

**Client:** Allsop  
**Source:** The Times  
**Date:** 27/09/2019  
**Page:** 6  
**Reach:** 406279  
**Value:** 19537.68



# The best and worst new developments

A website that publishes frank reviews is the Tripadvisor for homeowners, landlords and tenants, reports **David Byers**

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**T**he lift has been broken for a long time. Sometimes the water goes cold," writes Rashad, a tenant at the Northumberland House rental block,

which was built by the developer Miflats in Sutton, south London. He rates it one star. Meanwhile Katrina, who rents at the Pall Mall building, run by Liverpool city council, gives her building two stars. She says: "We were supposed to have a receptionist, but he's never here. He locks the parcels away so we can't get them."

In the west London area of Earls Court, Maria, the owner of a three-bedroom property at Capital and Counties's (Capco's) upmarket Lillie Square development, where similar flats are being marketed for about £1.7 million, writes: "All the bedrooms are supposed to have a cooling system... one of the bedrooms in our flat does not." She gives it one star and says she is consulting her lawyer.

These reviews are among 8,000 left by tenants and flat owners on a website that is revolutionising the way British buyers choose their new-build flats by arming them with information.

Home Views, dubbed the Tripadvisor of the property industry, was founded by the millennial entrepreneurs Hannah Marsh, 36, Oliver McGinn, 38, and Rory Cramer, 34.

Cramer, who used to work for Marsh

& Parsons estate agency, hopes the transparency provided by the site will drive up standards in the building industry, with the extra level of accountability forcing developers to do better.

Some developers such as Berkeley Homes, Argent and the American build-to-rent giant Greystar actively encourage buyers and tenants to leave reviews because they are confident of positive feedback. "They are embracing the healthy competition, because they're overwhelmingly proud of their product," Cramer says.

There are 800 developments lists on Home Views, with owners and renters able to rank things such as facilities, design, value, location and management to reach an overall star rating out of five. Anyone can leave a review of any development built after 2000 that has a minimum of 50 units, and it isn't a student or retirement complex.

Reviews are independently moderated and carry a verified tag, to minimise the number of fake reviews.

The highest scoring developer is Anthology, a boutique builder specialising in schemes in London, which was praised for its customer service in 40 reviews and averaged a star rating of 4.76 out of 5.

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Countrywide, a build-to-rent developer, is second with an average of 4.74 stars, followed by Allsop (4.72), Legal & General (4.67) and Essential Living (4.63). Anthology's Deptford Foundry building is the best-rated development, with a 4.78 star rating from 33 reviews. Other high-ranking developments include the Trilogy by Allsop in Manchester (4.77 from 45 reviews), Glasshouse Gardens by Lendlease in Stratford, east London (4.74, from 8 reviews) and the Cargo Building in Liverpool by Countrywide (4.74 from 29 reviews).

At the other end of the scale, Northumberland House performs poorly (2.93 stars from 10 reviews), followed by Pall Mall (3.15 from 6 reviews). Bellway Homes's City East development in east London - part of the Barking Riverside complex that was damaged by fire in

June - achieved only a 3.51 star average from 77 reviews, while Capco's Lillie Square had 3.27 from 13 reviews.

Cramer and Marsh say the most frequent complaints are about poor building management, bad maintenance and unresponsive or slow customer service teams. A lack of community atmosphere is also a concern, with some residents reporting feeling isolated or lonely. "What comes across in poor developments is an overwhelming frustration with poor management or communication," Marsh says.

Complaints about shoddy office-to-residential conversions are also cause for concern. Jorge, a private tenant, gave Miflats' development in Croydon, southeast London, a three-star review, but highlights what he says are unpleasant conditions. "Lift is always breaking down, building management has a slow response time; last week my son got stuck in the lift on a Sunday and they didn't respond for hours." He adds: "This building was previously an office so it is not well ventilated, so during the summer it gets extremely hot."

As *The Times* revealed earlier this year, developers have taken advantage of a 2013 change in permitted development rights to convert offices into residential housing without requiring full planning permission. As part of our investigation, we found flats costing £800 a month that are as small as 14 sq m (150 sq ft) — barely bigger than a typical parking space. Miflats was not named in the investigation.

Capco refused to comment when contacted by Bricks & Mortar, while Miflats could not be reached.

## Star ratings

### Highest average score

- 1 Deptford Foundry, London (Anthology)** 4.78 stars out of 33 reviews
- 2 The Trilogy, Manchester (Allsop)** 4.77 out of 45 reviews
- 3 Glasshouse Gardens, London (Lendlease)** 4.74 out of 8 reviews
- 4 The Cargo Building, Liverpool (Countrywide)** 4.74 out of 29 reviews
- 5 Park Central, Birmingham (Crest Nicholson)** 4.73 out of 10 reviews

### Lowest average score

- 1 Northumberland House, London (Miflats)** 2.93 out of 10 reviews
- 2 Pall Mall, Liverpool (Liverpool city council)** 3.15 out of 6 reviews
- 3 Aurora, London (One Housing Group)** 3.18 out of 5 reviews
- 4 Dovetail Court, London (L&Q)** 3.27 out of 7 reviews
- 5 Lillie Square, London (Capco)** 3.27 out of 13 reviews

Source: Home Views

Based on a minimum of five verified reviews

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**The Trilogy development in Manchester. Left: the co-founders of Home Views, from left, Olly McGinn, Hannah Marsh and Rory Cramer**

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**Apartments in Capco's Lillie Square development in Earls Court, west London, start at £820,000**