

IBP National Journalism Awards 2019: Event of the Year

Bisnow Build To Rent Annual Conference 2019

Date: 5 June 2019

Location: Hilton Wembley

Budget: £26,376



The UK has a housing crisis. It is widely accepted that a thriving build-to-rent sector will have a big part to play in making sure there is an increase in the amount of housing which is affordable to a greater slug of the population. In that sense, an event helping to promote this sector plays a vital role in helping it evolve. And Bisnow's Build-To-Rent Annual Conference (BTRAC) set new standards in terms of ambition and execution of a conference in the commercial property sector.

The aim was to bring together the key players from the UK and internationally in the rented residential sector, to network and debate the key issues of the day. In that sense it was a stunning success, with more than 400 attendees and speakers from some of the largest players in the sector, including Canada's Ivanhoe Cambridge and Oxford Properties, Malaysia's EcoWorld and UK players like Get Living and Fizzy Living. The UK government lent its support to the conference in the form of an appearance from Sir Edward Lister, who was then head of the Homes England public body.

<https://www.bisnow.com/events/london/build-to-rent-annual-conference-2486>

Event rundown

You will have been to all-day real estate conferences before. They are worthy but boring. BTRAC, on the other hand, is an embodiment of the mantra increasingly taken on board by the property industry: user experience is everything. Not only did the event feature a roster of the biggest names in the sector, but it was great fun as well: people felt they needed to attend for the content and networking, but they *wanted* to attend for the experience as well.

High-end, barista-made coffee and a pen full of cute puppies are now the norm at Bisnow events, as is music as panelists walk on and off stage. But at BTRAC we went further.

The event was held in a hotel at Wembley Park, right in the middle of Europe's biggest rented-residential development scheme, comprising 5,000 new homes. The delegates were given the option to take a tour of the scheme, giving them an opportunity to learn from the best practices of the market leading developer, Quintain, as well as giving them networking time in small groups. More than 250 people took the tours.

Rather than terrible, lukewarm food served from silver troughs, we took the delegates to Boxpark Wembley, a scheme comprising street food joint in shipping containers, providing them with tokens to pick the food of their choice, ranging from German hot dogs to Caribbean jerk chicken. While they were eating, they could listen to TED Talks from inspirational speakers, including Boxpark founder Roger Wade - Wade was one of a number of speakers from outside of the traditional real estate sector, giving the delegates a broad view of some of the consumer trends shaping the industry.



The content went beyond the norm as well. Rather than having panel after panel, the day was broken up by keynote speakers including Sir David Higgins, the man responsible for

delivering the development of the Olympic Park in Stratford. And most innovative of all, one session featured a series of debates between speakers on topics like high-tech versus low tech property, or where the best returns are to be found, in London or beyond? These debates were timed, with speakers that ran over silenced by a gong, and the audience having the chance to vote for the winner electronically.

Finally, the day rounded off with a set by a band made up entirely of BTR professionals, put together by Bisnow specially for the event. After more than 10 rehearsal sessions in the run up to the event, their sound was tight!

The logistics



Delivering a user experience of this level is no easy feat. In particular, getting 250 people to head out on tours in the middle of a content programme is a complex logistical challenge. Delegates went from their tour, straight to Boxpark for food and Ted Talks, and then back to the hotel for more content in the afternoon. Those delegates that did not go on the tour were given an area to write those all-important emails, then head on to lunch.

To facilitate this, every delegate badge had a number on it, indicating which tour they were heading on, with guides waiting for them with clearly visible tour numbers. Every delegate was given a token which they could exchange for lunch at Boxpark. People came back from lunch a little late, but not enough to knock the overall programme significantly off track, and not a single delegate missed their tour.

And all this with a team that is as lean as a yoga teacher. Bisnow has just five staff in the UK to produce an event of this scale and make it a commercial success, with only four available on the day. Production and coordination are done by only two people. The editor

not only covers the content but exceed the event and stuck numbers on badges, while the head of business development was not just out schmoozing, but also directing where the puppies should go. No task is too small.

Achieving objectives

In terms of meeting objectives, the event was a roaring success. With more than 400 attendees it was 25% bigger than the debut event in 2018, and is set to grow again in 2020. In that sense it brought together the biggest players domestically and internationally in a sector that is growing rapidly.

Commercially it was a huge success also, achieving a 75% profit margin - no small achievement for an event in just its second year, and in a market where other all-day conferences are struggling to make a profit.

“Congratulations, your event was a success!” Ivanhoe Cambridge senior vice president Martine Philibert said. “It was a great experience, as a first time speaker in the UK.”

“We certainly got a lot of value from it and would agree that this is the premier event in the UK BTR sector,” Multivista UK director Karl Pallas said.