

# Quality matters

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Autumn 2018

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## The rise of 'access for all' tourism

Catering for everyone is desirable, profitable and very achievable, says The Dairy in the Yorkshire Dales



THE DAIRY, YORKSHIRE DALES

# Luxury *for all*

Award-winning holiday cottage The Dairy in the Yorkshire Dales proves that accessible accommodation is not only achievable and affordable, but the results can be stylish, too, says **Rosalind Mullen**

**O**ne person who would never consider using the bleak phrase, ‘Sorry, we only have the accessible room left,’ is Diane Howarth, who owns self-catering cottages in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. While for many people accommodation for disabled guests conjures up a clinical image of hoists and ramps, she and husband Andrew have proved this doesn’t have to be the case. Instead, the couple has made their new award-winning holiday cottage The Dairy both accessible and luxurious without spending a fortune. Better still, they are busier than ever, attracting equal numbers of non-disabled and disabled guests.

‘We wanted to offer red carpet treatment, not red emergency-cord treatment,’ says Diane, adding, ‘We provide accessible luxury.’

The Dairy, which opened in 2017, is suitable for two people and is the third holiday property in the couple’s VisitEngland Five Gold Star Cottage in the Dales business, joining two-bedroom Inglenook Cottage and one-bedroom The Byre. Where The Dairy differs is that it is now the first accommodation business of any type in the Yorkshire Dales to provide hearing, visual and mobility accessibility to the VisitEngland National Accessible Scheme standards (NAS). Diane and Andrew’s efforts won them Bronze in the

Inclusive Tourism category at the 2018 VisitEngland Awards for Excellence.

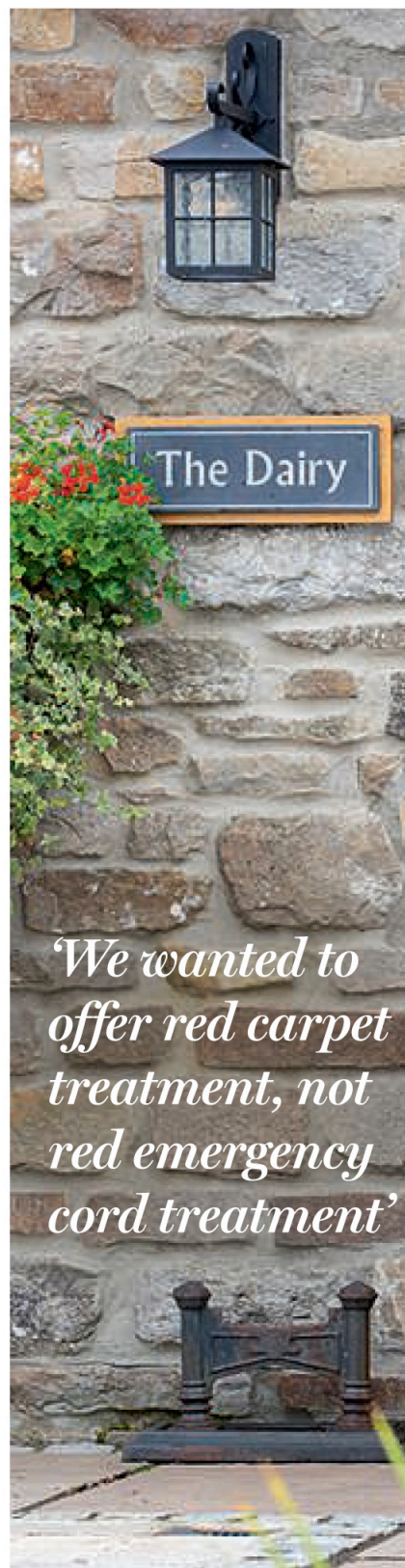
## Catering to older guests

So what made them convert the single-storey disused building in their garden into accessible accommodation?

‘After 11 years, we found that our regular guests were getting older and many were developing problems such as an inability to get up the stairs,’ explains Diane. ‘We realised we were not only having to turn these guests away, but that we were not able to cater for “wobblers”, or people who need a bit of help – people like me. I am only in my fifties, but had a knee replacement last year and find it harder to get up stairs.’

It took five years to get change-of-use permission to convert The Dairy, but the Howarths used the time to do thorough research and were open to changing their plans. They had guidance from organisations such as Access For All UK. While they didn’t use architects, Andrew is a trained civil engineer and the couple also got advice from accessible bathroom design specialist Motionspot.

‘Time made a difference for us or we would have made mistakes,’ says Diane, who now gives presentations on accessibility. ‘We did our research slowly. We have learned many little things from »



*‘We wanted to offer red carpet treatment, not red emergency cord treatment’*



Diane and Andrew won Bronze in the Inclusive Tourism category at the VisitEngland Awards



*'After one year of operating, some 70 per cent of guests are repeat. We are blown away'*



Flexibility: most accessible equipment can be removed



The accessible kitchen, which includes pull out, heat-resistant trays below the ovens

talking to others. It is all about working with people who have knowledge, as you don't know what you don't know.'

In the process, they discovered the extent of the business opportunity. According to VisitEngland research, accessible tourism is a £12bn-a-year market and guests requiring accessibility tend to travel with others, take longer trips and be loyal. More importantly, accessibility is not just important for wheelchair users – in fact only eight per cent of disabled people use a wheelchair. Plus, in an ageing population, the less agile elderly

are the fastest-growing market, so it makes sense to cater for them.

Even so, the Howarths' main concern was how an accessible cottage would fit in with their USP of providing luxurious five-star self-catering. The answer was to provide flexible accessibility. 'What differentiates The Dairy is that the accessibility support is there if people need it, but if not needed then the vast majority of equipment can easily be removed,' says Diane.

Removable extras range from a wake-and-shake alarm clock, a riser/recliner

armchair and portable hoist, to a toilet riser, choice of shower chairs and suction grab rails for use wherever needed in the bathroom. All equipment is kept in the loft and Diane says she can dismantle and move much of it on her own. The Howarths also work with Changemobility, so they can hire larger items such as pressure-relief beds.

To maintain cosy, stylish interiors, the integrated accessible facilities are unobtrusive. For mobility support, these include wider doors and level access throughout, even into the shower, which has remote control stop/start. There are also accessible sockets, flexible base kitchen cupboards that pull out to allow wheelchair access to worktops, pull-down hangers and drawers, and pull-out heat-resistant trays under the ovens.

'It's great – even for those who are not disabled,' says Diane. 'There is a negative perception of accessible accommodation, but it doesn't have to be clinical. That is wrong and based on a lack of knowledge.'

To aid visually impaired people, the design is high-definition. That means, for instance, colour-coded taps, and cream floors contrasting with oak cupboards. For hearing-impaired people, there is a hearing loop, while fire and CO2 alarms give both visual and audio signals. Assistance dogs

## GETTING SUPPORT

Want to become inclusive? Plenty of help is at hand

**To be able to call your B&B, self-catering business, hotel or attraction 'accessible', you need to ensure that every guest – whether they are wheelchair users, blind, deaf, elderly or not very agile – can stay in it safely. There are many organisations to help you ensure that your**

**business is compliant with regulations and offers your guests the best standards. These include Tourism for All, Access for All UK, and local tourism boards.**

**VisitEngland's National Accessible Scheme is the industry standard. It provides a set of mobility, hearing and visual standards for**

**you to work through and rates the accessibility of visitor accommodation in England. It measures various levels of accessibility, from Mobility and Visual or Hearing Level 1 up to Access Exceptional.**

**You can visit [www.visitengland.org/nas](http://www.visitengland.org/nas) to find out more.**

Photos: www.georginabrewster.com; www.stephengarnettphotography.com



are provided with a 'welcome pack' as they often accompany disabled guests.

### Surprisingly cost effective

Diane says the cost of delivering the accessible accommodation was not much different to the investment in The Byre and she expects to get a return on investment within five years, based on their annual 90 per cent occupancy rate. This is on target. In its first year, The Dairy was only empty for 10 days and this year it is already at the target 90 per cent occupancy with just a few dates left at year end. Looking forward, 2019 has 55 per cent occupancy already. 'After one year of operating, some 70 per cent of guests are repeat,' says Diane. 'We are blown away. It is a business investment and we can already see the return. The disabled market is very loyal and when they find somewhere they feel comfortable they return – even in low season. It makes good business sense.'

Diane is now keen to expand accessibility in the other two cottages, which are Grade II listed. They already have the VisitEngland NAS rating for older and less mobile guests (M1) – there is a solid stair bannister and the option for portable equipment, such as suction grab bars – and will be assessed for visual (VI) and hearing (HI) accessibility in November.

So what, according to Diane, are the downsides? 'My blood pressure,' she laughs. 'People have different requirements and I worry that it is okay for them. I show them pictures and explain. I would rather they turned us down than

find it wasn't right. But it has not been a disappointment to anyone so far.'

To ensure the perfect stay in the Dales, Diane works with other attractions and organisations, such as Yorkshire Trike Tours, to help guests explore the Dales.

'Accessible accommodation is just one aspect,' she says, 'but guests also need to know where they can go that is accessible. We supply recommendations in a file to take out and about with them and also encourage them to comment and/or add any places that they discover.'

### What next?

Looking forward, Diane now hopes to make her accommodation friendly for people with dementia or autism. 'It is all about getting knowledge,' she says. 'Dementia Friends training is free to anybody – just sign up. Support is there if you want it.' VisitEngland and the National Autistic Society have pooled resources to offer the industry advice on how to welcome autistic guests. (Find out more at the link below.)

Guest feedback is excellent. 'A wheelchair user said, "I could use everything – I felt normal again,"' says Diane. 'So, yes, it is a business investment, but it has taken job satisfaction to a new level.' And if you still have doubts, she adds, 'There is room for so many more accessible providers. This market is growing as we are all living longer. The opportunity is there!'

### MORE INFORMATION

Go to [visitengland.org/access](http://visitengland.org/access) to find out more about access for all.

## COVER STORY

### FIVE TIPS FOR BECOMING ACCESSIBLE

#### 1 DO YOUR RESEARCH

Talk to disabled guests and experts such as VisitEngland and Access For All UK. Visit accessible businesses to get inspiration. Also, attend conferences and visit accessible accommodation.

#### 2 GAIN THE RIGHT ACCREDITATION

Get your business properly accredited by the VisitEngland National Accessible Scheme.

#### 3 BE INCLUSIVE

Think about people with hearing or visual impairments, or autism – not just wheelchair-users. Also, with an ageing population, consider older people, those with dementia and mental illnesses.

#### 4 BUDGET WISELY

It doesn't need to cost a huge amount. Check your options. Do you really need a £20,000 lift, or would it actually be more cost-effective to create an accessible bedroom/wetroom downstairs or even build an extension?

#### 5 TAKE YOUR TIME

Don't rush into anything. Take time to adapt, amend and improve your ideas.

