

Dad found Costa coffee cup sticking out wall of new home

A dad who discovered a hole on the outside wall of his brand new £250,000 home had been filled with a Costa coffee cup is calling for an independent regulator to be introduced to hold house builders to account.

Author Justin Lee Anderson spent three years fighting to have a long list of faults at his five bedroom house in Wallyford, East Lothian, fixed by developers Persimmons.

He established a local tenants and residents association after discovering his experience was not isolated on the new estate but says he was left frustrated by the housing firm's lack of response to his problems.

Now he is calling on the Scottish Government to establish a housing ombudsman to give home owners the right to demand higher standards and ensure developers face consequences when they fail to get it right.

And he wants local authority planning committees to have the right to reject applications from builders who have failed to produce good quality houses in the past.

Justin said: "There is a presumption of competence given to house builders which is just wrong and allows them to get away with shockingly poor standards without any real consequences.

"Nobody's properly inspecting the work. Contractors are paid piecework and given too many houses to cover in a day, so they end up leaving rushed, incompetent work to be "picked up in snagging". There's no proper quality control.

"Planning committees can't legally refuse a planning application from a builder as long as that application meets regulations. There is no consideration of the builder's record of competence. So they can build as many terrible houses as they like and keep getting planning permission for more.

"Our experience was shocking but not unique as I discovered from talking to neighbours and other people on our estate. It is just not good enough."

Justin and his family faced problems from the day they arrived at their new home on the St Clements estate five years ago and discovered the oven and hob in the kitchen had been stolen as the house was not locked before they moved in.

That was just the first of a string of issues they would discover in the weeks and months ahead including finding a Costa coffee cup had been used instead of a cover for the extractor fan vent at the side of the house.

They also found issues with the heating which saw the thermostat upstairs controlling the heat downstairs and vice versa, the bath hot water tap producing cold water while the cold tap provided hot water and gaps between the walls and roof and windows allowing cold air into the property.

The list of snagging did not end there, Justin said: "Our ensuite shaver plug only worked when the light was on. Our extractor fan didn't work at all.

"Electricians came to fix the plug, so that it worked without the light on. Then the extractor fan was finally replaced and works. Now the shaver plug only works when the extractor fan is on.

“We had a similar problem when the shaver plug was finally fitted in our main bathroom. It only worked when the light was on. The electricians had to climb into the attic to sort out that wiring.”

The family also discovered the pipe from the extractor fan in the bathroom only went as far as the attic and was not attached to any external vent meaning damp air pumped into the loft area.

After three years of battling Persimmons and a list of site managers and customer service staff who, Justin said, would regularly leave and be replaced leading to the complaints process starting again, he told the developers he no longer wanted them involved in fixing outstanding problems.

Justin said: “It was exhausting and frustrating and I seemed to just get nowhere and I battled for three years. Most home owners would have given up before me and I think developers rely on that.

“It is absurd that they are making huge profits on houses but get away with botched jobs and using sub standard contractors.”

Justin took his plight to the Scottish Greens annual conference last month where his call for a housing ombudsman to be appointed to oversee developments and a change of law to allow planners to refuse applications based on a firm’s reputation was adopted by the party as policy.

Musselburgh councillor Shona McIntosh, Scottish Greens, said it was time for developers to be held to account.

She said: “It is like the wild west out there with no regulator overseeing developments or cracking down on shoddy work. This is the biggest investment in peoples’ lives and a major decision for them, yet they are left at the mercy of housebuilders who are not answerable to anyone.

“It has to stop.”

Persimmons said it was ‘disappointed’ to hear about Justin’s experience with his home, which he moved into in 2019.

A spokesperson said: “We are disappointed that Mr Anderson did not receive the level of service we strive to provide and we apologise for the inconvenience he experienced. While we have not been made aware of any issues with the property since 2022, we are committed to addressing any concerns brought to our attention.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter