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Lesley MacLeod: Don't bet the house on faults being fixed quickly

Would you buy a car from a dodgy dealer – or even an upstanding member of Scottish society advertising in the Scotsman? What would you reasonably expect when forking out for such a big-ticket item? Complete log book? A look under the bonnet? A chance to kick the tyres? A test drive, perhaps?

By [The Newsroom](#)

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THE SCOTSMAN

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Perhaps there was a generic showhome – all designed-to-the-nines and a different model to the one you actually chose; an architect’s model; a glossy brochure; or fly-through animation on some soft-focus website.

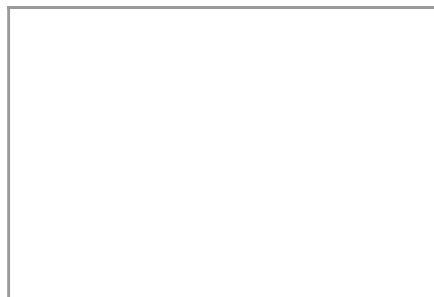
Maybe you got to choose the kitchen cabinets. Or the carpets. But, often, buyers don’t get to view their home during the build and it’s often the case that purchasers have nothing more tangible than the sales office until the day they turn up to collect the keys. Even though, by then, all the money has changed hands.

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I appreciate it may be tricky to allow visitors on to building sites. Maybe, more than most as a result of my role as CEO of the Association for Project Safety representing professionals engaged in mitigating risk in construction, I understand it can be difficult to marry proportionate safety concerns with a buyer’s legitimate wish to see around.

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But let's be clear, health and safety are being invoked to keep purchasers out of the way so builders can be on with the job.

Potential home owners could see their future home if builders and developers took sensible precautions to allow them in. But often they don't and, as a result if you've bought off-plan, it's quite possible the first time you actually see round the house is the day the removal men turn up with your sofa.

Actually, you have more consumer protection on the new furniture because you can get a replacement or your money back if it's faulty.



No such luck with the house.

That's where this gets much scarier than the fairy tale. Although all new homes come with a warranty the policy is chosen for you. Developers can shop around for the insurer they like, and the homeowner gets what they're given. Policies can be different and not everything you might expect covered.



Don't think it won't matter. When surveyed for an all-party investigation into new build homes, 98 per cent – that's right, 49 in 50 – purchasers reported faults in the first two years. Some may be very minor but, if my own experience is anything to go on, perhaps not.

My ceilings have been down more often than you can say 'kitchen drawers' where, incidentally, there are still insufficient electrical sockets in the right places to be compliant with the law.



I'm not alone. A friend has central heating requiring her to twiddle the thermostat in her bedroom for the system to come on in her living-room downstairs. Her daughter has an external wall from which you can hand remove the bricks.

It takes ages, and more grief than gin can ameliorate, to get anything done. Not because it can't be done but because there is no imperative or effective penalty. If the defect is reported within the first two years, it – maybe gets sorted at a leisurely amble or until, in sheer foot-stamping – frustration, you just get someone else in to fix it yourself.

A 'snagging-retention' has also been mooted to hold back a proportion of the purchase price until defects are made good. There are calls to introduce a binding national new-build

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But, more than that, we need – particularly as developers rush to deliver more and more homes – a system of building control that upholds standards, deters shoddy work and pulls up the perpetrators. For this councils need to be adequately and professionally resourced to do the work.

Otherwise, I may never have a home without its unintentional internal water-feature wall.

Lesley MacLeod, CEO, Association for Project Safety.



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