

Builders gag buyers over shoddy work

Owners say developers turn to bullying when asked to repair 'abysmal' new homes

Martina Lees

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Joshua and Phoebe Palmer outside their home in Hull, where builders Strata failed to fix all the faults despite six rounds of repairs
ASADOUR GUZELIAN

Buyers of substandard new homes are being asked to sign gagging orders to keep the faults secret and are routinely refused access to technical plans that show how their properties should have been constructed.

Some owners are then locked out of their homes during repairs, an investigation by The Sunday Times has found.

The research reveals how builders wield power over buyers at every stage of the new-build market, allowing quality to slip as the

government spends £43bn on stimulating private housebuilding to try to hit a target of 1.5m new homes by 2022.

Gagging orders — of which The Sunday Times has seen several examples — are “virtually universal” to stop neighbours making a similar claim, said Philip Waller, a retired construction manager who campaigns for new-build reform at brand-newhomes.co.uk.

When a client of Geoff Peter, of the legal firm Wingrove Law, found poisonous bacteria in her new home’s water supply, the national firm that built it “tried to get her to sign an NDA” (non-disclosure agreement) as a precondition of any work. Nine months ago, after six failed repairs, she spoke to the local newspaper. The builder walked off site.

“The builder had changed the locks and refused to return her keys,” said Peter. It also would not let her stay on in the rented home it had arranged for her. “She had to break back into her own home . . . It’s not justifiable for builders to make excessive profits through conduct that is blighting people’s lives.”

Liz and Giles Main, both 69, refused to sign an NDA with the developer Bellway. The first floor of their £269,495 house near Newcastle upon Tyne slopes by about 2in and the ground floor by more than 1in, but they do not want Bellway to rebuild it without oversight by an expert of their choice.

“If someone took our appendix out and botched the surgery it would be very unlikely that anyone would submit to letting the same surgeon do the repair,” said Liz Main. Bellway replied it had taken “every step possible” to address the couple’s complaints but had been “frustrated by a total lack of co-operation”.

When Wendy Howell’s family moved out for Taylor Wimpey to fix their £575,000 house at Loddon Park, a large scheme in Reading where many homes lacked insulation and had walls that wobbled, the builders “changed our locks and said it was for health and safety”, said Howell, 54. Taylor Wimpey said it changed the front-door lock as some works were “immediately adjacent” to it, but the owners

“remained able to access the property at all times through the rear door”.

Builders often resist requests for technical plans on intellectual-property grounds, meaning owners cannot check whether their home was built correctly.

One buyer, who asked not to be named, spent almost £100,000 in legal costs before being shown specifications for her Lancashire family house this year. According to her surveyor, the first floor moves so much when you walk around that the downstairs light fittings swing.

‘This has consumed my life’

The buyer said: “I gave them all my money for this house. Every day I deal with this — every weekend — piles of paperwork. The only conversation you have is the house. It’s consumed all my life.

Normally, you come home and put your key in the door and go, ‘Phew, I’m home.’ But we don’t want to come back here. We can’t decorate it. We can’t sell.”

When Phoebe and Joshua Palmer chose their first home they thought buying new would limit stress as she finished her degree. For greater peace of mind, the developer of the £189,950 house in Hull was Strata, a five-star-rated builder.

It’s not justifiable for builders to make excessive profits through conduct that is blighting people’s lives **Geoff Peter**, Wingrove Law

But when they moved in a year ago, aided by a 20% loan from the government’s Help to Buy scheme, the quality of the finish was “abysmal”, according to an architect. Floors were uneven and all 10 doors had to be refitted three times.

Strata also refused to give the couple technical specifications, meaning that they could not check whether the sound and fireproofing had been done correctly, and it failed to fix all the snags in six rounds of repairs, said Joshua Palmer, 27, a trawlerman.

The company apologised for what it called “ongoing” repairs. “Strata build more than 700 homes each year and it is very rare for one of our properties to experience such issues,” it said.

Many unhappy owners did not want to be identified over fears that the value of their home may drop. One asked the HomeOwners Alliance (HOA) for help after needing three new roofs and 10 roof repairs to her home in six years. She and her neighbours chose not to go to the press “as they were worried they’d struggle to ever sell their properties”, said Paula Higgins, the HOA chief executive.

Since 2012 private new-build completions are up 29% to 114,800 while profits of Britain’s top five housebuilders have soared 388% to £3.3bn.

But customer satisfaction over the same period is down 6%, the annual Home Builders Federation (HBF) survey shows. Though 84% of more than 52,000 new-home buyers surveyed last year would recommend their builder, 98% reported snags in the first two months.

Consumers’ means of redress were “inadequate”, an all-party parliamentary group on new-home quality found last year. “Over recent years hundreds of thousands of people have bought a new home, the vast majority of whom are happy,” the HBF said. “A huge amount of work is going on to look at how the industry addresses every one of the issues raised in the [parliamentary] report.”

Snags are to be expected, according to Higgins. “It’s whether they fix them that matters.” The builder is responsible for this in the first two years of most new-home warranties. If it refuses, the warranty provider mediates. The UK’s biggest, the National House Building Council, said it finds in favour of the owner in 70% of cases.

Sometimes companies deny defects. For nine months Barratt refused to admit that the dampcourse in Julie Andrews-Jones’s garage in Cornwall was missing. “We were wrong,” Barratt said. “We apologised and have installed it.”

Andrews-Jones, 58, also said the stone cladding of her family's £275,500 house "comes away at your fingertips". After being contacted by The Sunday Times, Barratt agreed to pay for a survey and "replace all of the affected stone".

Cheap fixes

Developers often say defects are "within tolerance", and many opt for cheap fixes. After seven top-floor flats in a Bellway block in Greenwich, southeast London, flooded in a 2015 storm the owners had to move out for 10 months for repairs. Yet resident Stephen Frost, 39, said Bellway had still not fixed the cause; downpipes that drained directly onto their balconies. "It can all happen again," he added.

Bellway said this was the subject of an insurance claim. "Some work has already been carried out without prejudice and we are scheduling further works."

Last week Bovis Homes set aside £3.5m, on top of £7m already pledged, for remedial work and to compensate buyers who moved into unfinished homes.

The government changed the rules in April to make inspection records available to homeowners, but is yet to act on the parliamentary group's other recommendations. The Department for Communities and Local Government said: "This government has been clear that new homes should be well designed and have a good-quality finish. They must meet rigorous standards as set out in the building regulations.

"Builders are responsible for complying with these standards, with all new homes also subject to building control inspections by local authorities or approved inspectors."

Wobbly walls and no insulation at all

Dozens of homes at Loddon Park, on a former landfill site near Reading, were built without insulation, and some had wobbly internal walls.



Residents at Loddon Park PETER TARRY/THE SUNDAY
TIMES

The first two phases of construction were among “the worst developments I have come across”, said Philip Waller of brand-newhomes.co.uk.

Two rounds of works failed to fix it. Now that the scaffolding has come down for the third time, residents want Taylor Wimpey, whose pre-tax profits have soared 715% since 2011, to pay for full surveys.

Rob and Sheila James prefer new-build homes as “you never have to do anything”, Rob said. But their £395,000 semi-detached house at Loddon Park “had no insulation at all — it was freezing”.

Nearly three years of disruption (“You end up having remediation of remediation because they do such a poor job”) included the death of their cat, run over after builders failed to fit speed bumps.

Taylor Wimpey has extended the warranty of affected homes and says it is working hard to fix any faults: “We sincerely apologise for the problems and disruption experienced by some of our customers.”

comments

Sinnott Jul 9, 2017

It's not rocket science. Profit EQUALS selling price MINUS land cost and building cost.

Nimbys and the broken planning system ensure land with permission is scarce and expensive so every £1 saved on the build cost goes straight into additional (super)profit.

Lack of supply in turn ensures top selling prices for jerry-buildings in countries like the UK where the regulatory bodies are in the pocket of the developers or their sponsored 'watchdogs'.

Shoddily built cars quickly destroy a manufacturer's brand image and depreciate 50+% within a couple of years.

Except in the most extreme cases the land value under scarce houses underpins second hand selling prices whatever the build quality so it's a win-win, right?

Amoral self-serving 'supervision' is endemic in the construction industry. The only difference with Grenfell is that, in low rise

housebuilding, there is rarely loss of life, only the misery and stress caused by cynical greed.

Arclight Jul 9, 2017

Broken Britain, again. The housing market from planning to building, buying and renting needs a complete overhaul. The hands off approach and self regulation doesn't work.

borris Jul 9, 2017

Yet many on here say government shouldn't interfere and let businesses thrive. Well, this is what happens when businesses are allowed to "thrive". Profit before people.

Chel2000 Jul 9, 2017

"Since 2012 private new-build completions are up 29% to 114,800 while profits of Britain's top five house builders have soared 388% to £3.3bn."

So their cutting corners, to the bone, to make even more money ?

How many of these houses are going to be falling to pieces in 20 years ?

And I thought that we were "all in this together"

Chel2000 Jul 9, 2017

New houses are often appallingly badly built.

Houses with essentially 2 large walkin wardrobes and a bedroom described as 3 bedroom houses.

If you've a dining room don't expect to have room for the table and chairs.

Sound proofing is also often appallingly bad.

Terraced house are built like a barn and then wafer thin walls are slotted in to create the separate properties.

I used to visit a lot of new builds, when running a small business recently, and can recall listening to the TV news, from the house next door, though the walls.

Thomas Malthus Jul 9, 2017

Be careful. Building control used to be independent council employees. Today they can be and often are private surveyors. Who while professional have an interest in not upsetting developers.

And their job is to ensure building regulations are met. EG rules about drains. They are not there to sign off all the building finish quality.

Some years ago we started to buy a new build from a developer. We noticed some peculiarities (like retaining walls with no weep holes) and queried them. The obfuscation that ensued was a clear signal and we did not proceed to buy. It was technically bad work.

If you want a sound house stay away from new ones. Buy one that has stood up for over 100 years. When the builders were proper tradesmen. Sure you will have to maintain it. But you can fix an old house. You cannot easily fix a new one.

Whatsnew Jul 9, 2017

Hush money?

Grumpy Old Git Jul 9, 2017

Before I retired 4 years ago I was a Quality Assurance Auditor for a large construction company making planned and surprise visits to sites to check that inspections were being truthfully carried out and compliance with specifications maintained. Shortly after I left the number of auditors were drastically cut, the results you see in the article above

TierradelFuego Jul 9, 2017

Shared ownership seems to bring additional problems to the whole matter.

Any problems seem to fall between the responsibility of the housing association/builder/developer.

I know someone with a problem with a new build in London. They haven't been able to get the matter resolved and part of the problem seems to be who is responsible in the case of shared ownership. Anyone know the answer to that question?

Gentleman living in Surrey Jul 9, 2017

@TierradelFuego

As the name implies the responsibilities are shares, and you own the freehold: far better than leasehold where the landlord takes the money but offers nothing in return (even if you can find him/her).

An association/management has to be formed with shared freehold as with leasehold, to deal with maintenance. In France that is the law... I would have thought so in England too... (?)

TierradelFuego Jul 9, 2017

@Gentleman living in Surrey @TierradelFuego NO. I was talking about a FLAT which is leasehold. NOT a freehold house.

Radlon Jul 9, 2017

Local Authorities used to have Building Control Departments to enforce the Building Regulations.

I'm not quite sure but I believe enforcement passed to Approved Bodies connected with the house building industry. In effect, the builders of new houses regulate themselves. I don't know what happened to the independent NHBC with its 10 year guarantee. Coupled with the abolition of apprenticeships in the 1980-1990 and the alliance between Governments and Builders to build thousands of houses in the shortest possible time, it is unsurprising that too many new houses are badly built, especially on high density sites.

Chel2000 Jul 9, 2017

@Radlon

Problem also is that many poor workmanship faults will manifest themselves after a few years, at which time the builders will be long gone.

Theres a new development, near my house, where all of the windows in the 25, or so, properties started letting in water or coming lose from their fittings. This was after 5 years.

Nigel Benson Jul 9, 2017

My partner and I live in a 1900 Victorian tenement. Yes, maintenance periodically but you buy into that. My partner's son bought a new build a few years ago. Utter junk with quickly creaky floors, doors that wouldn't close and more.

For us it was straightforward: buy older and accept maintenance will be required or buy new or in theory there will be none. For us the choice was made in 2.7 seconds.

Wonder how many senior managers of new builds live in their own company's new builds?

Chel2000 Jul 9, 2017

@Nigel Benson

Love the last sentence.

Our place was built in 1969, it's only a semi-detached, but it's built like a tank with sizable rooms.

Our third bedroom is actually a small bedroom and not a glorified cupboard.

Internal, none supporting walls, built of breeze block not plaster board.

There has been no movement in any floors, windows, doors, roof and the floor boards do not creak.

Some of the houses nearby built 15/20 years later are half the quality. Inside they've all sorts of the typical problems that are mentioned in the comments on this article.

Houses built more recently are like the food equivalent of economy sausages by comparison.

We have been lucky but the question, which obviously begs asking, is why the quality drop off in the period after the late 1960's ?

Ian Tinn Jul 9, 2017

@Chel2000 @Nigel Benson My first two homes were built respectively in the sixties and the fifties. I bought them in the seventies, when the then-modern houses attracted a premium but looked as though a good sneeze would knock them over.

Personally, I would say the quality of house building has fallen off consistently since the 1930s; though this would be an average, of course. There have been some improvements as better materials became available (insulation, including double-glazing, for example); but the workmanship and corner-cutting are totally out of hand. Most of the newer stuff aren't even attractive, but look as though a few fittings were thrown into a warehouse and called 'open plan'.

R Harris Jul 9, 2017

Go to any large construction site and see the percentages regards tradesmen. The majority will be Eastern European, not because they turn out superior work, no, because they are cheap!. As they say, " you pay peanuts, you get.....!".

TierradelFuego Jul 9, 2017
@R Harris Not sure that is fair.

Do you have any knowledge of the differences in training tradesmen/women in the UK and Eastern Europe? Be interesting to know.

R Harris Jul 9, 2017

@TierradelFuego

Haven't a clue as to how they train tradesmen / women in Eastan Europe, but interestingly, have met / spoken to many "tradesmen" on site that were teachers in their country before coming here. Make of that what you want.

There is another post on here, where the writer cites the case where unskilled workers watch the more experienced tradesmen and then branch off to do the work themselves.....usually to a poor standard. I can vouch for that happening as I have personally been involved in remedial work to rectify, usually, appalling workmanship!.

Chel2000 Jul 9, 2017

@R Harris

House building has been poor for about 20 years though.

Gentleman living in Surrey Jul 9, 2017

@R Harris I think that you will find most Easter European trades better trained than in England: but poorly managed by English project managers who are more interested in quick than quality.

Lerxst Jul 9, 2017

This has been an issue for a very long time. House builders have held the government to ransom with the taxpayer essentially funding enormous bonuses for executives whilst leaving homeowners in over-priced and poor quality housing. When I bought my new house 15 years ago every single radiator leaked, the bath waste wasn't even

connected up (demonstrating that they had not even bothered to test the bath), the door surround turned out to be made of skirting board material and the list goes on.

il babbo Jul 9, 2017

A buyer of a newly built house will usually not have it independently inspected as the buyer thinks that as it is "brand new" how could it possibly have any defects! Once purchased and defects are noted the purchaser wants the defects remedied without fuss as he/she does not want it generally known that the house is sub-standard as this will affect its resale value. Thereby becoming part of the process of hiding the truth.

Chel2000 Jul 9, 2017

@il babbo

Great comment.

Buy a new car, and it's poor, you've got options.

Bit tricky handing your house back to the builder for a refund or a knew one !

Ed Fearis Jul 9, 2017

I had numerous problems with a new home that I bought about 20 years ago in Chester. It had a sloping floor in the kitchen meaning I couldn't fit a dishwasher under the kitchen worktop. The plaster fell off the stairwell 3 times. The list goes on... I contacted the site and area manager who were extremely unhelpful. Eventually I contacted the chairman of the building firm directly. Within days the repair work and snags were being fixed properly.

JOHN Harvey Jul 9, 2017

One of the problems is that provisions for completion in contracts can require a buyer to pay up and move in before the building inspector reports.

Some years ago I acted on development of 100 affordable homes and slipped in a provision meaning, in effect, that the builder did not get its money until sign off by building control. They went spare when they found out.

The Council of Mortgage Lenders has standard instructions for conveyancers acting for mortgage providers. I do not know current requirements for build quality certification but it would be a simple matter to have one making it illegal to hand over mortgage money without holding appropriate paperwork.

Thomas Malthus Jul 9, 2017
@JOHN Harvey

Not quite so simple. Unlike a conventional purchase of a preowned home. Deposits are not recoverable under developers contracts. The buyer ends up very financially exposed if they need to pull out.

JOHN Harvey Jul 10, 2017
@Thomas Malthus @JOHN Harvey Yes. This needs legislation

Rich Sims Jul 9, 2017
Part of the problem is that there are few competent properly trained trades, most do 6 months at a college. Even fewer competent management staff all with degrees in media studies.

STucker Jul 9, 2017
Manufacturing industry learned a long time ago that 'get it right first time' is a better method than to produce a product but have a 'quality control' inspector at the final stage to pass or reject. It is harder for builders when so much is sub-contracted but getting it right first time will save money and aggro. It's a culture thing!

Thomas Malthus Jul 9, 2017
@STucker

True. It must be the last industry to get modernised. It still has blokes mixing muck in barrows with water and sand- unbelievable.

Robert M Jul 9, 2017
NHBC really needs to jump on this...

Toujours Latrek Jul 9, 2017
@Robert M NHBC have been known to force buyers to sign agreement preventing them from contacting media about problems with their property or discussing with neighbours

www.theguardian.com/business/2017/feb/16/new-home-owners-gagged-over-poor-build-and-compensation-claims

STucker Jul 9, 2017
There are some bad builders and there are also some purchasers who set up 'trial by social media/press' for advantage. In between lies the truth and a need for arbitrated summary solutions. Time for a 'Judge Judy' figure to be assigned to get matters resolved in a 'win win' manner.

mike hennigan Jul 9, 2017
I might add an interesting and amusing encounter a good friend of mine had in London many years ago. As a senior building inspector he attended a new residential build site, greeted by the Korean builder who always bowed when my friend approached him, following his inspection he informed the builder he had to demolish the outer brick walls to this property and rebuild them because of a problem with the wall ties.

The Korean was adamant all required ties had been installed and the brickwork itself was beautiful, " yes " my friend replied you are correct" unfortunately the ties have been placed the wrong way " galvanised butterfly ties have a twist in the centre that faces down allowing rainwater tracking across the tie to fall off into the cavity, in

this instance the bricklayer had placed the twist facing upwards , rainwater could therefore track across into the inner wall !!
After showing the Korean the problem the builder proceeded to thank him and bowed continuously as my friend walked off site!

TierradelFuego Jul 9, 2017

@mike hennigan Probably a silly question but would it not be possible to design ties that can be used either way up?

Observer20 Jul 9, 2017

It's been quite a while since I was involved with house building but I imagine little has changed. The work is mostly done by sub-contractors whose prices and time-scales are beaten down to unrealistic levels by the big developers whose only consideration is maximising profits. The sub-contractors who built particular elements are usually long gone and onto the next barely-profitable-if-done-properly job by the time the main building work has finished and quality and fitness for purpose comes a very long way down the list of anyone's priorities.

The groundworks team don't comment on what was actually in the ground as opposed to what was expected to be in the ground and the plasterers don't draw attention to deficiencies in the underlying walls for instance unless and because it would stop them completing their work on time and on it rolls through all the different sub-contract elements until you have defect on top of defect on top of defect. The building inspectors would have to be on site all day to see all that goes on and the site managers are under relentless pressure to quickly move on, however doubtful the 'codge', to meet deadlines or find themselves out of a job.

The professionals, architects, civil and structural engineers, who design and supervise some elements are under the same kind of pressure of course .. effectively sub-contractors again who either produce the cheapest result and don't make waves or they don't get any future work.

It's not a process generally subject to much truly independent rigour from any quarter.

j h Jul 9, 2017

So the Homebuyers Federation say 84% of home buyers would be happy to recommend their builder. Oh, so that's alright then. Er, what about the other 16%.

Sixteen percent of home buyers would NOT recommend their builder!!!!

The big house building companies are all celebrating record profits at the moment. That's good. It means they will be able to easily afford the class action legal volley which seems to be on its way.

Observer20 Jul 9, 2017

@j h And another 16% don't want word to get out the quality is rubbish before they sell it!

Hem Laljee Jul 9, 2017

We all have known the poor quality of the modern houses is. The Timber is so thin to support the roof and ceilings that walking on these layers of structures the whole building shakes. The wood is not seasoned wood and the bricks are so light as compared to material manufacturers before the WWII. Even the plastering is so thin one can rub it off. It is the modern building specifications they will say but these buildings do not stand to the elements as their older version did. It is all profit for the Builder.

Balbir Jul 9, 2017

Not only is the new house building market biased towards builders, but the Government gives them more support by making the planning system more easy for them. Councils can rarely take into account

local peoples opinions when a major development is decided. Even the appeal system is loaded in favour of developers. But, large developers do make generous donations to political parties!!

allen westgate Jul 9, 2017

Sadly this article reflects the poor state of the construction industry in the U.K. - all driven by profit and money and totally unrealistic deadlines. The training in the industry has been diabolical for the last 25 years, with a heavy reliance on Sub Contractors to carry out craft training, which only covers the basics.

Construction is considered a dirty word at school now as there is a complete lack of vocational training for those who are not academic, which adds to the massive skills gap, and we now have to rely on a poorly trained Eastern European workforce that don't understand what they are building, borrowing each other's tools and only want to earn a few quid here and then return home.

20 years ago we ran sites with all direct labour, with tradesman that had done proper 5 year apprentices, and learnt the necessary skills to build anything asked of them, unfortunately now a days, one week they are a labourer, the next week they are a carpenter.

All the time this carries on the large housing developers are happy to keep earning massive profits whilst their reputation goes down the drain.

Hello Campers Jul 9, 2017

£143 billion to private builders - how many houses have been built regardless of quality?

Mr Robert Noakes Jul 9, 2017

What ever happended to the building inspectors??

John Forbes Jul 9, 2017

Nothing has changed in the building trade, certainly not in the 40 or so years since I had the misfortune to buy a Barratt property.

Until the Building Regulations and surrounding approvals and inspections processes are significantly tightened up by legislation nothing will change with regard to quality and fitness for purpose.

Until it becomes common knowledge how much building materials and labour actually cost, and how outrageous profiteering, by what is no more than a mickey mouse cartel of house building companies, carries on, there won't be the legislation enacted to deal with what amounts to little more than criminal negligence and racketeering in house building and, for that matter, commercial property building as well.

A fundamental change to the construction industry and its practices across the board is required in this country. Of all the market sectors not working properly, the construction sector, for all it represents in the economy, is surely the one to get into good and transparent order first.

The sector itself has shown, over many years, that it is incapable of putting its own house in order. Outside bodies and primary legislation are required.

If the Government can send in Commissioners to Local Authorities to get them back on the rails, then it ought to be possible to do the same thing in the construction industry.

Winthorpe Jul 9, 2017

"Snags are to be expected, according to Higgins. "

You see, it starts right there and ends with the parliamentary committee telling the public what was self evident.

No, snags are not to be expected. Properties should be inspected by an independent surveyor prior to contract completion and penalties and compensation paid for delays beyond the move in date. That problem would be fixed overnight.

From banking, medicine and public behaviour, to infrastructure planning and public behaviour, this country demonstrates three problems over and over again.

The first is a poverty of expectation regarding the standards to be delivered. The second is simple incompetence and the third is criminal lack of accountability. The latter is made possible by a shambolic, self serving legal system in which incompetence and criminal acts go unpunished as a matter of course. It is a cultural inferiority, frequently underpinned by the comic conceit that the UK is a benchmark for quality.

They say one measure of a country's development is the standard of its roads. This country can't even repair pavements or build flat road surfaces and what takes other civilised countries months to build or repair, takes the UK years. M3 widening? I rest my case.

James Croft Jul 9, 2017

Safe as houses?

Allington Pippin Jul 9, 2017

Perhaps planning permission for future schemes could be denied while these builders fail to rectify defects?

Joannah Yacoub Jul 9, 2017

We have very poor standards of building in this country. The approach is both cavalier and amateurish. Most builders work from problem to problem, even on major projects and very few even begin to reach the standards of building found elsewhere. We are at least 50 years behind most countries in Europe and 70 years behind Germany. And that applies even to iconic buildings. There are new schools by famous architects which almost need total replacement after 10 years, yet the same design in France or Germany (and by the same architect) is still standing and problem free. Our professionalism in this area is the worst in the developed world and is closer to some 3rd World countries.

Alien Looking Down Jul 9, 2017

Apart from the house we recently moved in to I have always built our own, brick on brick, so the quality was literally down to me. I wanted to build another house but was unable to find a plot of land in our

area. The local authority could release land for self builders but they can't be bothered and don't have the expertise to administer the process: far easier to deal with a big developer and spend the allowance (section 102) received on a community project. Regarding specific house construction plans: these have to be approved by the local building control who should hold a copy (electronic); and these should be made available for inspection. If this is not possible or permissible then the law should be changed immediately so that it is.