

New-build Housing: A Question of Quality?



The quality of new home construction has come into scrutiny throughout the UK in recent years.

The issue of quality control has existed in the housing market for many years. However justifiably so, it seems to be in the spotlight now even more than ever. The Home Builders Federation's own annual survey indicates that new-build housing defects have become almost universal in the past few years, with the proportion of respondents reporting defects increasing from 91% in 2011-12 to 99% in 2017-18.

Government schemes such as Help to Buy, Help to Buy ISAs, Stamp Duty and others have been driving demand for new build houses. According to recent government statistics, the annual construction output of new-build houses has shot up to an 11-year high. It is no surprise we are now seeing a direct correlation of increasing volume of houses being built, and an increase in poor quality.

A recent report on the housing stock by the UK's second-largest house builder, Persimmon, revealed significant issues with fire prevention measures and poor workmanship on its properties. A spokesperson for the Chartered Association of Building Engineers (Cabe) noted: "Anecdotal evidence and feedback received by Cabe suggests that this indeed might be a wider issue affecting more than just one named developer. The concern is that the industry over recent years may have broadly taken its eye off the ball when it comes to quality,

and in particular, in regard to fire safety issues.”

Inspired Initiatives



A number of new initiatives have been launched to improve productivity and project quality.

Organisations such as the Get it Right Initiative (GIRI) are driving quality improvement across the construction industry. The initiative has gathered momentum with construction companies realising the significant effect poor quality and costly errors causes on their bottom line. Studies have measured that direct costs of avoidable errors in the construction industry is around 5% of project value which equates for £5Bn per annum across the sector in the UK and is higher than average profit levels across the industry (around 3%). GIRI is gathering momentum, house builders such as Berkeley Group and many major contractors are already members.

Specific to the housing market, the National House Building Council (NHBC) is an independent authority who are the UK's leading warranty and insurance provider for UK house building for new homes. It has a particular focus on quality and customer satisfaction. In the 2020 standards set out by the NHBC, they highlighted improving the quality of all newly built homes to minimise issues seen after completion by the owners as the main aim.

It seems quantity over quality has been the recent underlying approach from house builders due to a combination of contributing factors highlighted in the above. However, with increased scrutiny surrounding the industry and a growing momentum from initiatives ensuring standards are met, the shift to a quality-first approach is now taking place. Last year the new housing secretary noted developers who try to get poor-quality schemes through planning will find the door shut in their face under a major overhaul of the system.

Technology's Role



Adopting the latest technologies, like Viewpoint's Field View solution, can dramatically improve quality tracking measures for contractors.

As early as 2016, in The House of Commons report "More Homes, Fewer Complaints" improving systems in place to check quality and workmanship was identified as a key change needed to drive a new quality culture in the construction industry. Fast forward a few years and the driver is very much technology led with the housing minister calling for a digital revolution in the property sector. With the mentioned increased demands on supplying new houses paired with a skilled labour shortage, it is technology that holds the key for house builders to improve quality whilst not causing detriment to the productivity rates of workers. Persimmon recently reported a fall in full year revenue as the company looked to correct quality issues. It recently invested £15m in annual quality as well as "industry-leading" digitalisation.

Viewpoint's Field View offers the digital solution to tackle the quality crisis. Field View enables house builders to drive quality improvement through digitising the snagging process, issuing snags directly to subcontractors from site, without the need to create additional reports. Viewpoint's customer St George of the Berkeley group improved quality through implementing Field View, as it gave them a central view of the status of all snags in a project to ensure defects were not missed. All aspects of the company's project management capabilities improved, including planning, drawing checks, sign-off and health and safety.

"It's easier to control the program, easier to control costs, it's easier to track snags being closed out," said Colin Draper St George Project Director. "I can't see any reason no matter what scale of project, why a house builder wouldn't be using Field View."

Learn more about how St George (Berkeley Group) digitised their snagging and planning processes to improve project quality or watch our webinar.

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