

A tenant's guide to Video Viewings

Video Viewings are used by many people to secure a property to rent when they are unable to view it in person and are sometimes the most practical option, especially for people based overseas.

However, for some people using video viewings for the first time, making such a big decision without visiting the property can seem a little daunting and risky.

To help you make a sensible and informed decision, we have put together the following guide on how to use Video Viewings.

Advantages of Video Viewings

The two great advantages of Video Viewings are speed and practicality.

- Making a quick decision is important when renting in London as the rental market is extremely competitive, with several people often bidding for a single property within a day of it coming onto the market. Video Viewings allow tenants to view a property quickly – often without the need to make an appointment – meaning that they can submit their offers before anyone else.

- Because video viewings can be done on any device, at any time, and from anywhere, they are incredibly practical for people who are not based in London, or for those who do not have time to spend hours physically viewings multiple properties.

If you can't see it, ask about it

There are a few smaller details that you may not be able to see on a video, but if this is the case a few quick questions to your agent should provide you with the answers you need to proceed.

For example:

- The condition of a property is often hard to see on a video, but just ask your agent when the property was last painted. If the condition is not to your liking, ask whether the landlord would consider decorating it before you move in.
- If you can't see the view from the windows, ask your agent for pictures from the window or use Google Street View to work out what you will be looking out onto.
- If you want to see a specific room or feature in more detail, ask the agent if it is possible to get an additional video or images of it. In some cases, the landlord or current tenant may even be able to give you a live video walk through using a video conference tool.
- Videos will not generally show communal and reception areas of apartment blocks, so ask about the condition of these. Also ask whether any works to the building or common areas are planned, as these could create noise or other disturbances.
- Likewise, it is also worth asking whether there are any major construction works underway nearby which may affect your enjoyment of the property.

Your agent will understand that you will need to ask more questions after a Video Viewing than a physical viewing and will always be happy to answer any queries you have. There is no such thing as a silly question, so don't be afraid to ask!

Supplement your knowledge

Things may all look fine from the first glance, but it is advisable to not just to rely on your eyes, as specific information will often tell you a lot more. Ask your agent for details about the property such as:

- How old is the kitchen and bathroom?
- Has the property been professionally cleaned?
- Is the carpet new?
- Can a list of the furnishings be provided?
- When was the boiler last serviced?
- Are there any communal facilities such as bike storage?
- Is there a maintenance history of the property?
- How long did the last tenants stay in the property?
- Is the property managed by the estate agent or the landlord?
- If managed by the landlord, do they have other properties?
- How long have they been a landlord?
- What is the security like? Is there an intercom?
- How much is council tax?

Get to know your agent

In order to secure the right property for you, it is essential that your agent fully understands everything about your search, including your property requirements, any relevant personal circumstances, timeframe and budget.

Likewise, it is very important that you have a good relationship with your agent and can trust them to assist you with your search. To help with this, why not have a video call with your agent to help you feel more comfortable with who you are dealing with? Most agents would be more than happy to arrange this with you.

Tenant protection

Tenants are generally very well protected in the UK:

- Agents and landlords must put your tenancy deposit into a government-approved tenancy deposit scheme, meaning that there is no way that you can lose your deposit without a proper reason. If there is a dispute about any damage to the property or its contents, the case will go before an independent adjudicator to make a decision.
- By law, agents cannot charge tenants any fees and can only ask for a maximum of five weeks rent as a deposit (unless the tenancy is over £50,000pa or is not an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)).
- If you make a complaint against an agent and feel the agent has not addressed your complaint properly, you can escalate your case to the Property Ombudsman.

Break Clauses: for extra peace of mind

Most of us are more than comfortable booking holidays and hotels online using just images and descriptions and securing a rental property is very similar: there is of course a risk you do not like the hotel/property, but it is only temporary so even in the worst case you will be able to move out and find somewhere else.

If you are very concerned about the risk of not liking the property once you are in there, ask the agent if it is possible to insert a 6-month break clauses into your tenancy agreement.

This means that if you don't like the property, you will be able to move out of the property in six months, with no financial penalties.