

Second session of the Inquiry into the Quality of New Build Housing in England

At this second session the committee took evidence from a group including companies, organisations and concerned citizens.

The first to give evidence was the BRE (British Research Establishment):

- There is a need to increase build quality of houses along with quantity.
- A third of new buyers are dissatisfied with the quality of new houses, despite the fact that third party standards already exist to some degree.
- House builders have no long term financial interest once a house is sold as repeat custom is highly unlikely.

Suggestions included:

- Consumers must be at the heart of the issue moving forward and should be made fully aware of the state of the building.
- Must measure real costs and benefits to health and wellbeing for long term residency not just efficiency upon completion.

Wingrove Law was next to give evidence.

- The law in relations to defects in the building process is unclear and unhelpful to those effected.
- Necessary alterations and repairs are left until after residents have moved in.
- They believe that this is rooted in an endemic institutionalised attitude problem towards dealing with problems, only fixing defects after the building is complete when required to.
- Builders make it extremely difficult and draining for residents to follow up with them and fix defects.

Suggestions included:

- Buyers need much better access to the relevant documents about the property and the ability to view and fully survey the house they intend to purchase.
- A standard form and sale template for new build properties.
- A review of the X survey and consumer code as they do not believe they work as is.

The evidence given by the involved citizens pointed to a number of recurring problems:

- House builders are selling product and not homes, therefore there is little incentive to improve built quality as houses are nearly guaranteed to sell, once the builders own the land there is no need to spend more on quality.
- The NHBC and builders costs are kept low at the expense of residents.
- Builders are only responsible for buildings for five years after completion which is too small.
- Builders substitute materials and products with cheaper less reliable versions without consulting the architect or residents
- Too greater tolerance for defects, leads to sloping floors and damaged glass for example.

- There is a lack of competition to force the industry to care for the consumer compounded by the sellers' nature of the current housing market.
- Mid build surveys are kept secret.
- House builders care little for their brand or customer care as buying house is a single large investment with little to no chance of return custom regardless.

Suggestions included:

- Pushing the Passive House Standard to be accepted as the norm.
- Legal requirements for qualified inspectors chosen by the buyer and paid for by the building company.
- Introducing New Build Housing Ombudsman
- Withdrawing state-funded Help to Buy from house builders that fail to deliver or improve the quality of products and/ or customer service.
- Banning of substituting materials and products without residents and architects permission.
- Independent plumbing and gas inspections.
- Builders should be incentivised to get things right the first time, this would actually lower costs as repairs post completion cost more.
- There is scope for greater involvement from a consumer body to also help educate new build buyers.
- Mandatory workmanship standards and lower tolerance for defects.