

NHBC to take BBC Wales to Broadcasting Standards Council over allegations of “misrepresentation”.

The National House Building Council has hit back at a BBC television documentary that claimed the NHBC failed to inspect every home constructed under its inspection service.

A spokesperson for the NHBC said it would lodge a complaint with the Broadcasting Standards Council over the documentary, *Safe As Houses?*, made by BBC Wales and broadcast in Wales on 26 October. It featured an interview with NHBC chief executive Imtiaz Farookhi and residents of an estate in Pontypool, South Wales, who complained that their homes had been built with defective mortar.

The NHBC claims that the programme makers misrepresented comments made by Farookhi in an interview shown on the programme.

During the interview, Farookhi was asked: “How many homes do you inspect out of all those that are built?” He replied: “We inspect about 150 000-160 000 units in this country in a year.” When asked if the NHBC inspected every home, Farookhi answered: “Probably the vast majority of houses.” A spokesperson for the NHBC said Farookhi thought the interviewer was asking him how many of the homes built in the UK the NHBC inspected, not the number for which the NHBC was responsible.

She said: “We didn’t admit to not inspecting every house. We do inspect every single plot several times and we have detailed plot information to back that up.” The spokesperson added that Farookhi could not be expected to comment on “technical questions”.

The documentary focused on a Redrow Homes estate where residents have complained that the mortar used was weak and had crumbled away, leaving gaps in the exterior and interior of houses.

One of the houses referred to in the programme had previously been featured in *Building*. The NHBC admitted then that some inspections it claimed to have carried out on the property (and authenticated by Farookhi in good faith) had never taken place (23 July).

Colin Lewis, regional managing director of Redrow Homes, was interviewed on the programme and admitted that the mortar in the houses was defective, calling it a “rogue batch”. The residents have asked Redrow to buy back the houses, but Lewis insisted that this was not an appropriate response to the problem. Instead, he suggested repointing the brickwork.

The programme also featured Malcolm Hollis, professor of building surveying at Reading University. Hollis said: “This [repointing] is a minimal way to resolve a problem that shouldn’t exist in a building constructed at the end of the 20th century.” He added that the inspection of the buildings during construction was deficient and had failed the homeowners.

The NHBC spokesperson dismissed Hollis’ criticism, saying: “Weak mortar is an extraordinarily difficult problem to detect on site. An NHBC inspector isn’t on site watching people mix mortar, the only form of inspection he can do is visual.” She added: “The programme featured very heavily on Professor Hollis as a construction expert, yet despite our requests they refused to interview Barry Haseltine, the international expert we had look at the site. This was trial by television.” She added that Haseltine should have been interviewed.

A spokesperson for BBC Wales said: “We are grateful for Mr Farookhi’s contribution to the programme. However, we believe the journalist behaved in accordance with our strict editorial guidelines.” She added: “We interviewed the people we felt necessary to give a fair and balanced insight into the problem.”