

Aprao's Remote Work Toolbox

APRAO GUIDES, ISSUE 1

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CEO & Founder // Aprao

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APRAO



aprao

Introduction

Tania Chakraborti, Content Marketing Manager // Aprao

Welcome to this Aprao Guide: Remote Work Toolbox! For some, the glitz of the 9 to 5 office is losing its appeal. If you're reading this guide, perhaps you're a business owner and you're weighing up the option of making a fully remote transition or perhaps you're looking to cut down on office costs. We know that the pandemic has brought a lot of change to the way people want to work and so we've compiled this handy guide for anyone considering the switch to a remote setup. Even if you have an idea of what your remote working programme may look like, there may still be many elements, from organisation to communication channels, that you may want to consider structuring before diving straight in. Whatever your situation, this guide, with a mix of anecdotes and helpful lists, offers you a personal look into how Aprao has handled the transition to remote work and ways you can make the move smoothly too.

Aprao is a remote-first company; this means that although we sometimes meet with colleagues and clients face-to-face, we predominantly work from home 5 days a week. We have colleagues spanning across the UK, Dubai and Australia across multiple time zones. We know that we can work from anywhere in the world and still trust in each other to get our work done, in our own time, syncing up regularly. In fact, the different timezones also have strategic benefits for a business looking to have boots-on-the-ground in different customer regions.

Moreover, this remote-first ethos is also aligned with a lot of the benefits of our product - cloud-based financial modelling software - that can be accessed from anywhere; from your home to the office to a construction site. We want to be as authentic in the way we work and as agile as the service we provide to developers, lenders and valuers in the real estate market.

Perhaps this promise of agility is also what motivates you to move remote?

We made this transition ourselves well before the pandemic and as such have put in place an infrastructure for remote working which includes weekly standups, communication and project management tools and deadline-orientated campaign goals. This report will share a lot of this infrastructure with you!

So without further ado let's kickstart the read with a contribution from CEO Daniel Norman about why we went remote before the world did. We hope you enjoy it!



Why we went remote before the world went remote



"We knew of many other tech companies who were remote - and that was close enough for us to feel confident that we could do the same."

Daniel Norman, CEO // Aprao

Back in 2017, I was in the process of leaving the comfortable world of banking to start working on an unknown and exciting project, then called Appraised (now Aprao).

I was inspired by articles that I had read on blogs such as Signal v. Noise, in podcasts with Tim Ferris and hearing stories from the founders of companies such as Automattic, all talking about how they have thrived by building fully remote companies. Automattic, the creators of WordPress, has 1,172 employees spread across 75 countries speaking 93 different languages. They have no physical offices, access to a global talent pool, improved communication and an incredible diversity of mindsets and cultures.

We didn't know of any other PropTech companies who were fully remote, but we knew of many other tech companies who were - and that was close enough for us to feel confident that we could do the same. With such great inspiration, I was encouraged to do the same with the company we were building at Aprao.

Although first, we had to build our product. We concluded that as we were all living in the same city and a lot of collaboration would be required so we decided to take a small office on a short lease at a WeWork in London. As time went on, this soon morphed into a bigger office as we grew the team where we had been working for a year.

However around that time, when scrolling through my Audible account I stumbled across a book that I originally listened to 2 years prior. This book, ReWork by David Heinemeier Hansson and Jason Fried, picks apart what's wrong with the 'old' way of working and was what had inspired me to start building the company in the first place.

Upon listening to the book it reminded me of all of the core principles that we originally set out when starting the business. It prompted me to write down all of these principles and compare what we were building to what we had originally intended.

Overall, they were aligned. We have successfully built a great product, a brilliant team culture and most importantly, a happy and loyal customer base.

There was only one piece of the puzzle that wasn't there - the remote setup.

We discussed it almost instantly and started putting a plan into place that would allow us to go fully remote: free everyone from commuting, free from a fixed place of work and open up new opportunities to scale with access to a global pool of talent.

We started working out what we needed to achieve this:

- Reliable hardware - everyone already had a great computer, mostly Apple Macbooks
- Reliable software - we already were using Google's G-suite and then implemented Basecamp as a communication and project management tool
- The right mindset - ensuring that everyone was up for it (they were)

Sure enough, we actually had all of the components ready to go. We served notice on our office and we were all ready to go for a remote way of life.

Then two weeks later, Coronavirus came knocking and forced pretty much every office-based business into remote working. Suddenly, the novel thing we had been preparing for wasn't so novel. In general, businesses were unprepared, many larger corporates spent the first two weeks of remote working simply figuring out how to work remotely. But we were ready (by luck not judgment) and have built a great way of working remote with the tools we use, the communication practices and the mindset that goes with it.

"But we were ready (by luck not judgement) and have built a great way of working remote with the tools we use, the communication practices and the mindset that goes with it."



The remote work tool kit list

Rebecca Nixon, Marketing Manager // Aprao

While the switch to remote work can often be a challenge, there's a host of great tools available to make it a whole lot easier. So here's a list of our favourite remote work tools, in case you find it useful.

1. Aprao, of course!

We're all here - doing what we're doing - because Aprao is a remote working tool, designed for people at all stages of the property development process: and that includes us! We use Aprao every day, mostly to manage our customers' projects. Ideally, we like to get our customers so familiar with the platform that they don't need our help, but in a lot of cases we'll help you get started - and of course, we're here for you whenever you get stuck or need help with something a bit out of the ordinary. You can sign up for a free trial [here](#).

2. Basecamp

We love [Basecamp](#) - not just because their platform helps us to manage our teams, projects, and tasks, but also because we are completely aligned on their ethos of encouraging remote work, trusting your employees to do great things, and being flexible to ensure everyone is enjoying their time at your company. The co-founders of Basecamp - Jason Fried & David Heinemeier Hansson - have written 3 books we love, too! "It Doesn't Have to be Crazy at Work", "Remote", and "ReWork". These are our work "bibles" and we refer back to them often! You can try Basecamp free for 30 days, too.

3. Google Workspace

We use Gmail and Calendar for the basics, but we also use other tools from [Google Workspace](#) too: like Sheets rather than Excel, so that we can collaborate live on spreadsheets, never having to worry about multiple versions.

Google Drive is a great way to manage and share our files, as well as Docs and Slides for word processing and presentations. All these tools are hosted completely online, and you only ever need one version of any document - as many people as you like can work on the document at the same time, and you can see changes being made in real-time. G Suite doesn't have a free trial, but it's cheap, you pay monthly, and can cancel at any time. Every Monday at 10am we all join a video call on [Google Meet](#), where we can talk about what we're working on, and catch up with our colleagues. Staying connected on a daily basis - both personally and professionally - is vital to the success of remote work. You're not shooting the breeze over the coffee machine anymore, so you need to make up for it in other ways.

4. Asana

[Asana](#) is an efficient way to map out all tasks, dependencies and deadlines associated with individual campaigns and projects. You can monitor the progress of a project depending on who has ownership of an individual task at each stage in the project lifecycle, ensuring you can keep ahead of your timelines, roadmaps and revenue goals. Not only do we use it, but we have spoken to developers [who say](#) they rely on it for mapping out their development projects.



5. HubSpot

We use [HubSpot](#) to ensure we've got all our customer's contact details up-to-date and can keep records of all our conversations with them. It also ensures that whenever someone unsubscribes from our emails, we never bother them again! We want to let people know about Aprao, but only insofar as they find it useful. HubSpot also helps us to manage our sales and marketing processes, and support tickets whenever our customers need a helping hand. HubSpot has both free and paid options across a range of online products, which you can see [here](#).

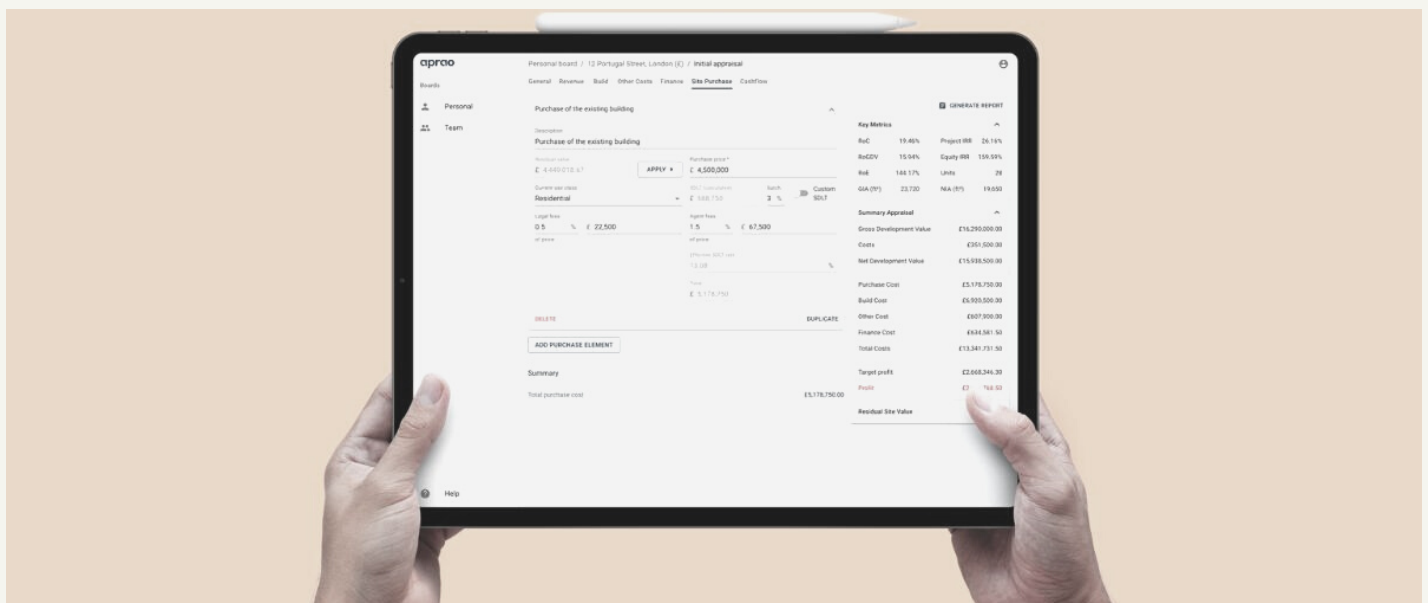
6. GitHub

Now, we may be getting a little technical with this one - but this is where we store the code for our product. It's what we call a version control system. It allows our engineers to avoid stepping on each other's toes when we want to make changes in the Aprao application. It's where we discuss feature implementations with other members of the team as well. [Github](#) is so ubiquitous that chances are, if you have an engineering team at work, they are already using it without you knowing.

7. Other tools

[Diagrams.net](#) is a great place to create, edit, share, and collaborate on flowcharts and diagrams of all kinds. It comes in useful for the sort of thing that often gets mapped out in a PowerPoint slide and lost in a file somewhere. Google Analytics is how we measure traffic on our website, to ensure everything is working as it should be, and that our content is relevant and useful to you. LinkedIn is a staple for connecting with people in our industry, as well as keeping up-to-date with all the latest news and developments in the property. [Zapier](#) is a simple tool you can use to automate tasks - and the best part is, you don't need to be super tech-savvy to use it. No code, no faff, just "if this thing happens, please do this other thing." It's integrated with loads of online applications, so whatever you need to get done, it's probably somewhere in there!

None of these companies have approached us for promotion and we don't receive any kickbacks if you sign up with them. But if you have any questions about how we use these tools don't hesitate to get in [touch](#).



Don't just survive remote work; thrive in it

Rebecca Nixon, Marketing Manager // Aprao

The plan for remote work was always a priority, ever since we started Aprao - it was only a matter of "when", not "if". Why? Flexible work attracts and retains great talent. It gives ourselves and our team members the freedom to live and work wherever they like. It improves the quality of life while reducing overheads and cost of living.

There are big wins to be had from remote work, and now that so many companies have been forced into adopting systems to support remote work, it's not going anywhere. Even when restrictions are lifted and life is moving "back to normal", our workplaces will be forever changed.

Hot desks and online meetings and asynchronous working were previously the domain of tech startups - not any more! Now, everyone knows how to get on a video call, schedule a meeting across multiple time zones, or collaborate using online tools.

Developing property is often very practical, hands-on work. Unlike building software, you're building buildings and doing this remotely requires structure. Although we've mentioned a few tools above, how can you most efficiently utilise these and how much can realistically be done virtually? The answer might surprise you. Let's start with the basics:

Email

We know, that's really basic. But some people are still not using email effectively!

- Keep it actionable. Is there a clear outcome or decision being made here? Or is this just a conversation that will clog up people's inboxes?
- Is this something that could be resolved with a 2-minute call? Going back-and-forth over email might seem more efficient at times, but it can become a distraction or interruption.



- Remember: there's no such thing as an urgent email. If it's urgent, it's not an email. And if it's important enough to warrant a call or text, the email is just a formality to confirm and keep a record of any decisions made.

Calendar

- Have you made it clear (by using a calendar that your colleagues and contacts can see) when you're available to talk business? A lot of "phone tennis" can be avoided by ensuring it's clear when you're able to take calls. This is especially important if you're working across multiple time zones.
- Do you set meetings with yourself? When working remotely, this can be a great way to block out time for focus, especially if you've got strategic work to do, or detailed work that requires your uninterrupted attention.

Collaboration & communication tools

- At Aprao, we use Basecamp to communicate and collaborate with one another.
- Having everything in the same place, with everything recorded (in case you need to check back!) saves us a lot of time, and helps set clear, manageable expectations.
- Again: we're trying to keep away from the dreaded overflowing email inbox! Using a collaborative tool like Basecamp (or one of the others out there - Slack, Asana, Monday, Microsoft Teams...) keeps conversations in an easy to manage conversational tool, which can be picked up when needed, rather than constantly monitored.

People communicate in different ways. Giving them a platform where they can use text, images, and video doesn't just make work easier and more efficient - it makes it more fun!

Project & task management:

- We also use Basecamp for project and task management: having a shared dashboard with projects, where everyone's responsibilities and delivery dates are clearly laid out, helps us to manage our time well and reduces the need for constantly checking in to see where a task or project is at.
- Trello is another great task management tool, with "cards" that can be moved between lists or columns, and you can use colour codes to create categories, and you can have multiple boards for different projects... it's a great platform and can be used in a multitude of applications, both business and personal.



Live document management

- Of all the tools you could implement, these do more for the Dreaded Email Inbox than any other!
- No more emailing versions back and forth - we don't need to do that anymore! You can have ONE version of a word processing document, spreadsheet, or slide deck, with a record of what's been changed and when, and the ability for multiple people to work on the same document at once.
- For general use, Google docs is perfect for this purpose. For industry-specific use, you'll need industry-specific tools - like Aprao, for example! Use Aprao to collaborate on development feasibilities/appraisals and ensure up-to-date, accurate data is being used.
- There are a host of other proptech tools that can help you here. Fonn and ProjectPay are a great place to start! Let us know if you can think of any others.

- We touched on this above (you can collaborate on a slide deck using Google Slides) but there are other, more sophisticated tools out there when it comes to presenting your ideas. Interactive presentations allow for more fluid conversations when presenting, and often have better multimedia integrations than the standard tools.
- What this means in practical terms, is creating, sharing, and presenting ideas in a format that allows the viewers to lead the conversation, get the information they're looking for, and make decisions faster.

Networking

- Yes, we all miss standing around wearing itchy lanyards and holding plastic wine glasses half-filled with tepid chardonnay in a hotel basement with no windows and fluorescent lighting... it's very sad that it all stopped during the pandemic. Although these events are starting to happen again, there's a lot to be positive about online networking.

Smart presentations

- Say goodbye to Death by Powerpoint!





- LinkedIn is obviously a tried-and-true way to identify and connect with people when physical space is not an option. The challenge, though, is that there's no social contract, so people are not obliged to listen or respond to what you've got to say.
- You need to offer value right off the bat if you want to successfully network online. Consider who you're speaking to, and what they're doing on a day-to-day basis. Do you have something to offer that could benefit them? Is it interesting enough that you can get them to commit to a quick video call?

CRM

- Remember when we all had a Rolodex? Remember when that turned into an Excel spreadsheet? CRM is what comes after that - a smart online platform where you can keep a record of all your interactions with your business contacts, and most importantly, ensure that they're kept in the loop, since you won't be bumping into them at any conferences for the time being.
- A CRM allows you to automate a whole lot of quotidian tasks that have the ability to get you and your team bogged down in repetitive work, instead of making the most of your time! Automated deal management, task creation, email outreach, and data updates can make a huge difference when it comes to freeing up your time.

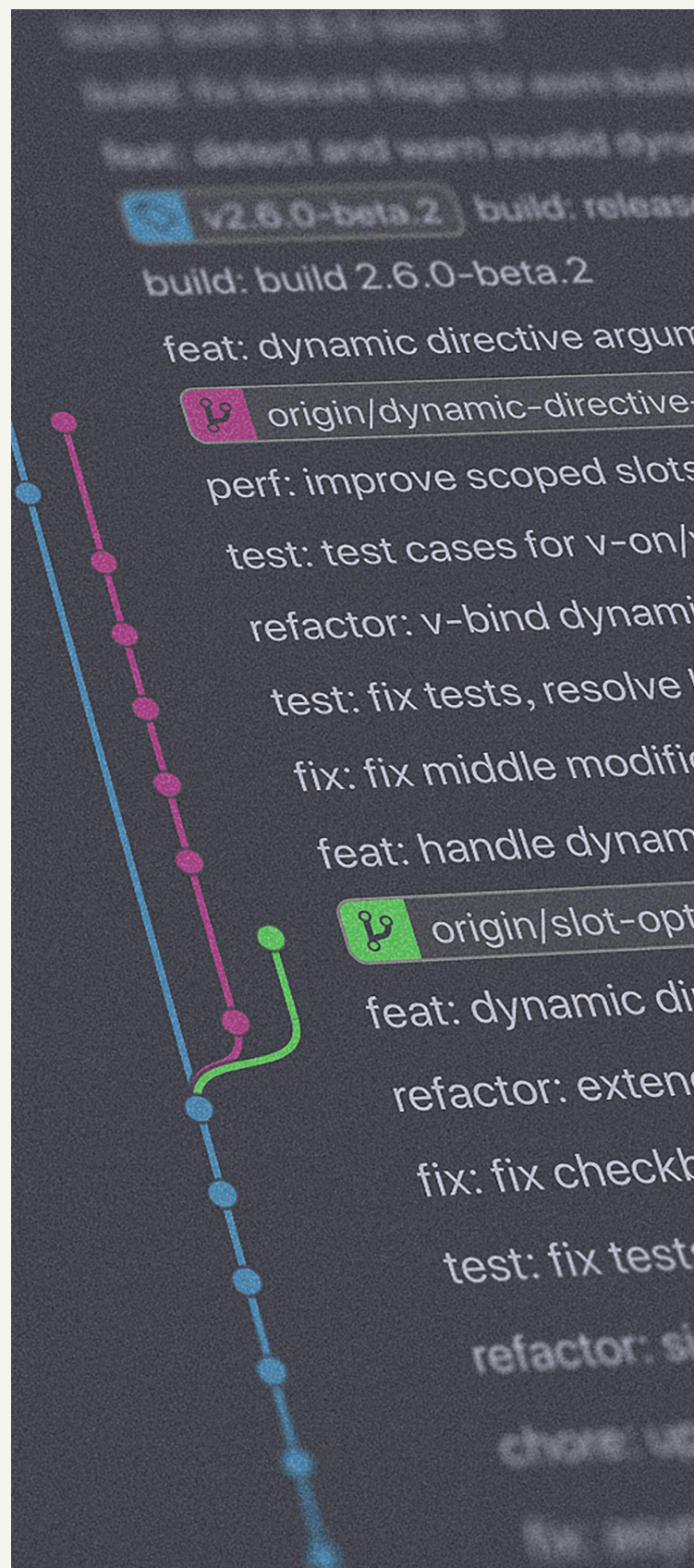
"Remember when we all had a Rolodex? Remember when that turned into an Excel spreadsheet? CRM is what comes after that."

Getting Advanced; remote tools for the next level

Things start to get really interesting when you go from "survive" mode to "thrive" mode. Rather than simply overcoming the limitations and challenges posed by remote work, you can start to embrace digital transformation as an operational mindset that improves everything you do as a business.

Machine learning

- Machines aren't super creative. That's really handy... since they're great at doing the stuff humans don't like doing. (Nobody likes sending the same email 20 times over, trying to remember dates and times of things, keeping lists managed, reminding ourselves of what needs to be done... leave that to the computer!)
- Tech-wise, we're now at a stage where you can start offloading slightly more complex tasks than just the simple "if, then, else" stuff that can be set up with a bit of CRM automation.
- Machine learning can be leveraged when there's enough data involved; identifying patterns and taking (or simply recommending) actions off the back of that.
- An example of machine learning being applied to property development would be the ingestion of a database that lists the history and status of property development applications, identifies patterns in this data, and then makes recommendations to a developer regarding timelines for approval in certain geographical regions, at certain times of year, or in relation to other trends and factors at play.
- If all this sounds great in theory but you're not sure how it works in practice, you can look at adding to your tech stack with the support of a digital transformation consultant, or if you're big enough to have a development team (either in-house or outsourced) they may be able to build what you need. If it ends up being something really special, you could look at launching your own proptech!



Automation

- We've touched on this before, but again: automation is your friend. If you're on a Mac it can be as simple as setting up the Automator app (which comes free with your computer!) to do any repetitive tasks that just aren't a good use of your time.

- If nothing else - when it comes to retail sales, for example - AR helps filter out sales that were dead in the water to begin with, ensuring your team focus their attention on legitimate enquiries.

So, that's how we're thriving remotely! We hope you found some of this useful.

Analytics

- Analytics tools can help you identify both strengths and weaknesses in your business, providing opportunities for growth.
- The most popular tool for this purpose is Google Analytics - a free tool that helps you report on your website traffic - but there are now a multitude of analytics tools that can be used across almost any area of your business.
- The most important insights you can get from analytics will help you to make strategic business decisions.
- For example, a UK-based business that uses Google Analytics may discover they are receiving visitors from the USA, and decide that in order to serve that market better, they will build a localised version of their website to target that market. Or a business using a forecasting analysis tool may discover that their target revenue goals aren't realistic for the current quarter, and adjust their business strategy accordingly.

Augmented reality

- AR is becoming increasingly useful in day-to-day life; which you'll know if you've ever gone to buy a piece of furniture from Amazon and used AR to see what it will look like in your living room using your mobile phone.
- In our industry, specific use cases around building visualisation are incredibly powerful, especially as a remote selling tool. Sure - most people will want to visit a site or a property in person. But that's not always necessary, depending on the circumstances.



About us

Thank you for reading this Aprao guide, we hope you enjoyed it!

Aprao is a cloud-based financial modelling tool for real estate development. It's used by property developers, land teams, valuers, agents, development finance lenders and property professionals.

[Get started free.](#) No credit card required.

Have you tried Aprao recently?

Transform your development appraisal and
feasibility process with Aprao

Get started free. No credit card required.

The image shows a tablet held by two hands, displaying the Aprao software interface. The interface is for a 'Personal board / 12 Portugal Street, London (E) / Initial appraisal'. The main section is titled 'Purchase of the existing building' and contains several input fields and buttons. A white stylus is resting on the tablet above the screen.

Aprao Personal board / 12 Portugal Street, London (E) / Initial appraisal

Boards

Personal

Team

General Revenue Build Other Costs Finance **Site Purchase** Cashflow

Purchase of the existing building

Description

Purchase of the existing building

Residual value £ 4,449,018.67

Purchase price* £ 4,500,000

APPLY

Current use class Residential

SDLT (calculated) £ 588,750

Search 3 % Custom SDLT

Legal fees 0.5 % £ 22,500

Agent fees 1.5 % £ 67,500

Effective SDLT rate 13.08 %

Total £ 5,178,750

DELETE

DUPLICATE

ADD PURCHASE ELEMENT

Summary

Total purchase cost £5,178,750.00

Key Metrics

RoC 19.46% Project IRR 26.16%

RoGDV 15.94% Equity IRR 159.59%

RoE 144.17% Units 28

GIA (H) 23,720 NIA (H) 19,650

GENERATE REPORT

Summary Appraisal

Gross Development Value £16,290,000.00

Costs £351,500.00

Net Development Value £15,938,500.00

Purchase Cost £5,178,750.00

Build Cost £6,920,500.00

Other Cost £607,900.00

Finance Cost £634,581.50

Total Costs £13,341,731.50

Target profit £2,668,346.30

Profit £2,768.50

Residual Site Value

Help