SNAGGING AND INSPECTIONS

The hidden problems with new-build homes—and how to avoid them

What buyers can check, what an inspection can reveal and how to deal with problems after moving in

PART OF THE CHECKSURE HOMEOWNER KNOWLEDGE BASE

Buying a new home	Handover	Snagging	Warranties	Home maintenance	Heating and ventilation
Electrical safety	Gardens	Building standards	Connectivity	Energy efficiency	General advice

The short answer: most new-home problems are not literally hidden. Many are visible finishing snags, commissioning issues or items that become apparent only when the home is used. Some concealed defects do occur, but no non-invasive inspection can expose every part of a completed building. The best protection is a combination of careful buying enquiries, an appropriately timed inspection, clear written evidence, prompt reporting and an understanding of the developer, consumer-code and warranty processes.

CheckSure's Homeowner Knowledge Base draws on practical experience of building, inspecting and resolving defects in new homes. Our aim is to explain what homeowners should reasonably expect, what may require further investigation and what steps they can take next.

In the Home Builders Federation's 19th National New Home Customer Satisfaction Survey, published in 2024 and covering completions between October 2022 and September 2023, 95% of respondents answered yes when asked whether they had reported any problems with their home—described in the survey as "snags, defects"—to their builder since moving in. The New Homes Quality Board's homeowner guide to snagging subsequently summarised this finding as "95% of homebuyers found snags in their new homes." The statistic indicates that reported issues were common among survey respondents; it does not mean that 95% of new homes contained serious defects.

Source: Home Builders Federation, 19th National New Home Customer Satisfaction Survey, 2024.

New does not mean perfect—but it should mean properly completed

A new home is produced by many trades, components and inspections. Small imperfections can remain at handover even on a well-run project. That does not make every issue acceptable, and it does not mean that a long list of defects should simply be dismissed as normal.

The Competition and Markets Authority found that most new-home buyers were happy overall, while also identifying a meaningful group who experienced numerous snags, delays or difficulty getting faults resolved. The sensible position lies between two extremes: do not assume a fresh finish proves everything is correct, but do not treat every paint mark as evidence of a serious construction failure.

Snag, defect or normal behaviour?

These labels help describe an issue, but the practical question is the same: does it affect safety, use, appearance or durability, and who is responsible for putting it right? Record what you can see before trying to diagnose hidden construction.

A snag is usually a minor imperfection or fault that does not meet the expected finish or contractual quality—for example damaged decoration, untidy sealant or a door needing adjustment. A defect is a failure in design, materials or workmanship that affects what was required. A leaking pipe, inoperative extractor fan or incorrectly installed component is more than a cosmetic snag.

New homes also dry and settle. Small shrinkage cracks, minor timber movement and the need for reasonable adjustments can occur as materials lose moisture and the building is heated and occupied. Whether movement is normal depends on its pattern, size, location and progression. Persistent dampness, recurring cracks, displaced components or anything affecting safety needs investigation rather than reassurance by label alone.

Figure 1. A careful inspection can reveal concealed defects and records the evidence needed for a clear report.

The issues buyers most often encounter

Finishes and fit

Decoration, sealant, tiling, ironmongery, doors, cabinets and glazing are the most accessible parts of a home, so they often dominate a snagging list. Check them in good natural light and from normal viewing positions. A professional inspection should apply the relevant published tolerances and inspection conditions, not invent a standard based on extreme close-up photography or artificial lighting.

Plumbing, heating and drainage

Leaks, poor falls, loose fittings, incomplete insulation, unbalanced heating or controls that were not explained can appear only when systems are used. Run outlets where the inspection scope permits, look beneath accessible fittings, check that sanitaryware is secure and understand the heating and hot-water controls. A visual snagging inspection is not a full pressure test, drainage survey or commissioning audit.

Ventilation, condensation and insulation

A new home contains construction moisture and needs correct heating and ventilation. Blocked, noisy or ineffective fans, closed trickle vents, missing loft insulation and poor seals can undermine performance. Some gaps are visible. concealed insulation defects may require specialist investigation such as thermal imaging under suitable temperature and weather conditions. Thermal images indicate temperature patterns—they do not, by themselves, prove the cause.

External levels, drainage and gardens

Check thresholds, falls, gullies, air bricks, boundary positions, paving and visible drainage routes. Newly laid turf can conceal uneven or compacted ground, but lifting it or walking across it too early may cause damage. Garden inspection should be timed appropriately and must not assume that a fragile new lawn can be heavily trafficked without leaving impressions.

Safety-related items

Loose electrical accessories, damaged safety glass, faulty alarms, incomplete guarding, insecure handrails or concerns about fire doors require prompt attention. A general snagging inspection can record visible indicators, but formal electrical testing, structural assessment, fire-safety certification and intrusive opening-up are separate specialist services.

What a pre-completion inspection can—and cannot—do

A pre-completion inspection is a structured visual check at a particular moment. It can identify incomplete work, visible damage, poor finish and apparent departures from relevant tolerances. It creates an independent record before furniture, decoration and normal occupation make responsibility harder to establish.

It cannot see through walls, verify every concealed fixing, redesign the building, certify statutory compliance or guarantee that no fault will emerge later. Access may also be limited by incomplete areas, safety restrictions, weather and the consumer code's permitted checklist. The inspector should explain the scope and any limitations rather than imply that the home has received an invasive building survey.

For homes covered by the New Homes Quality Code, eligible customers can appoint a suitably qualified inspector within the Code's pre-completion process. The applicable Code version depends on the developer's registration and reservation date. Other codes or contractual arrangements may apply, so confirm the actual rules for your purchase.

How to reduce the risk before completion

- Read the reservation agreement, specification, drawings, consumer code and warranty before exchange.
- Record important sales statements in writing and ask your conveyancer to confirm what becomes contractual.
- Check the plot, boundaries, parking, tenure, estate charges and future development phases—not only the house interior.
- Ask what inspections are permitted, when they may occur and which checklist or qualification rules apply.
- Keep copies of plans, options, upgrade invoices, emails, completion information and photographs.
- Do not exchange or complete on the assumption that a verbal promise will automatically be enforceable.

Reporting defects effectively after moving in

Use the developer's published aftercare system and keep one controlled record. Give each item a number, exact location, date first noticed, short factual description and clear photographs. State the effect—such as active leakage, inability to heat a room or a trip hazard—without guessing at a technical cause. Save acknowledgements, appointments and repair records.

Prioritise anything unsafe or likely to cause further damage. If water is escaping, use an accessible isolation control if safe and contact the emergency or aftercare number. For gas, electrical, fire or structural danger, keep people away and use the appropriate emergency or competent specialist route. A routine snagging list should never delay urgent action.

Under the New Homes Quality Code, the developer's after-sales and complaints duties include time expectations, but exact rights depend on whether the Code covers the home and which version applies. If an item is not resolved, follow the formal complaint route rather than relying indefinitely on informal calls. The relevant ombudsman, warranty provider or other redress scheme may become available at the appropriate stage.

Choosing the right inspection after completion

A CheckSure New-home Snagging Inspection is the systematic post-completion service, ideally arranged soon after the homeowner's completion or occupation. It establishes a detailed current record of the visible and accessible home room by room and component by component.

The CheckSure End-of-Defects Period Inspection is the systematic later-stage service before the applicable developer or warranty deadline. It is not merely a recheck of an old list: it uses the full applicable post-completion sequence and can be arranged even if no earlier snagging inspection took place. It additionally distinguishes outstanding matters, failed or recurring repairs and relevant concerns that have emerged during occupation.

Understanding the warranty

A structural warranty is not a maintenance contract and does not insure every cosmetic or functional complaint. A common model has an initial period when the developer deals with qualifying defects, followed by insurance cover for defined structural risks. Gardens, minor finishes, wear, condensation caused by use and items below a claim threshold may be excluded or treated differently.

Read the policy schedule, technical requirements, exclusions, excess and notification rules. Report relevant issues within the required timescale even if the developer is also investigating. Do not assume that building control, the warranty provider and the developer are the same organisation or have identical responsibilities.

When to seek specialist advice

Obtain specialist help where there is a safety concern, significant or progressive movement, repeated water ingress, persistent dampness despite correct use, suspected drainage failure, serious overheating, recurring electrical faults or disagreement about the cause of a substantial defect. The appropriate expert may be a chartered building surveyor, structural engineer, registered electrician, Gas Safe engineer, drainage specialist or building-physics professional.

An expert should answer a defined question. Commissioning an expensive investigation before clarifying the symptoms, available records and contractual process can create cost without resolving responsibility.

Common misunderstandings

“A new home should contain no imperfections at all”

Developers should aim for a high standard, but minor snags can occur and should be recorded and corrected.

“Every snag is a structural defect”

Most snags are finishing or installation issues; structural concerns are a smaller and more specialist category.

“The warranty provider will find everything”

Warranty inspections are not a buyer’s full snagging survey and do not continuously inspect every element.

Frequently asked questions

Should every snag be fixed before completion?

A home should be complete and suitable for occupation, but the treatment of minor outstanding items depends on the contract and applicable consumer code. Obtain a written schedule, responsibility and timescale. Serious safety, security, weather-tightness or essential-service issues should not be treated like minor decoration.

Can an inspector guarantee there are no hidden defects?

No. A non-invasive inspection cannot verify every concealed element. It can reduce risk by identifying visible evidence, testing items within scope and directing further investigation where justified.

Is a long snagging list proof that the house is badly built?

Not necessarily. A list may contain many minor finish observations, while one short list may contain a serious fault. Severity, cause, recurrence and the quality of the developer's response matter more than the raw number alone.

Should I let the developer repair defects?

Usually the developer should have a reasonable opportunity to inspect and put qualifying work right under the contract or code. Do not arrange non-emergency work that may affect evidence or recovery of cost without legal or warranty advice. Emergencies require proportionate action to keep people safe and limit damage.

Key takeaways

- Separate cosmetic snags, functional defects, normal drying behaviour and urgent warning signs.
- Use the inspection appropriate to the home's stage: pre-completion before handover, New-home Snagging after access, or End-of-Defects Period later in occupation before the applicable deadline.
- Check which consumer code and warranty apply to the individual home and reservation date.
- Report issues factually, with locations, dates, photographs and a controlled written record.
- Escalate unresolved matters through the formal process and seek the right specialist for serious concerns.
- Good preparation and documentation reduce risk more effectively than assuming either perfection or disaster.

> If you would like an independent assessment, use the CheckSure inspection-services page to choose the New-home Snagging or End-of-Defects Period service appropriate to your stage.

EXPLORE FURTHER Explore the CheckSure Homeowner Knowledge Base for related guidance on buying, inspecting and looking after a new home. Please visit checksure.co.uk/knowledge-base/

Sources & References

Home Builders Federation — 19th National New Home Customer Satisfaction Survey (2024), covering completions from October 2022 to September 2023; question 20 is the primary source for the 95% reported-problems wording. https://www.hbf.co.uk/documents/13402/19th_Survey_CSS_2024_Completions_October_2022_to_September_2023.pdf

New Homes Quality Board — A homeowner guide to snagging; secondary summary of the Home Builders Federation survey result. https://www.nhqb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/A-homeowner-guide-to-snagging.pdf

New Homes Quality Board — the Code. Current Code versions, developer scope and New Homes Ombudsman eligibility.
https://www.nhqb.org.uk/the-code/
New Homes Quality Board — after-sales service and complaints. Current Code process for snagging, complaints and redress.
https://www.nhqb.org.uk/the-code/after-sales-service-complaints-and-the-new-homes-ombudsman/
New Homes Quality Board — glossary. Current definitions of snags and the pre-completion inspection checklist.
https://www.nhqb.org.uk/the-code/glossary-2/
Competition and Markets Authority — housebuilding market study final report. Independent evidence on defects, aftercare, warranties and consumer outcomes.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housebuilding-market-study-final-report/final-report
GOV.UK — How to buy a home. Official guidance on new-home warranties, surveys and buyer enquiries.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-buy-a-home/how-to-buy
House of Commons Library — New-build housing: construction defects—issues and solutions (England), CBP-07665 (22 August 2022). Historical policy background only; current law, Code, warranty and redress information should be checked separately. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7665/

Need help with your new home?

Contact CheckSure for an independent assessment of your new home.

Email admin@checksure.co.uk
WhatsApp 07533 917477
Website checksure.co.uk

ABOUT THIS PRINT EDITION. This edition reformats CheckSure website content for comfortable A4 reading and printing. Website navigation and related-article links are not reproduced. The article text, headings, figure captions, sources and copyright notice follow the approved hardcopy order.