

Background

YHA Boggle Hole is a uniquely placed three star hostel which occupies a former stone built-mill house six miles from Whitby Abbey, North Yorkshire. It is set in a wooded valley with a sea view cafe, homely wood burning stove, restaurant, bar and all the usual services you would expect from a good hostel. The location is a nature lover's paradise and it is a regular host to educational trips. However for years they had problems with a poorly built annex.



Main house at Boggle Hole (photo credit: YHA)

Issues Faced

For over 10 years YHA had wanted to refurbish an annex at Boggle Hole that had become run down and almost unfit for purpose meaning maintenance was difficult and some guests were unhappy with the facilities. This was an obvious concern to YHA and the managers.

In addition the annex had asbestos in the roof and to make matters even more challenging access to the remote site could only be reached via a beach which was heavily tidal. Therefore only certain vehicles could reach the site at specific times of day. From here all material had to be transported up a small road at the side of the house to the top of the hill where the annex is located.



The route from the road to the hostel (photo credit – Geograph)

They had spent significant amounts of time through the years talking to different contractors and in one instance had even been given an estimated quote of £6 million for the work. The challenges were evident.

Actions Taken

After much consultation Boggle Hole decided to set up a project group to understand the feasibility of the work and how the refurb could best be achieved. This involved members of the YHA, their building consultants and the onsite managers. The work was completed initiated with their Green Spirit Plan, a commitment to reduce YHA's impact and enhance the natural environment.

By taking a project group approach and bringing much of the planning internally Boggle Hole was able to develop an efficient cost effective plan to overcome many of the challenges. This was achieved by having greater in house knowledge and a more controlled process throughout the work. Eventually this resulted in the commencement of an eight month construction project in 2014 working with the beach and tides.

The asbestos was removed and the annex was carefully refurbished in to a highly energy efficient building with quality modern insulation, window vents to provide circulation, included the installation of an air source heat pump, a 10KW solar PV system and has seen a complete uplift providing quality new facilities and a spectacular exterior.



The work in progress (photo credit: YHA)

A key feature was the inclusion of various panels on the walls educating the guests on the sustainability measures installed and why they were so important.

Costs and funding

In total the renovation cost £1.2 million with funding provided from Coastal Communities, a private donor, a grant from Hostelling International and the YHA itself. Due to efficiency gains and decreased maintenance year on year costs are now expected to be much lower than before.

Outcomes

This was a refurb from the offset was as much about guest experience as any efficiency gains and the hostel ratings and feedback have been more positive than ever since the work leading to increased booking numbers and greater financial security.

However monitoring and managing the energy improvements has led to greater challenges. The solar panels installed were not initially MCS certified which meant they could not benefit from the feed in tariff. In addition the panels occasionally go offline and they are trying to get to the bottom of why. Boggle Hole can also feel and see the success of the heat pump but the energy monitoring system for it is not working. This means measuring the efficiency gains from the equipment installed is not currently possible.

Initial estimates were that annual carbon emissions at the hostel would decrease by 4.1 CO₂e tonnes and energy use would go down by 56% whilst the hostels dependence on fossil fuels would decrease. However this cannot be proved.

What is true is the past problems of asbestos and poor facilities have gone providing a much more optimistic feeling for the future and more jobs have been created both as a result of the work, and to run the hostel. Boggle Hole is now able to remain a quality guest facility for years to come and countless educational groups will still be able to head there in comfort. The educational panels have proved a very popular feature for all guests and educational groups to understand the importance of sustainability.

Challenges and lessons

The challenge with the beach and tide was certainly a tough task to overcome but this was achieved with careful planning and scheduling from the project group. This project group proved a corner stone for the whole task helping to greatly reduce costs and improve efficiency throughout the work and would be a key recommendation for anyone undertaking similar project. Another advantage was having the manager of the project live on site so they could oversee every aspect.

Throughout the work great benefit was gained by working with other prominent organisations in the area such as the National Parks and National Trust as this helped share knowledge and ideas to help overcome issues.

However a big lesson is to ensure you have a good level of control over sub-contractors. When YHA sub-contracted the work out they did not check that the solar panels being installed were MCS certified to receive the feed in tariff. This is something they have recently rectified with the correct authorisation but they are still unable to monitor the amount of energy they are generating from the panels. They are also working to ensure a system to finally monitor the air source heat pump.

Conclusion

Andy Rimmer from the YHA says 'overall the project has been fantastic.'

The refurb has seen the whole guest experience step up to another level which the hostel's unique location and style truly deserves. They know their energy needs and emissions are greatly reduced and their bills will be less they just need the monitoring systems to work out by how much. Boggle Hole now more than ever is a must stay location on any map!

The end result, a stunning new annex (photo credit: YHA)

