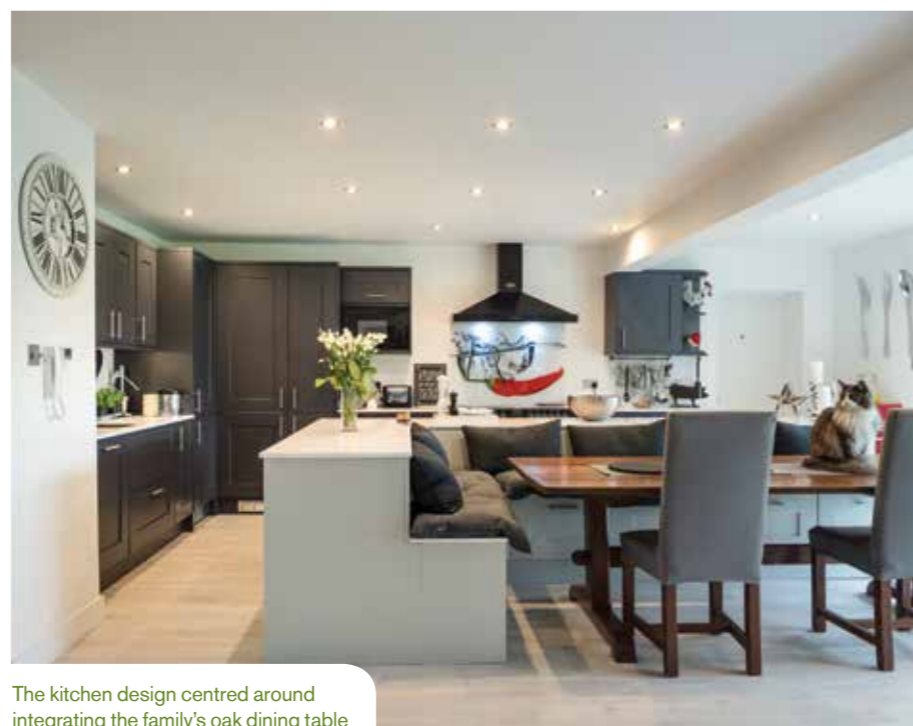
**NAMES** Mark & Stephanie Fernandez  
**OCCUPATIONS** Chartered surveyor/ property developer & director of serviced office business  
**LOCATION** Windsor, Berkshire  
**TYPE OF PROJECT** Renovation & extension  
**STYLE** Contemporary  
**CONSTRUCTION METHOD** Brick & block  
**PLOT SIZE** 0.25 acres  
**LAND COST** £720,500  
**BOUGHT** 2016  
**HOUSE SIZE** 271m<sup>2</sup>  
**PROJECT COST** £275,000  
**PROJECT COST PER M<sup>2</sup>** £1,015  
**TOTAL COST** £995,500  
**BUILDING WORK COMMENCED** October 2016  
**BUILDING WORK TOOK** Six months  
**CURRENT VALUE** £1,300,000

were to be removed to make way for a large hall space, featuring a cantilevered staircase and providing a sense of openness that would flow throughout the house.

Externally, the shape of the property would stay largely the same, but transformed with contemporary finishes. The gable arches were to remain, enhanced with spans of modern glazing bordered with a bold render in fresh white – a new covering to hide the red bricks across the front and rear elevations. Dark roof tiles and window frames would contrast with the render to create a striking monochrome look.

**Last minute revisions**

The couple worked alongside an architect to come up with the designs and engaged planning consultants Pegasus Group to aid the process of submitting the application. “My commercial background means I understand how to deal with planning, but residential has been relatively new to me,” says Mark. A member of the local planning office visited the house to discuss the plans in what seemed like a very positive conversation; however, after he went back to talk it over with his colleagues, Mark and Stephanie had a call saying it looked like their plans were going to be refused. “They didn’t want me to extend at all, but I rushed back to the property, thought about where we could reduce the additions and emailed over my sketched out thoughts straight away,” says Mark. “We went to appeal on our



The kitchen design centred around integrating the family's oak dining table

previous project and it took 18 months of time, money and anguish to get permission, so we didn’t want to go down that route again.”

The planner asked them to get the new plans worked up within the next 10 days, while he was on holiday, so that on his return he could look to approve them within the two days left before he had to say yes or no. Luckily, it all worked out for the Fernandezes. “The property is positioned within a designated greenbelt area, so I don’t think we’d have been granted permission if we hadn’t engaged the skills of a planning expert,” says Mark. “We got there



through sensible advice and knowing where compromises could be made; we liaised with every neighbour and nobody objected."

### No time wasted

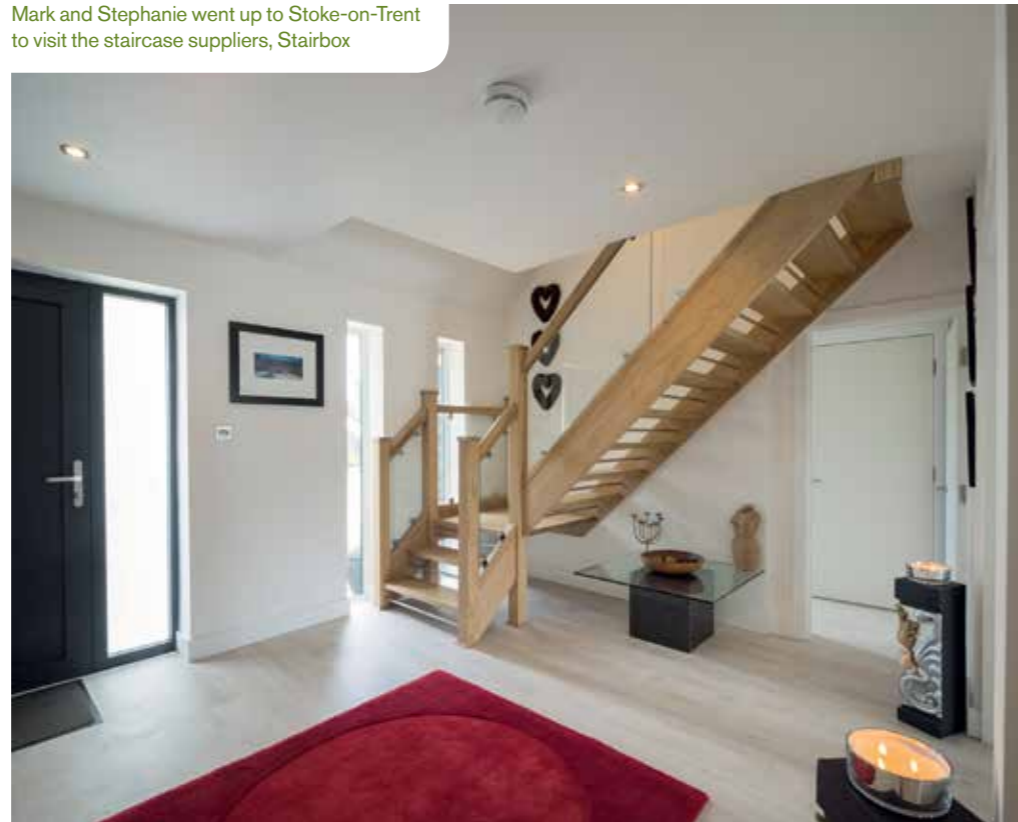
With the application approved before exchanging the bungalow, the couple had time to line up all the trades to get started from day one of owning the property. Two days after formalising contracts the team was in, stripping everything back. Although several trees had to go, they tried to recycle as much as possible – a silver birch tree that had to be removed has now become the shrub borders, for instance.

The aim was always to create something different to a run-of-the-mill house, and this was at the forefront of Mark and Stephanie's minds when specifying products. They did lots of online research and travelled to visit companies in person. They also attended numerous self-build shows. "These are vital for anyone creating a bespoke home – even if you spot one thing then it's worth it, and we always found something," says Stephanie.

Mark decided to take on the role of project manager, putting a line through his diary from October through to the end of April to commit as much time as possible to the renovation. "Throughout my career I've been used to assembling a huge team around me to do things on my behalf rather than being the person on site making decisions – I'd never got my hands dirty before 2011," he says. "I've learnt to get stuck in and that delegating isn't always right, especially when it's your own home. I was there every day, encouraging everyone on site, keeping them motivated, making sure they turned up, telling them they're doing a good job and building on teamwork."

Mark kept everything under control via detailed spreadsheets, understanding exactly how much money was going out to ensure

Mark and Stephanie went up to Stoke-on-Trent to visit the staircase suppliers, Stairbox



balanced cash flow – especially important as the family continued to live in their home during the works rather than selling to finance the build. "Owning two houses meant we needed to be efficient," he says. "We were realistic with timings, allowing six months. We probably could have done it in four and a half but we didn't want to rush it; I wanted our team to do a high quality job. I like working with good people, who I can form a decent relationship or even become friends with; it's important to have a team that comes together."

They were also under the constraints of having teenagers revising for upcoming GCSEs and A Levels, so they didn't want to potentially compromise the children's ability to study at home by moving house

at the wrong time. "We set the schedule to move at Easter when the kids weren't in school," says Mark. "Others race to the finish line because of funding, but we felt like we had to complete the project before moving and just find ways of getting the money. Thanks to BuildStore and others we managed to keep things afloat."

### Eating into the contingency

The couple recognised the importance of having a contingency fund, which was just as well as it was soon dipped into. "Always add a month to your timings and 10-15% to your budget," says Stephanie. Mark recognised that, no matter how organised you are, there are always details that go unnoticed and cause complications. "When you're project managing every day, sometimes you suddenly spot something in the house that you hadn't on the original plans," he says.

The first unexpected hurdle was to do with their hot tub. It was fitted into its sunken position before the winter, but the family hadn't realised the water table would be as high as it was – something they discovered before they got round to having the area tanked. "Water



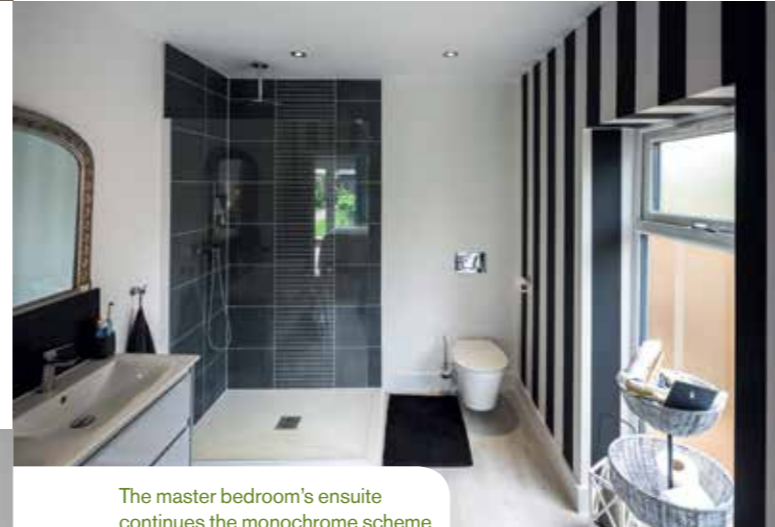
Mark is thrilled with the amount of natural light that pours into his study

### A comfortable home

Mark and Stephanie wanted to renovate this property into their forever home, and that meant making a pleasant environment that was warm and filled with daylight. They packed extra insulation in to minimise heat loss and included ample glazing. One of the couple's favourite features is the amount of natural illumination that filters throughout, as well as how quiet and private the property feels. "I love being in my bedroom or study where the light streams in," says Mark. "Also, we're near Heathrow with a road right outside but all we can just about hear is the fridge humming."

Being a sociable family, another key aim was for an open-plan living space suitable for entertaining, the hub being the kitchen. Its design centred around integrating an oak table that the couple had owned their whole marriage. Bespoke seating was designed into the kitchen to form the dining space. "We knew exactly how we wanted it to look – we could see it almost down to the last cupboard," says Mark. "We actually had to adjust the design at the last minute after we'd ordered it, but the company was brilliant and happily made changes at no extra cost; it could have been an expensive mistake."

Reflecting on their project, Mark and Stephanie understand that the process of creating a bespoke home is all about balancing the vision, compromises and indulgencies. This venture centred around the desire for somewhere they could enjoy together as a family and the small details were important to them. "We've been fighting since we got knocked back in 2008 and we've created a place our children can enjoy and remember," says Mark. "There are days when it all goes wrong, but what's great is that you're creating a product for your family. We're a unit and have come together as a team; for us I think it's been a journey we've all shared and worked towards. We made errors along the way, but we're still here smiling."



The master bedroom's ensuite continues the monochrome scheme

had been leaking through the side the whole time and had broken the electrics, so it had to be replaced," he says.

Then, it turned out that the calculations for their cantilevered staircase had been incorrect – but unfortunately they didn't notice until after the bespoke oak flight arrived on site. "Conceptual designers don't always appreciate detailed schemes," says Mark. "Extra costs can be incurred due to the need for significant structural change arising from a flawed design." The couple had to order a new one, but tried to make use of the original treads where possible, some of which now feature in window sills and bookcases.

Another frustration was down to the glazed doors in the kitchen. The couple faced numerous problems with the supplier, who they felt offered terrible customer service. What should be an efficient folding sliding system working on magnets didn't operate properly when originally fitted. The installation was delayed, then a door actually fell off and, due to a fault with the screws, the whole system had to be replaced – something the supplier didn't do until over six months had passed. "We did our research and saw the product in person, but you can still make mistakes," says Mark.



### WE LEARNED...

#### WORK WITH AN EXPERIENCED

architect who has all the technical skills needed to bring the small details together.

#### DESPITE ALL THE RESEARCH

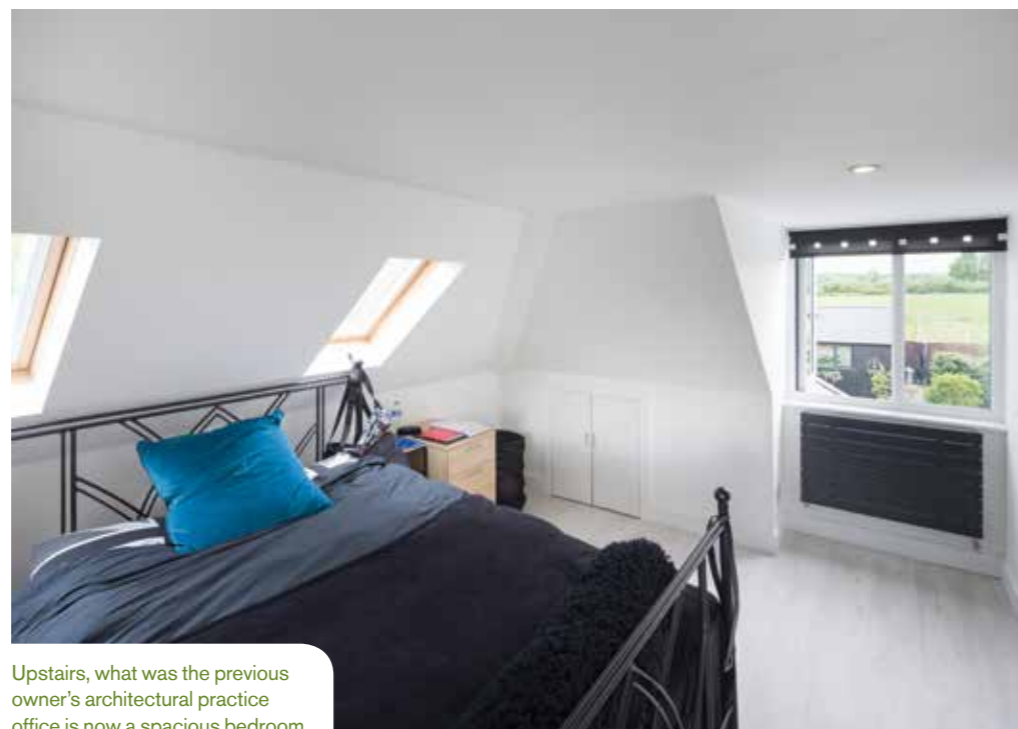
we put in we still made a mistake with our glazed door supplier for the kitchen. Unfortunately we found the company very difficult to work with.

#### HAVING UNUSUAL SHAPED

WINDOWS in the bedrooms at the front turned out to be a nightmare for finding suitable curtains and blinds. The bespoke glazed spans look great, but a curtain rail didn't work for the gable angle. Blinds were the solution, but the very top of the window is always covered by the fabric.

#### YOU'LL NEED A CONTINGENCY

FUND. We ate into ours because of a mixture of mistakes made by us and some of our professionals – something unexpected always crops up.



Upstairs, what was the previous owner's architectural practice office is now a spacious bedroom

closer look

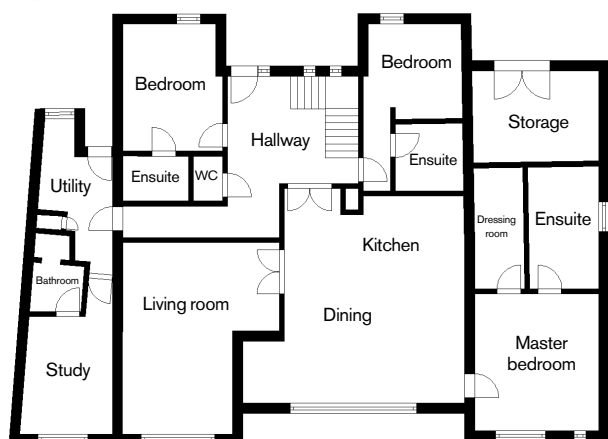
# Light & space...

One of the main drivers of this project was to transform the space into a bright and airy home. Mark and Stephanie have achieved a sense of spaciousness thanks to light interiors, large rooms and ample glazing. The gable arches in the bedrooms at the front of the house create a vaulted zone that makes the area feel voluminous even though the rooms aren't that large. In the entrance hall, tall windows and the gaps between treads in the open-riser staircase collaborate to create a sense of space – and this is a theme that flows throughout the house.

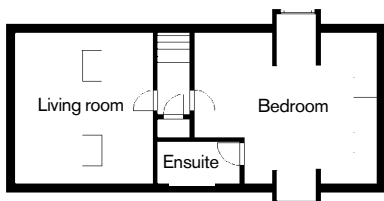


Unusual glazing

## Floor plans



Ground floor



First floor



House plans re-created using Build It 3D Home Designer software. [www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware](http://www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware)

## £ TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m <sup>2</sup>	Cost %	Total cost
Fees (architect, surveyor, planning and engineer)	£44	4%	£12,000
Foundations	£22	2%	£6,000
Drainage	£18	2%	£5,000
External walls (incl. timber cladding & render)	£129	13%	£35,000
Roof structure & covering	£111	11%	£30,000
Windows & doors	£96	9%	£26,000
Internal walls	£66	7%	£18,000
Stairs	£28	3%	£7,500
Plumbing & heating	£66	7%	£18,000
Electrics	£63	6%	£17,000
AV/IT	£15	1%	£4,000
Woodburning stove	£9	1%	£2,500
Kitchen & utility	£81	8%	£22,000
Bathrooms	£48	5%	£13,000
Decoration	£37	4%	£10,000
Flooring	£35	3%	£9,500
Automated gates	£17	1%	£4,500
External works (incl. hot tub, pagoda & external gym)	£129	13%	£35,000
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>£275,000</b>

## Useful contacts

PROJECT MANAGER & COORDINATOR **Fenchurch Estates** 01 628 876833 [www.fenchurch.co.uk](http://www.fenchurch.co.uk) PLANNING **Pegasus Planning Group** 01 344 203267 [www.pegasuspg.co.uk](http://www.pegasuspg.co.uk) FINANCE & MORTGAGE ADVISOR **BuildStore** 03 45 223 4888 [www.buildstore.co.uk](http://www.buildstore.co.uk) ENGINEER **Dennis Hadley** 01 189 700800  
 GROUNDWORKS & EXTERNAL CONTRACTOR **SK Brickwork** 07 833 317712 WINDOWS **New Look** 01 753 517999 [www.newlookglazing.com](http://www.newlookglazing.com) TIMBER CLADDING **Russwood** 01 540 673648 [www.russwood.co.uk](http://www.russwood.co.uk) FRONT DOOR **RK Doors** 01 872 222300 [www.rkdoorsystems.co.uk](http://www.rkdoorsystems.co.uk) DOORS **DCB Group** 01 924 224900 [www.dcb.co.uk](http://www.dcb.co.uk) INTERNAL CONTRACTOR & JOINERY **Ascot Refurbishments** 07 990 755087 STAIRS **Stairbox** 01 782 832555 [www.stairbox.com](http://www.stairbox.com)  
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