

After months trying to buy my dream country house, I'm devastated to be back at square one

Property woes and wheeler dealers are getting in the way of our columnist's fresh start

By Katie Glass 23 January 2021 • 6:00am



Katie Glass: 'After months trying to buy my dream country house, I'm devastated to be back at square one'
PHOTO CREDIT: Jooney Woodward

‘How is your new house?’ Friends excitedly ask me. I cannot bear to tell them, far from having moved in, the purchase is in an absolute mess.

My attempts to negotiate with the seller through the estate agent are being met – by the agent – with contempt, as he dismisses the issues I raise about the house as if I am causing a fuss over nothing.

He shrugs off my concerns about the lack of listed buildings consent, laughing off any suggestion that the seller might reduce the price to reflect the restoration bill I could face.

He scoffs at my suggestion that the seller seeks retrospective listed buildings consent (even when I offer to wait for six months and rent), instead reiterating his threat that the seller will just put the house back on the market for more cash.

Meanwhile he pressures me to 'just leave' the water situation, without clarity on how the seller has not paid a water bill in 20 years, and no certainty I will not. We are at stalemate.

'It's because you're a woman,' one friend says. 'You should try being a single mum – all men talk to me like I'm an idiot.'

'It's because you're a woman,' a different friend agrees. 'He's not taking you seriously.'

At first I refuse to believe this. Perhaps I am naive about sexism. Or perhaps until now I've mostly negotiated with people as a journalist and that has protected me from the way some people see women.

I decide to try a different tack. I tell the estate agent I have spoken to my father who is furious things have got this far when the seller must have known about these issues months ago when they accepted my offer. I tell him my dad has insisted that the seller either applies for retrospective buildings consent or drops the price, or he wants me to withdraw from the purchase. (I do not mention that my dad is dead.)

I am a traitor to feminism. And it is a success. The estate agent knocks £50,000 off. He still wants me to 'leave' the water situation.

For a day I feel triumphant. Still, the problems with the house are far from resolved. As my solicitor explains that although I could take out indemnity insurance against the lack of listed buildings consent it would be invalidated if, say, I later applied for planning permission to add heating.

I call my head bridesmaid, Rob, also a barrister, who is furious. 'Who's selling you this house, Arthur Daley?' he says. I have to stop him from writing several stronglyworded letters to South West Water, Historic England and the Property Ombudsman.

I feel overwhelmed by the whole situation: on my own in Cornwall, still grieving the breakdown of my relationship and having [made myself homeless during a pandemic](#), it all feels too much. 'What happened to [my peaceful escape](#) to the country?' I think. Instead I have left one emotionally fraught relationship behind only to start a new one – with a house.

The magnificent farmhouse described in the estate agent's details now looks more like a stone box in a field with no heating, water or planning permission. My beautiful home is a mirage. I've waited months for something that doesn't exist.

In the end, I don't have a choice. I pull out of the purchase and with it a [whole dream I had built](#) collapses.

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