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MYSTERY SHOPPING REPORT 2023

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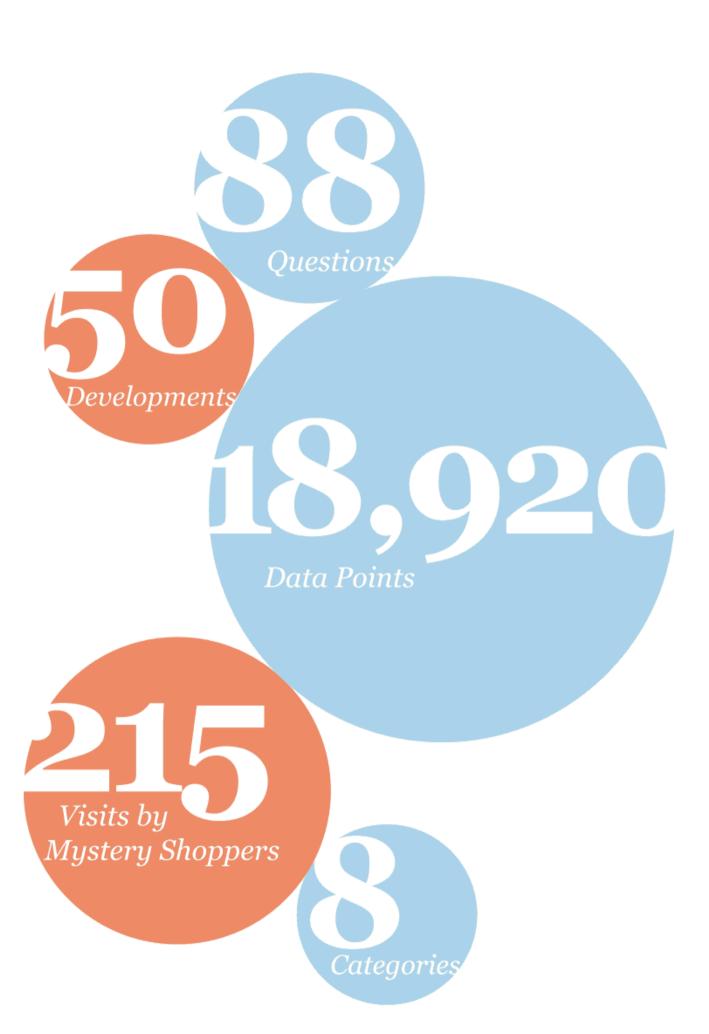
In the spotlight: ESG



By Debra Yudolph, Partner at SAY

ustomer service is a critical aspect of the Build-to-Rent sector that all developers, investors, and operators need to understand. Therefore, the HereSAY service is a valuable tool as it offers an unbiased evaluation of one of the most crucial parts of a customer's journey. The "lead to lease" experience not only attracts customers but also provides an opportunity to promote the benefits of the sector and development. This year, hereSAY conducted over 215 shops and collected over 18,500 pieces of data across 50 schemes. The findings were intriguing, mostly showcasing excellent quality homes and service, with some areas ripe for improvement. Unlike last year, when research was conducted during the pandemic's late stages, this year's market has been prosperous, with a significant demand but a lack of supply. As a result, the decline in elements of customer service may be understandable, but it is still disappointing. The data also revealed that BTR struggles to explain its benefits and value-add to potential customers during the leasing journey. Despite the sector's offerings defying all expectations of renting, promoting these advantages seems to be an issue. Perhaps, in a "hot" market, such as the current one, the developments themselves are enough to capture leasing interest but as we all know, markets change, and a teams bad habits are difficult to correct. We have had great feedback from our retained clients on the value of the service, particularly as a training tool.

I hope that you enjoy the report and its insights.



hereSAY

[heer-sey] noun.

A detailed account, shared by a person about their experience of viewing a place to live.

hereSAY is the first mystery shopping service that benchmarks the viewing experience across the build to rent (BTR) industry in the UK, focusing on the lead to lease journey.

hereSAY surveyed the Build to Rent (BTR) market in England, Scotland, and Ireland from October 2022 to February 2023. A team of professional mystery shoppers contacted 50 BTR developments, providing detailed feedback on customer service, amenities, and overall development quality. The mystery shoppers responded to over 80 questions across eight categories, providing insights into the quality of customer service and development presentation.

This report summarises hereSAY's findings of the new 50 development benchmark, including what makes or breaks a development, trends across the industry, the top three performing operators, and the highest performers of each category. The report compares and contrasts the results from the 2021 benchmark to see where the industry is progressing and where attention is required.

Overall, the benchmark study provides unparalleled insights into the BTR industry, informing developers, investors, and property managers on best practices and areas for improvement. The report includes verbatim quotes from mystery shoppers, highlighting positive experiences or features while keeping negative quotes anonymous.



here SAY

The Leading Mystery Shopping Service for Build to Rent

Gain valuable insights into your leasing team's performance compared to competitors with hereSAY, the first mystery shopping service for Build to Rent.

Our 2022-2023 benchmark includes data from 50 BTR schemes across the UK, providing a comprehensive understanding of market performance and best practices.

Expertly trained mystery shoppers pose as potential customers, reporting on service quality and scheme presentation and upkeep.

We provide both detailed quantitative and rich qualitative data to help you understand how customers perceive your product, how your team makes them feel, and their perception of your brand.

hereSAY is brought to you by SAY, an award-winning consultancy and leading provider of operational advisory services across all industries. SAY's clients include market-leaders like Greystar, Native Residential, and John Lewis & Partners.

Our mystery shopping service helps operators, investors, and developers understand the customer and brand experience during the lead-to-lease journey.

A robust mystery shopping programme consistently measures and monitors service performance, preventing blind spots in customer experience.

All our data is feedback from a customer's point of view, removing internal team bias.

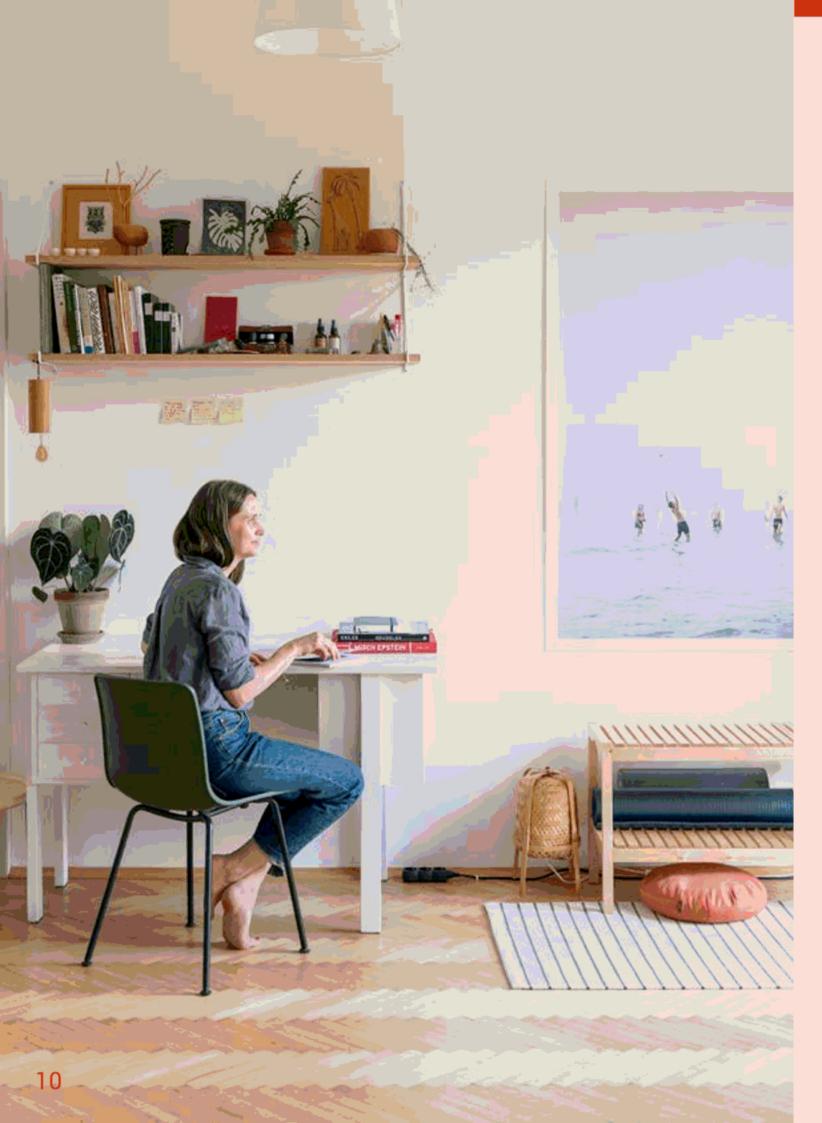


The benefits of mystery shopping with hereSAY

- Independent, unbiased feedback from an award-winning team specialising in the built environment
- Objective and easy-to-digest data
- Internal and external benchmarking
- Tried and tested methodology
- Continuous monitoring with qualitative and quantitative feedback
- Can be used to deliver targeted training and development

Discover how you performed in our 2023 benchmark and how we can help enhance your understanding of customer experience relative to competitors.

Our mystery shopping services are available for BTR, student, sales, and later living. If you are interested in entering the sector, our data-led insights can help support your business strategy.



Who we shopped

Allsop

Lendlease

Amro Partners

M&G/Savills

be:here

Moda

City & Docklands

Native Residential

Cortland

Outpost Management

Dandara

PLATFORM_

Essential Living

Quintain Living

Folio

Simple Life

Fresh

Touchstone

Get Living

UNCLE

Grainger plc

urbanbubble

Greystar

Vertus

Kooky

Way of Life

Legal & General

What we measured:

experience



Where a viewing takes place, this category accounts for 60% of the Total Score.

Pre-viewing Experience

Within this category, we asked the shoppers to rate the initial communication with the development's staff and the efficiency of the booking process.

The analysis includes some of the following fundamentals:

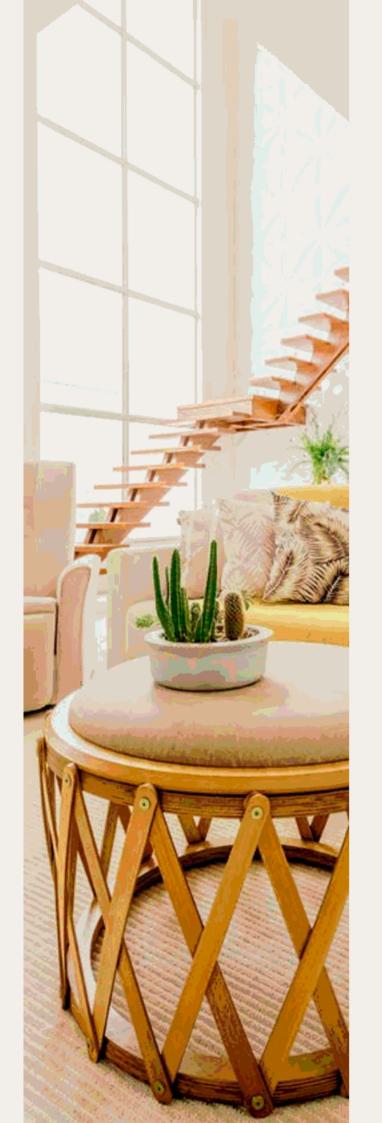
- · Time taken to secure a viewing
- Viewing booking confirmation
- Experience of contacting the development

Viewing Experience

In this category, we asked the shoppers to rate their experience of the physical viewing with the development's guide.

The analysis includes some of the following:

- Description of the viewing experience
- The guide's knowledge about the development and the area
- The guide's attentiveness and support
- ESG indicators



Building and Apartment Presentation

In this category, we asked the shoppers to rate the cleanliness and presentation of the development, communal spaces and apartments that they viewed.

The analysis includes some of the following details:

- · Cleanliness and presentation
- Positive features of the development and apartments
- Negative features of the development and apartments

Post-viewing Experience

This category covers the final communication with the development's staff and the efficiency of the follow up process.

Some of the points included in the analysis are listed below:

- Time taken for the guide to follow up after the viewing
- Overall experience of the follow up procedure
- Provision of additional marketing materials

What we measured:





Where a viewing takes place, this category accounts for 10% of the Total Score.



This category measures the shoppers' experience of the development's brand and marketing.

The analysis includes some of the following fundamentals:

- Marketing experience vs physical experience
- Accuracy of the marketing collateral
- Experience with the development's website

Development

This category covers the physical aspects of the development, including the immediate area, communal spaces and apartments.

The analysis considers some of the following points:

- Quality of the development and apartments
- · Attractiveness of the area
- Experience of the amenity spaces
- · Sustainable features



Incentives and Value for Money

Within this category, we measure the range and quality of incentives on offer and the value for money of the development.

Some of the following points are covered:

- · Rental incentives on offer
- Attractiveness of the incentives
- The development's value for money

"The development was in a prime location, just a few steps from the train station.

The development was contemporary and had a luxurious feel.

I felt a sense of community within the development and I felt like a priority to the management team"

- The Almere

What we measured:

final thoughts



Where a viewing takes place, this category accounts for 10% of the Total Score.

Final Thoughts

This category measures the shoppers' overall experience taking into account the different elements covered in the previous categories.

The analysis includes some of the following fundamentals:

- · Overall experience
- Likelihood of recommending the development
- Likelihood of living in the development



"The overall appearance from the way the cushions are placed on the sofas in the common areas, and the quality of apartments, gave the development a 5 star hotel feeling. The development is beautiful, with excellent links to London and beautiful views of the city."

Sailmakers

"The overall feel of the development was luxurious and had a number of great facilities, particularly the gym, work from home and shared spaces which were included. It would make it a convenient place to live. The location was good as it was close to shops. My experience of the customer service was excellent. Staff members were friendly, efficient and incredibly helpful. I felt like the priority and it made me feel welcomed. Overall, I would recommend the development to a friend."

UNCLE Wembley





Trenas

AMONGST THE TOP TEN DEVELOPMENTS

A Commitment to Cleanliness

Our data revealed that the top 10 developments stood out from the rest in terms of their commitment to quality, cleanliness, and tidiness. In fact, these developments scored a perfect 100% on these criteria, across all areas including amenities, reception areas, external spaces, and apartments.

These high scores are a testament impact of operational teams on the customer experience during a viewing. A clean and well-maintained environment is crucial for attracting and retaining tenants and indicates that developers take pride in their buildings.

Expectation vs Reality

Brand and marketing play a crucial role in the BTR leasing process. In line with this, our top 10 developments excelled in this aspect. An overwhelming 97% of the mystery shoppers agreed that the website and marketing materials accurately reflected the reality of the amenity spaces and overall development.

This finding highlights the significance of effective marketing strategies in attracting potential tenants. It also indicates that the top-performing developments understand the importance of providing accurate and visually appealing marketing materials to showcase their amenities and facilities, which can influence a customer's decision to lease an apartment.

100%

score on quality, cleanliness and tidiness across all areas amongst the top 10 developments 97%

of shoppers agreed that the website and marketing materials reflected the reality of the amenity spaces

Tailoring to Customer Requirements

At the top 10 developments, 86% of the shoppers felt that the guide had an existing understanding of their requirements, which facilitated them to provide a more personalised tour experience. Moreover, an impressive 97% of shoppers at the top 10 developments, strongly agreed or agreed that the guide was able to answer questions about the leasing process and development with confidence, providing them with a clear understanding of what to expect.

These findings highlight the importance of pre-qualifying tenants and providing excellent customer service from the initial contact phase. A positive customer experience in this phase can influence a potential tenant's decision to lease an apartment and ultimately result in increased leasing rates. As a result of the top-performing developments' effective prequalifying strategies and excellent customer service, an overwhelming 95% of shoppers could definitely or to a good extent imagine themselves living at these developments.

95%

of shoppers could 'definitely' or 'to a good extent' imagine themselves living at these developments

ESG Better Conveyed

As sustainability and community-building become more critical in the BTR market, our survey highlights the need for improvement in these areas. While the top 10 developments outperformed the rest with an average ESG score of 46%, compared to the industry average of 40%, there is still ample room for progress across the board.

Developers and property managers who prioritise meaningful ESG initiatives and effectively communicate them to potential tenants can gain a competitive edge in attracting and retaining environmentally-conscious residents.

As more tenants prioritise sustainability and community-building in their housing choices, addressing these areas can lead to increased tenant satisfaction and retention rates, ultimately benefiting both tenants and the industry as a whole.

46%

Average ESG score amongst the top 10 developments, outperforming the industry average



Benchmark

THE TOP 10 SCHEMES

- UNCLE Wembley UNCLE
- The Marches Native
- Ten Degrees Greystar
- Union Wharf Essential Living
- Coppermaker Square Greystar
- Hawkins and George Grainger
- Sailmakers Greystar
- The Junction Native
- Repton Gardens Quintain
- MyLo Fulham Riverside Greystar
 - **⊜ The Almere -** *Native*

64%

The average score across all schemes was 64%, a 5% decrease from 2021.

London schemes scored an average of 66.4% whilst schemes out of London scored 64.7%.

THE TOP 3 OPERATORS

UNCLE

Essential

Grainger

"I enjoyed the viewing and found the guide to be attentive, informative and very friendly.

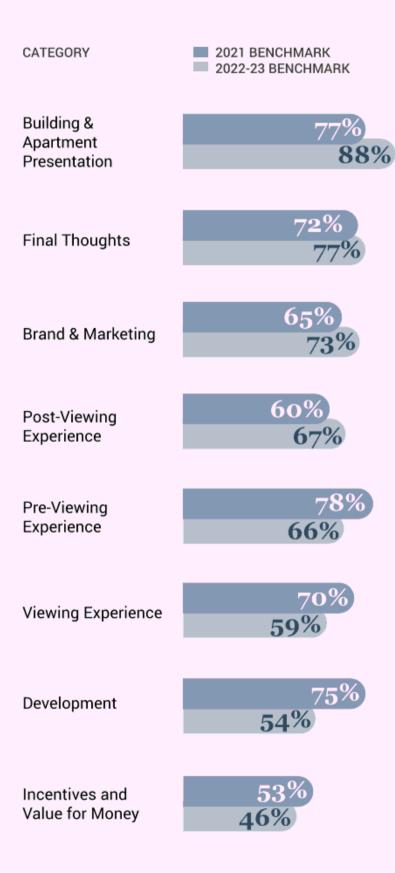
She spent time showing me around and I was not made to feel rushed at all.

The communal areas were lovely and the apartment was modern and well furnished. I could certainly see myself living here."

- Union Wharf



CATEGORY SCORES

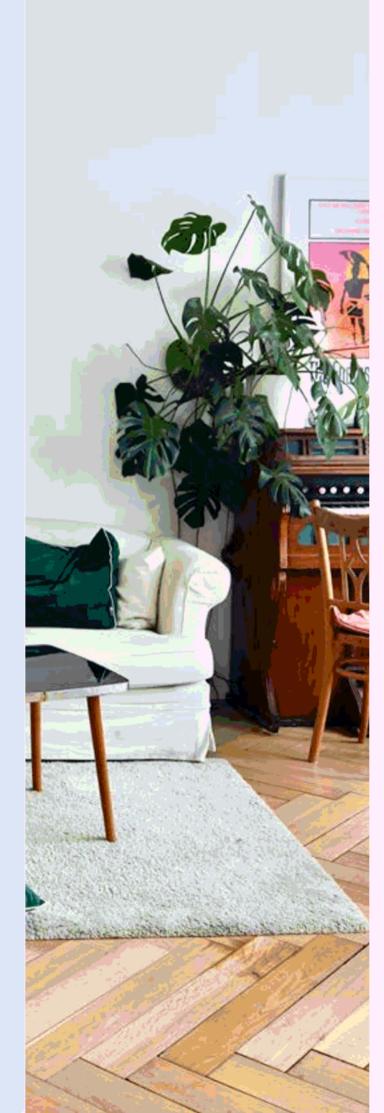


97%
of shoppers rated
the reception area
as 'definitely' or
'to a good extent'
clean, tidy and

well-maintained.

92%
rated the external areas such as gardens and roof terraces as 'definitely' or 'to a good extent' tidy and well-presented.

91% rated the building and its amenities as 'very good' or 'good'.



Since 2021, **Building and Apartment Presentation** has continued to be a **high- performing category and has improved the most**, with an additional 11% overall. The

biggest improvements were:



of shoppers rated the reception area as 'definitely' or 'to a good extent' clean, tidy and well-maintained.



of shoppers rated the quality of the building and its amenities as 'very good' and 'good'.



of shoppers rated the quality of the apartments as 'very good' and 'good'.

Since 2021, the **Development category** saw the **biggest decline**, with a 21% reduction overall.



of shoppers rated the design of the apartments as "extremely" or "very" attractive. We see almost no difference regionally, with schemes in London scoring an average of 45.6%, whilst those outside London scored an average of 47%.

For the second year in a row,
the lowest scoring category was
Incentives and Value for Money. This
category evaluates the shoppers
perception of value for money based
on what is discussed during the tour
and is often influenced by how much
the shopper is told about on-site
events, inclusions, services and
amenities.

51%

of shoppers were not told about Wi-Fi being included in the rent.

44%

were not told about any on-site events.

34%

were not told about an on-site maintenance team or how maintenance in their apartment would be handled.





WHAT GOOD SOUNDS LIKE...

"The apartments were spacious and bright. It was fully furnished and had modern appliances. The views from the private balcony were spectacular and each communal area was clean and well maintained."

- UNCLE Wembley

"The staff were friendly and seemed proud to work there. Additionally, staff members gave the impression that the development was well managed."

- The Marches

"All apartments were smartly designed with plenty of space and included everything one may need for living."

- Ten Degrees

"The apartment complex was modern and contemporary with plenty of amenities such as a social space and gym. The location was good with close links to the train station and it was a bonus to have on site parking. The maintenance team seemed to be supportive to changes and the general team seemed interested in the residents."

- The Junction

"The overall feel of the development was luxurious and had a number of great facilities, particularly the gym, work from home and shared spaces which were included. It would make it a convenient place to live. The location was good as it was close to shops. My experience of the customer service was excellent. Staff members were friendly, efficient and incredibly helpful. I felt like the priority and it made me feel welcomed. Overall, I would recommend the development to a friend."

- Repton Gardens

"I was very impressed with the level of details put in to ensure maximum comfort and convenience for residents, i.e. a sound-proof kiosk (for making work-related calls). The amenities provided were the best I had seen in the market."

Coppermarker Square

"The guide was punctual, friendly and professional. They familiarised themselves with my requirements beforehand and planned the tour accordingly. Overall, the tour experience was excellent."

Union Wharf





WHAT BAD SOUNDS LIKE...

"While I waited, anther member of staff arrived to talk with a resident about why he could not have a parking permit. The member of staff said these were only for contractors. The resident told her other staff were much more friendly and she should be too. When he left, the member of staff called him an 'areshole'."

"My overall experience was good but not exceptional. Although the guide was friendly and answered my queries, I felt that the details were not presented proactively. The lack of amenities were disappointing, and I felt that there could be more value for money."

"Having seen all the information on the website I had high expectations as the apartments and amenities looked excellent. My requested viewing time was quickly confirmed and there was no issue with a weekend viewing but when I arrived there was no staff members to be found which was very disappointing. I waited for 20 minutes and then eventually left. I did receive an email nearly two hours later which did apologise for the issue."

"Although she said she would contact me after my viewing, I did not heard from her again which was disappointing."

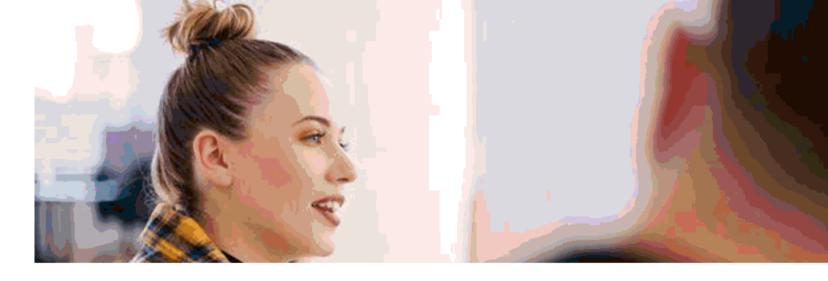
"When I arrived at the complex a member of staff greeted me and invited me to take a seat, explaining the guide would do my viewing. When he came down I heard him tell the receptionist that he was not expecting the viewing as it was not in his calendar, although she had been aware of my visit. They spent five minutes discussing this while I watched the front of house team greet everyone coming in in a friendly manner."

"The guide then took me to the apartment on the first floor. She did not volunteer any information and was quiet; I had to find out about the amenities in the apartment myself."

"I was not impressed by how difficult it was to secure a viewing and that in the end I did not even have one. The experience of dealing with this company was stressful and confusing."

"I felt that for what was available at the development, the rental price was quite high. The guide even said this herself as she compared it to the cost of her own house. The communal areas were not really to my taste and I got the impression they were not used very much by the residents."





Positive Interactions Can Influence Future Behaviour

Studies show that the way in which a potential tenant is communicated with and presented information about not being able to rent influences their perception of the interaction.

When developments reply promptly and politely, despite not currently having availability, the interaction can still be positive and the customer is much more likely to remember that development in the future and enquire again.

When asked, "on a scale from 1-10 how likely are you to recommend this scheme to a friend?", those who were told their was no availability gave an average score of 4.98 vs just 2.18 for those who received no response.

Responses, even if automated, are critical to a positive experience.

Reputation is Everything

The way in which operators treat those who cannot rent at the moment can have a significant impact on their reputation.

Negative experiences can lead to negative reviews and word-ofmouth, ultimately harming their brand's reputation.

On the other hand, positive interactions can lead to positive reviews and recommendations, enhancing the operator's reputation and attracting new customers. In fact, research shows that 88% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.

Customers Who Cannot Rent Right Now May Refer Others

Customers who cannot rent right now may still refer others based on their positive experiences.

These referrals can lead to new business and an increased customer base, even if the original customer cannot rent at the moment.

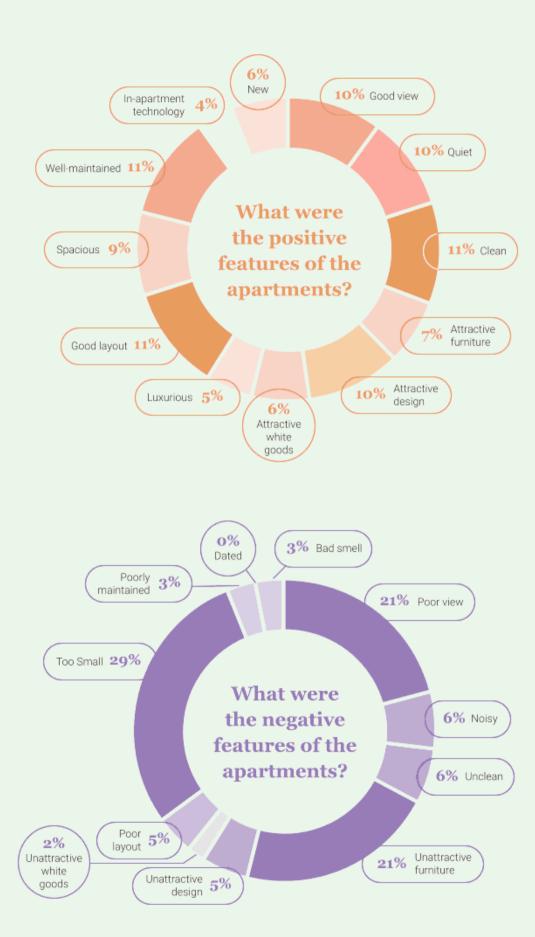
In fact, studies show that referred customers are 18% more likely to stay with a brand long-term than those acquired through other means, highlighting the value of positive interactions with all customers, even those who cannot rent right now.

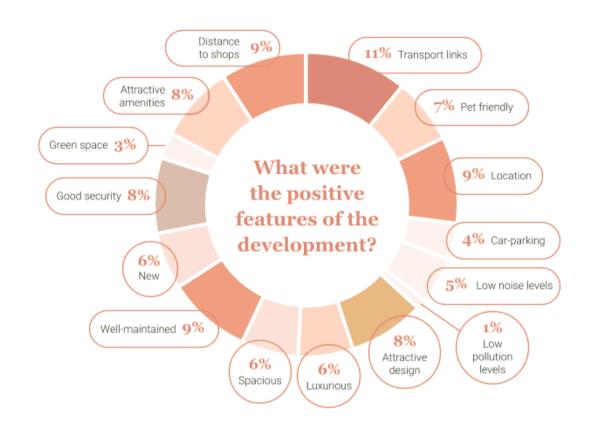
THE PRO'S AND CON'S OF BUILD TO RENT LIVING

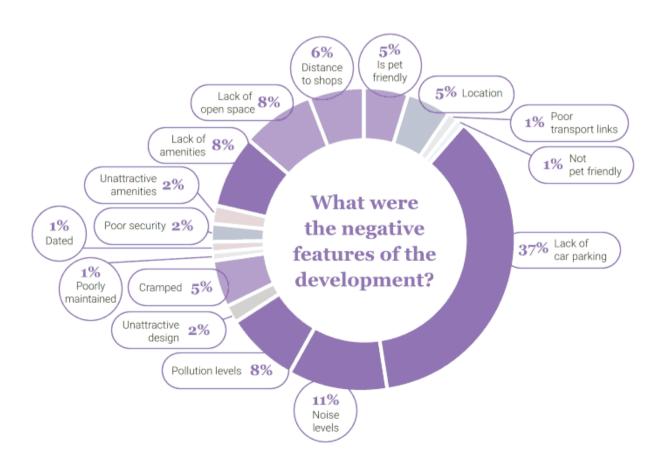
As an industry, BTR takes pride in offering high-quality, well-considered rental homes, something that has consistently been recognised by our shoppers during their viewings. Clean (11%), well-maintained apartments (11%) with good layouts (11%) were the most selected positive apartment features whilst transport-links (11%), location

(9%) and distance to shops (9%) were the most selected positive features of the development. When it comes to the negative features, their was a significant sentiment that the apartment were too small (29%) with unattractive furniture (21%) and poor views (21%) whilst 37% also indicated that a lack of car parking would put them off.











SHOPS WHERE NO IN-PERSON VIEWING TOOK PLACE

Out of the 215 shops which took place, 28% of shoppers were not able to complete a viewing. At hereSAY, we still believe that customers can and should always have a positive customer experience, irrespective of whether the scheme currently have availability. Where no in-person viewing took place, our shoppers provided feedback in the Pre-Viewing Experience and Final Thoughts categories only. Schemes are able to score highly, even if no viewing has taken place.

28%

• of shoppers could not secure a viewing

5.2%

i..... of shoppers booked a viewing but on arrival, no member of staff was present Mylo Fulham Riverside was our highest scoring scheme in this benchmark, scoring 60.8% with the shopper commenting "I was impressed by the speed of the response and left with a good impression of the scheme. The development was still somewhere I would be interested in living, based on the experience I had". Of those who were unable to secure a viewing:

30%

..... • of shoppers were likely to recommend this development to a friend.

68%

of shoppers rated their experience of contacting the scheme and attempting to book a viewing as 'poor' and 'very poor'.



Given that 28% of our shoppers were not able to complete a viewing, the average total scores reveal that these schemes are underperforming across the Pre-Viewing Experience and Final Thoughts categories. Where there is no availability at a scheme, guides could be doing more to improve the lasting impression of the scheme and the initial contact experience.

Shoppers who received an email informing them there was no availability Shoppers who received no response to their enquiry

29%

71%

Informed about an alternative scheme 2.6%

-

Average Total Score 47.9%

17.3%

On a scale of one to ten, how likely are you to recommend this scheme?

4.83

2.18

WHAT HAS CHANGED **SINCE 2021?**

In our 2021 hereSAY Mystery Shopping Report, we learned that consumer awareness of both the products on offer and the benefits of BTR were low.

This awareness has only improved by 4% since our 2021 Report, indicating that the concept of BTR still remains an unknown for many of our shoppers, who were chosen to reflect the target market of the developments they were visiting. Despite this improvement, the on-site guides are still missing a trick with their explanation of the benefits of BTR and identifying who the landlord is.

Despite a lack of awareness surrounding BTR, awareness of the development or developer itself has improved by 11% since 2021, which indicates that brand awareness is having a positive effect on prospective tenants in the rental market. One of the most shocking findings from our 2021 Report was the failure of the follow up, with only 50% of guides following up with the shoppers after their viewing. Things are looking up as this has improved by 14%, however, there is still some way to go.

We wanted to give the shoppers an opportunity to collate their whole experience into a simple conclusion: How likely are you to recommend this development to a friend? The 2021 Report revealed that only 43% of shoppers were 'very likely' to recommend the development. We have since revised this question so that shoppers can score their answer on a scale from 1 to 10.

The average score was 7.7 (77%) across the developments in our 2022-2023 benchmark, indicating a circa 34% increase and much more promising prospects for the BTR sector as a whole.

"The guide was quiet throughout the tour. She did not ask me any questions during my viewing; nor did she ask what I thought at the end, saying I should give them a call once I had thought about what I wanted to do.

It was also a shame that I received no follow up."

2021 BENCHMARK
2022-23 BENCHMARK

Shoppers who had heard of Build to Rent





The guide explained who the landlord was and the benefits of 'Build to Rent'





Shoppers who had heard of the development or operator prior to visiting





Shoppers who received a follow up after the viewing









More expensive does not always mean *Better*

TOTAL SCORE VS. AVERAGE RENT

The benchmark analysis reveals that the correlation between high-priced, more highly amenitized developments and optimal lead-to-lease experiences is weak. Instead, the focus shifts towards the impact of customer service, which emerges as the key driver of customer satisfaction and overall experience. The data clearly demonstrates that a memorable

viewing experience is rooted in the quality of customer service, rather than the allure of amenities or a hefty price tag. This trend continues from our 2021 report. Additionally, there were no regional differences in the overall score, with schemes in London scoring an average of 66.4% and schemes outside of London scoring an average of 64.7%.



WHAT GOOD SOUNDS LIKE...

"Overall, I was impressed with the development and could see myself living there. The amenities included presented good value for money. The guide was able to make my experience feel personal and made me feel like I was a priority. I would also recommend this development to a friend."

- Hawkins & George

"The guide told me who the landlord was and said it was better than chasing private landlords for each flat. He showed me a 1-bed in detail, going through the amenities and facilities. When we went to see the communal areas he offered me a drink and took me to the gym, checking that the resident exercising was happy for us to go in first.

I saw several residents in these areas and he pointed out the social gatherings advertised. He was very busy as his colleague was away, but he handled the tour superbly. He had an ease about him and did not rush me."

- The Well House

"The apartment and building had a high-quality finish. Furnishings were attractive and well-made. There was an on-site management team and 24/7 concierge: the building was professionally managed. The guide made me feel welcomed to the development and valued as a potential resident."

- The Marches

WHAT BAD SOUNDS LIKE...

"She did not volunteer any information and was quiet; I had to find out about the amenities in the apartment myself. When I asked, she told me the building was currently at 70% capacity. She did ask me if I was thinking of living there on a short or long term basis but did not tell me anything about the car park, the area around the development nor the facilities. I had seen a playground for children to play in but was not sure if this belonged to the complex. At the end of the tour, the guide told me to call them once I had had a think about how I wished to go forward."

"Firstly, I was quite frustrated with the booking process which was inefficient and time consuming. During the viewing, it felt as though the guide was simply going through the motions. She did not offer much information and if I did not make comments on certain features, we simply stood in silence. She did not speak with enthusiasm and if anything I felt she was quite negative about the communal spaces and how little they were used. She showed no passion and the whole tour was over within 12 minutes."

"I would have liked to have been told about social events as this would have built up a better community feel. I felt the apartments looked quite basic and would have liked to have seen a show apartment so I could envisage how warm and homely it could look with soft furnishings."





IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ESG

Given that Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) is becoming less of a 'nice to have' and more of a mandatory requirement, we are seeing it at the forefront of the BTR agenda and observing prospective tenants taking notice of the sustainable credentials in the buildings they occupy. As part of our 2022-2023 Benchmark, hereSAY have introduced five new questions which focus specifically on ESG. By combining these questions into one ESG score, the developments scored an average of 40%.

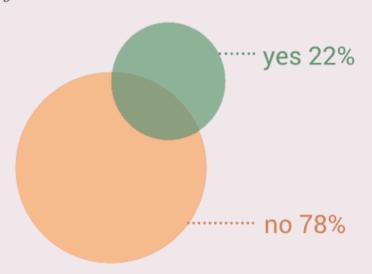
40% Average ESG Score

According to a 2021 Survey by Zoopla, 54% of tenants surveyed said they would pay more in rent for a rental property with environmentally friendly features, with those aged 18-24 and 35-44 most likely to pay more for these features. The top three features that tenants are looking for in an environmentally friendly rental property are: energy-efficient appliances (57%), double glazing (45%), and insulation (42%) - features that almost all BTR developments have. Yet, just 20% of our shoppers were told about environmentally friendly or sustainable features during their viewing.

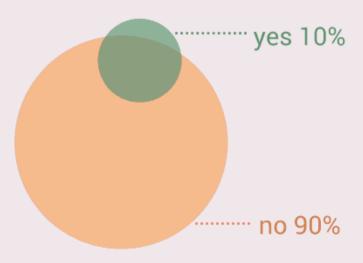
Source: Zoopla. (2021). Eco-friendly rental properties are in demand. Retrieved from https://advantage.zpg.co.uk/article/eco-friendly-rental-properties-are-in-demand



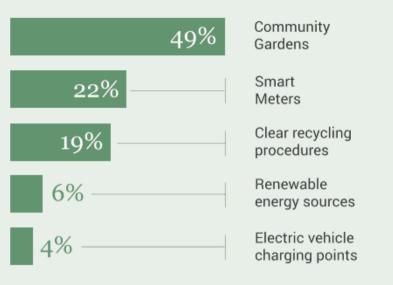
Were you informed about environmentally-friendly or sustainable features or initiatives of the development during the viewing?



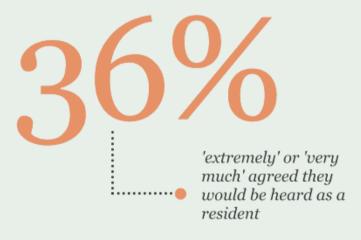
Were you made aware of your role in the building meeting its sustainable objectives? (I.e. water usage, waste provisions, switching off lights in places when not in use)



Were you told
about or shown
any of the
following?



Do you feel that you would be heard as a resident and have a say in the way the building was managed?



Do you feel that this development offers a sense of community?

