

Sara's grand design reaches a landmark

Foundation stone is laid at last for new country house

By Sarah Chambers

A LANDOWNER planning to return to the golden age of the British country house has taken the first step with the laying of a foundation stone for her modernist mansion.

Former theatrical agent Sara Low, of Darsham, near Yoxford, gained permission in 2003 from Suffolk Coastal District Council to build her luxury contemporary country house in the middle of the countryside.

The striking building, which will consist of large expanses of glass as well as block render, was granted permission as an exception to normal planning regulations, under a rule which allowed for buildings considered to be "truly outstanding" in terms of their architecture and landscape design to be built in the countryside.

Mrs Low has just marked the start of building work with an informal celebration to mark the laying of the foundation stone at the site.

It is thought it will be the last country house built under the old regulations, although a similar exception has been included under new planning rules. But

unlike its historic predecessors, Wilderness House is designed to blend into its woodland setting rather than be an imposing presence on the horizon.

Architect Sir Michael Hopkins described the design for the building, which will include seven bedrooms, six bathrooms and a swimming pool, as "eminently worthy of support as a piece of architecture".

Mrs Low, a grandmother and widow, was clearly delighted to have arrived at the latest milestone in her quest to build her dream home.

"It's very exciting to have got to this point," she said. "It's taken from October 2003 when we got planning permission to now to actually get stuff sorted. That's nobody's fault."

Work was halted due to the presence of great crested newts, and licences were required before the development could proceed, she explained.

The design, by Paul + O Architects Ltd, is to be made a reality by Lowestoft-based builders MS Oakes. It is expected the building work will take 10 months, and the building will be complete by March 2006.

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SPECIAL MOMENT: Sara Low with the foundation stone for her new home. Below, an architect's sketch of Wilderness House

Main photo: SIMON PARKER

