A Guide to your New Home

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Section 1 –
Settling into your new home

Like most new things, a home needs to be taken care of. In the first few months, it's especially important that your home is allowed to 'settle' – this includes allowing it to dry out gently.

During this period, you may notice minor cracks in walls, gaps in joinery and white deposits on the walls – all are completely normal in new homes and may occur regardless of the measures you take to ensure that they do not. However, you can certainly reduce the chance of this happening by following the steps outlined in Section 3 – Running your new home.

The First Few Days

Over the coming days, you should carry out several tests and checks to make sure everything's in order:

- Familiarise yourself with the operation of your smoke alarms and check they work by pressing the button.
- Ensure you have been given operating instructions for all systems and appliances.
- Check that the garden boundaries are as you expected.

Standard of Finish

Each and every house is different – that's what makes a house a home. Yours has been individually built and handcrafted by human beings, not robots! That means there will inevitably be some variation in the finished appearance of different elements of the construction. This is due to the nature of the materials and the ways in which they are applied. Slight variations are normal and to be expected – complete uniformity is quite rare.

Section 2 –
Running your new home

New homes should be run-in gently over the first few months. This is because concrete, bricks, timber, plaster and other materials will have absorbed a considerable amount of water during construction. You may not be aware of it, and it certainly will not do you any harm, but it does need to evaporate slowly and be ventilated away.

Drying out

As your home is lived in and heated, timber and other materials will shrink and this can cause small cracks on wall and ceiling finishes together with joints in joinery. These cracks are not structurally significant and can be put right in the normal process of redecoration. However, because such minor cracks are inevitable, the builder is not required to rectify them and should be made good by the homeowner as part of normal household maintenance. However you can certainly reduce the chance of this happening by following the advice given in this section.

To minimise cracking, try to keep a reasonably even temperature throughout your home, even in rooms which are not occupied. If you move in during winter months try to use the central heating sparingly at first, so that the structure of your home warms up and dries out gradually. Depending on how your home has been built and the weather conditions, this may take several months. Your home needs to be kept well ventilated to allow moisture to evaporate as the structure dries out. Leave windows or, at least, the trickle vents (slotted vents in the window frame) open for as long as you can each day.

Efflorescence

The appearance of a white deposit on the wall (known as efflorescence) can also be an effect of the drying-out process. These white deposits are actually natural salts that come out of the wall materials and are quite normal. These salts are not harmful and usually disappear over time, and where they appear on internal walls, they can be brushed or wiped away. However, if the white deposits continue to appear on internal walls, it could indicate something more serious, such as a water leak. If that's the case, you need to contact the Newbuild Aftercare Team for further advice.

Reducing condensation

Condensation is caused by steam or water vapour when it comes into contact with cold surfaces (in the same way that steam in the bathroom condenses on the window). Condensation is common in new and newly converted homes while construction materials dry out. If allowed to persist it can sometimes cause mould on walls and ceilings. In exceptional circumstances, condensation and mould can damage clothes, bedding, floor coverings, decorations and the home itself.

Once materials have dried out, you should no longer experience significant condensation. However, normal daily activities produce a great deal of water vapour, which may cause condensation if allowed to spread around the home. In cold weather you may notice some moisture on the felt under the roof tiles of your home. This is due to warm moist air from inside your home passing through the ceiling and condensing on the cold timber or felt and should gradually disperse. The following advice should help reduce condensation:

- **Produce less moisture** - cover pans when cooking to reduce steam. Avoid drying clothes indoors over radiators. Put washing outdoors to dry if you can. If you use a tumble dryer, make sure that it is vented to the outside air (unless it is a self-condensing type). DIY vent kits are available.

- **Stop moisture spreading through the home** - use the cooker hood and/or extractor fans and keep the doors closed when cooking, washing, bathing and drying clothes indoors.

- **Ventilate moisture away** - Ventilation is needed to get rid of the moisture that is naturally produced every day in your home. The trickle vents (slotted vents in the window frames) are intended to provide constant 'background' ventilation and should be left open when rooms are occupied. If you have one, make sure your tumble dryer's venting duct leads outside (unless it is a self-condensing dryer).

- **Provide even heating** - Homes where the heating is off all day because the occupants are out, are more likely to suffer condensation problems than those heated more continuously. This is because, when normal activities such as washing and cooking are carried out in the evening, the home has been unheated for long periods and so surfaces are cold. Make sure the central heating timer is set so that your home is warm by the time you return home. During very cold weather it is better to leave the heating on during the day to maintain an even temperature. The temperature can be set a few degrees lower and turned up when you return.

Condensation in your roof space

Condensation isn't normally a building fault. It can occur in a new home because building materials, such as mortar and plaster, contain a lot of moisture. Water vapour is formed as the materials dry out when the home is lived in and heated. This is a slow process that takes some time to complete.

Water vapour can pass through most building materials and will enter the roof space through the plasterboard ceilings. A greater amount can enter through air gaps in ceilings, such as around cables, pipes, loft hatches and downlighters.

Your roof space is an unheated area and normal daily activities in the living area of the home (such as taking showers and baths, washing and drying clothes, cooking and boiling kettles) produce warm air containing a large amount of water vapour. If the warm air can't escape through an open window or air vent, it moves around until it finds a cold surface (which could be in the roof space) where it cools and forms condensation.

This may be more obvious in cooler weather or when there is a big temperature drop between day and night, where you may notice some moisture on the underside of the felt beneath your roof tiles. As the roof space is ventilated/breathable, this should gradually disperse without any issues arising, and following the general tips on reducing condensation (given earlier in this guide), will help keep any moist air that does escape into the roof down to a minimum.

Lofts are not generally intended to be used as a storage space; They are unheated, and the structure of the roof is not likely to have been designed to take the additional load of stored items. Additionally, the loft insulation may prevent safe access.

Section 3 – Essential Services

Electricity

Where does it come from?

Electricity is normally supplied via an underground cable, which is connected to your meter (used for measuring energy consumption in kWh). In some cases, electricity may be sourced directly from an on-site generator such as a wind turbine, solar panel or combined heat and power (CHP) unit.

How does it work?

From the meter, cables run out to your consumer unit (often referred to as a fuse box). This contains the main on/off switch and a number of miniature circuit breakers (MCBs), which protect individual circuits. An MCB will automatically disconnect the supply of electricity if one of the circuits is overloaded or there is a fault. You can reset an MCB by simply switching it back to the 'on' position. A consumer unit will also often contain a residual current device (RCD), which provides additional shock protection. An RCD which has 'tripped' can be reset by returning the switch to the 'on' position. RCDs should be periodically tested to ensure they are functioning correctly: you can do this by pressing the 'test' button.

WARNING: If an MCB or RCD trips repeatedly, there may be a fault with an appliance or the installation. You should contact a professional electrician for help.

From the consumer unit, electricity is distributed around your home via a series of cables. These are usually concealed within walls or under floors. Cables above a ceiling or under a floor may be run in any position, but those found in walls should have been installed by your builder as follows:

- Vertically above or below a socket outlet or switch being served.
- Horizontally on either side of the socket or switch.
- Horizontally in a band within 150mm (6") of the ceiling.
- Vertically in a band within 150mm (6") of the corner of a room in each wall.

Water

Where does it come from?

Water is supplied by a regional water company through an underground service pipe. This pipe is fitted with a stop valve, which can be found at the boundary of your property. Its position allows the water company to turn off the supply in an emergency or for maintenance. Please make a note of the precise location of your stop valve. You may also have one within your home - make a note of this location too (often under the kitchen sink).

In some cases, water may be sourced directly from an on-site rain or waste-water harvester – water collected this way is often used for flushing toilets.

Gas

Where does it come from?

Gas is supplied by an energy company and enters your home through a service pipe that terminates at the control valve, which can be found next to the meter. The meter, which is usually installed outside the building (either on a wall or partially buried in the ground), is used to measure gas consumption in cubic metres or cubic feet. Your builder should have given you a key that opens the meter cupboard so you can read the meter or close the control valve in an emergency.

How does it work?

Gas is fed to the central heating boiler and other gas appliances (such as an oven) through pipework, which may be concealed within walls and under floors.

WARNING: You should always contact a professional gas engineer who is listed on the Gas Safe Register to deal with problems with your gas supply or appliances.

Central heating

With a better understanding of your central heating system, you can:

- Improve thermal efficiency
- Lower your energy costs
- Reduce your carbon footprint

How does it work?

Most new homes are fitted with a hot water central heating system which consists of a boiler, radiators, a pump and several controls. Water heated by the boiler is pumped around the radiators through pipework that is usually concealed within the floors and walls.

Some central heating systems may include a ground or air source heat pump, a biomass boiler/burner, or even solar panels/tiles. Your builder will have informed you if you have any of these systems in place.

Operating instructions for your central heating system are provided at handover.

Boilers will usually have a programmer that allows you to turn the heating on and off, and to adjust the settings to suit your requirements. You can easily program the heating to stay on for longer in the colder winter months. A room thermostat and/or thermostatic radiator valves are normally provided to regulate individual room temperatures.

WARNING: Always take care to establish the exact position of cables and pipes which are embedded in walls or under floorboards. You can do this using a cable detector.

Types of central heating system

There are generally two types of central heating system: those with a hot water cylinder, and those without one.

Central heating systems that have a hot water cylinder or storage vessel – water that is heated by the boiler is also circulated through a coil to heat the water within the cylinder. Water from the cylinder is then distributed to the hot taps around the home. The temperature of the water provided from the taps can usually be adjusted using the cylinder thermostat.

Central heating systems that use a combination boiler **do not have a hot water cylinder**. This is because the boiler takes water directly from the rising main, heats it, and distributes it directly to the hot taps as and when needed. A control found on the boiler allows you to set the temperature of the water that comes out of the hot taps.

Repairs and maintenance

Most repair and maintenance work ought to be carried out by a professional engineer. However, there are one or two things you may be able to do yourself, such as:

- Bleed your radiators

- Repressurise your central heating system


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Section 4 –
Care and Maintenance Tips

Fitted furniture

Over time, things like doors, drawers, windows and cabinets may require a little adjustment here and there. This is to be expected and is considered as part of normal maintenance.

Servicing (Purchasers only)

Central heating boilers, sprinkler systems and mechanical ventilation should be checked and serviced at least once a year by a competent maintenance engineer, so that they remain safe. Engineers should be registered with the following organisations, as appropriate for the type of appliance:

- Gas Safe Register for gas appliances
- OFTEC for oil fired appliances
- HETAS Ltd for solid fuel appliances

Servicing unvented hot water storage systems (Purchasers only)

These systems should be serviced at least once a year by a competent installer in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. The manufacturer should be able to provide details of an approved installer.

Water from overflows and warning pipes

If you notice water dripping or flowing from an overflow or warning pipe, you should identify the cause without delay. It may indicate that a valve has developed a fault and needs attention.

Gutters

Gutters should be cleaned out regularly to remove leaves and debris. Wet patches on the walls below may indicate that gutters or downpipes are blocked or leaking. Prune trees or branches that touch or grow over roofs and gutters.

Flat roofs

Flat roofs and associate flashings should be inspected regularly to ensure that they remain in sound condition. Rainwater outlets should be checked to ensure that they are not blocked.

Paintwork

External finishes will dull over time and, where appropriate, should be washed on a regular basis. Outside woodwork should be regularly repainted or stained to preserve the wood. The first repainting outside will probably be needed in about two years, but after that – provided it is properly done – repainting or staining should only be necessary every four to five years. You may need to do it more often if you live by the sea or in an exposed area.

Caring for your garden and turf

The initial establishment period will depend on the weather and nature of soil, however it will generally take 6-8 weeks and is advisable to keep pets off the lawn and not walk on it for this settlement period. Avoid allowing pets to foul on your new lawn. A bulk dressing of sand, soil and peat in the proportion of 3:2:1, may be necessary to fill any joints/gaps and uneven surface that have appeared in hot weather.

- **Watering –** it is most important that a suitable watering system is available immediately after laying the turf and you continue until the lawn is established, if there are signs of a drought, water the lawn area, avoiding excessive watering since this encourages weed grasses to flourish.

- **Initial Mowing** - Pick a nice dry day to mow your lawn, mow the area as and when necessary – with the blades set at their highest level, continue to gradually reduce the mowing height and step up the frequency of mowing to twice a week, never remove more than 25% of the growth at any one time, do not forget to remove the clippings.

- **Treat** areas infected by moss or disease with a proprietary moss killer or fungicide application, when the first signs of disease are evident. These are available in either liquid or powder form.

- **Keep** the area free from debris and leaves in readiness for the winter months.

- **Generally** – Many of our developments are built on heavy clay soil which can lead to waterlogged gardens during rain or adverse weather conditions, if the weather permits, aerate the surface using a garden fork, it is your responsibility to tend, keep clean and generally maintain in good condition the turf, any hedges, forecourts and pathways to the premises.

- **Do** stop pets from digging up, urinating or fouling on your lawn. Dog urine can cause brown patches in your grass as well as causing it to burn which will be detrimental to the lawn. If your pet fouls on your lawn, please clear away and dispose promptly.

- **Tip:** Once the lawn has established It also helps if you keep the lawn as healthy as possible by feeding every spring and autumn and mow weekly when the lawn is fully established and growing. As your lawn grows, you can mow at regular intervals to match the growth rate.

If your property is provided without turf to your garden and you decide to turf your lawn, we recommend the following:

- **Do** prepare your soil removing all pieces of rock, roots and other debris to allow for the turf to be laid. You should then level the area with a rake.

- **Don't** wait too long to lay your turf. You should try to lay it within a day of delivery, however if this is not possible open the rolls and water them. They may turn slightly yellow, but should turn back green once laid.

- **Do** ensure that your new turf is regularly watered to prevent the grass from being put under stress.

- **Don't** walk on your new turf until it has been properly rooted into the soil, this could take a several weeks.

- **Do** trim it slightly if the weather is mild and it has started to grow, however keep the mower blades set high as if cut too short it can prevent the grass from being able to absorb and retain the moisture and nutrient it needs.

- **Don't** forget to regularly fertilise the lawn to help it remain healthy and dense. Never fertilise a dry lawn unless you are using granules which you should water after.

- **Do** stop pets from digging up, urinating or fouling on your lawn. Dog urine can cause brown patches in your grass as well as causing it to burn which will be detrimental to the lawn. If your pet fouls on your lawn, please clear away and dispose promptly.

- **Don't** water at night as this can cause mould and fungi to grow, leaving your lawn in a worse condition.

- Now that you know a few dos and don'ts of preparing for and looking after your new lawn turf, you can be sure that you know how to look after it properly to get the best results.

Trees and shrubs

Planting trees and shrubs can make your garden more attractive – but be careful: trees and shrubs take moisture from the soil. If the soil is clay, new planting may cause it to shrink, while removing existing trees and shrubs may make it swell. Excessive shrinkage or swelling could damage foundations.

Be careful not to plant trees near your neighbour's home. They could cause damage, and you could be liable for the cost of repair. Before cutting down or pruning a mature tree, check with your local authority to make sure that it is not protected by planning conditions, conservation area restrictions or a tree preservation order.

Drives and paths

Gravel, stones and other loose surfaces may be displaced over time. They may need adding to or replacing as part of normal maintenance.

Inspection chambers and rodding eyes are there to provide access to the drainage system below ground so that blockages can be cleared. It is important that these are not covered over by soil, turf or paving.

In soft landscaping, such as lawned areas, some settlement of the ground may occur and should be made good as part of normal maintenance

Damp proof courses, air bricks and other ventilators

The level of soil around your home should be kept below the damp proof course (generally 150mm or two brick courses). Paths should also generally be kept around 150mm or two brick courses below the damp proof course, except where these have been designed to provide level access into the home.

Where air bricks, permanent ventilators or perpend vents are provided, they should not be blocked or covered by soil or paving.

Section 5 – Alterations and extensions (Purchasers only)

Thinking of updating your home? Perhaps it's a porch, a conservatory or a double-storey extension. Whatever alterations or extensions you're thinking of making, you should always seek advice from an appropriately qualified structural engineer, building surveyor or architect. You should also refer to your title deeds or lease.

However, it's important to remember that any alterations or extensions to your home will not be covered by your structural warranty; neither will any damage to your home caused by the work undertaken.

Other things to think about:

- All electrical work should be carried out by competent electricians. The National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC) and the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) keep a register of approved firms.

- All gas system changes/modifications should be carried out by a gas engineer listed on the Gas Safe Register.

- All roof timbers are necessary for the support of the roof and should not be cut or removed.

- Lofts are not generally intended to be used as a storage space; the structure of the roof is not likely to have been designed to take the additional load of stored items, and the loft insulation may prevent safe access.

- Ventilation is provided to control condensation. If vents have been provided in the eaves, they should not be blocked or covered over.

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