
ROMNEY MARSH VISITOR CENTER – BBM SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Client: Kent Wildlife Trust, Shepway District Council
Romney Marsh, UK
Architect: BBM Sustainable Design
Completed: 2004
Budget: £230,000



The project has been developed by a core group including the Romney Warren Project Advisory Group, Shepway District Council, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent County Council, South Kent College and the Romney Marsh Countryside Project.



Support has been received from many organizations including:-

- Community Action South Kent (CASK) SRB Partnership/SEEDA
- Shepway District Council
- SAGA
- EPAC Landfill Tax Scheme (British Energy)
- The Environment Agency
- Kent County Council Rural Revival
- The Dungeness Trust
- SEEBOARD
- Romney Hythe & Dymchurch Railway

Designed by architects BBM Sustainable Design the environmentally friendly timber-framed centre has been built on “brownfield” land. The centre is built from straw bales, deliberately chosen because they are cheap, could be sourced very locally to the site, and were very easy for the team of local people and volunteers, who helped with the construction, to work with.

The techniques and materials used mean the building has a life span of at least 100 years. But the Romney Marsh Visitor Centre has to be one of the most environmentally friendly

buildings in the county because almost all of the materials could be reused if ever the building is demolished. You may have heard about reducing food miles, trying to buy food that is grown locally instead of from further afield, but what about building miles? Ian McKay, of architects BBM Sustainable Design, tried to use materials from as close to the site as possible to keep building miles to a minimum.

The foundations are steel cages filled with cobblestones from Lydd, which were selected by hand to ensure they were the right size for the job.



The main framework of the building is larch, from the West Country. This part was built first so that the roof could be added and a dry place provided for the straw during the building process. 350 straw bales make up the walls, held together with chestnut poles.

The straw bale walls took less than two weeks to raise, the end wall half an afternoon. The windows were created by missing out a bale and inserting a window block. These spaces are exactly the same width and

depth as a straw bale, and double up as exhibition areas, with all sorts of wildlife artifacts displayed inside.

The windows have been deliberately planned with children in mind, which is why some are only a few inches from the ground - to let even toddlers have a view of the Marshes from their eye level.

Even the roof has been designed with wildlife in mind, as it's covered in sedum, a succulent, drought resistant plant. The roof covers the building's entire footprint, replacing the habitat which would have otherwise been lost.