

VAQAS QUALITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

Wroxham Barns Hoveton, Norfolk

Assessor: Stephen Barratt. FIH

Date of Visit: 6th October 2008

The following report relates to the quality assessment Wroxham Barns under the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS). The report details the findings of the assessment, as discussed during the de-brief on Monday 6th October 2008 with Ian Russell MBE, Director. The attraction merits the award of the accreditation of '**Quality Assured Visitor Attraction**'.

Pre-Arrival and Arrival

Telephone Enquiries

A number of telephone calls were made from a potential visitor viewpoint prior to arrival to establish routine information concerning opening times, any admission charges, catering facilities, the availability of children's entertainment and directions to site. All calls made to telephone number 01603 783762

- An initial call was made on 11th August 2008 "out of normal working hours" at 5.10pm and was answered after only 1 ring by a recorded message with a clear female voice advising of information via various dialling options.

The option to listen to visitor information was selected which gave detailed information answering most key visitor questions including opening hours, entrance costs, catering on site, directions, special events and advice to visit the attractions. Website if further information is required.

- A further call was made on the 11th August "out of normal working hours" at 5.15pm with the call answered by the same recorded message as the 1st call detailed above.

On this occasion the potential visitor opted to hold to speak to a staff member but the recorded response advised the "system was exiting" followed by the line going dead.

- A call made on 12th of August "during normal working hours" at 11am was answered by the same recorded message as previous calls.

On this occasion the potential visitor opted to hold to speak to a staff member and the call was answered after 1 ring. The response to the visitor's enquiry concerning the suitability of Wroxham Barns for a family visit was polite and positive from the male staff member taking the call and included an assurance there was lots for children to do.

VAQAS QUALITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

- A call made to the restaurant at 11am on the 6th October to enquire about a table booking for lunch was answered after 5 rings. A polite female staff member offered informed and positive advice on the table booking procedure for the restaurant together with the restaurants opening hours and the availability of vegetarian options on the menu.
- A call was also made to the Junior Farm on the 6th October at 11.10am to enquire about animal feeding times but the call switched to voice mail after 6 rings. However, callers were given an option to leave a message for a return call.

Overall, access to pre-visit information is generally excellent both during and out of normal office hours via websites and telephones. However, removing the option to hold to speak to a staff member for calls made out of office hours should be considered and perhaps including the message “the office is now closed” together with details of office open times, may be beneficial.

Some provision to leave messages for return calls could also be considered for the office as discussed.

Leaflets / website

No “taster” or other promotional leaflet was seen prior to the visit or obviously available on the day.

As reported previously, the property information on the website was easily reached via www.wroxham-barns.co.uk and was found to be of an overall excellent quality standard with lots of detailed information covering all key potential visitor questions.

The following observations were made:

- Presentation was excellent with a good mix of colour, script and pictures.
- Both general and “taster” information is very detailed.
- Where appropriate, pricing information is clear and includes a child’s age to avoid confusion.
- Written directional information is generally very good but mapping could be greatly improved upon and including the attractions Postcode would be useful for GPS users.
- Special events information is currently limited to “Christmas Specials”.
- Some excellent information on “secondary spends” such as catering and the extensive shopping opportunities with useful links to expanded information and photos on each retailer.
- Good use of the VAQAS logo provides an additional quality assurance to potential visitors.
- Some information found of Accessibility but an expanded and dedicated Access Statement may be more effective.
- Some good provision was found with regard to useful web links i.e. Produced in Norfolk.

VAQAS QUALITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

- Some interactive schematic mapping of Wroxham Barns inviting the visitor to explore would further entice and could be considered in time.

A small observation but the link from the VAQAS logo could also include some visitor information on Visit Britain/VAQAS as discussed.

Arrival

Wroxham Barns benefits from some useful tourist directional signs on local roads and a useful distance sign giving notice of the entrance ahead. The entrance is clearly defined by a quality board listing the workshops and other attractions open to the public.

The overall quality standards of car parking including overflow and disabled parking provision remains good with the undefined loose and grassed surfaces maintained in a very neat and tidy condition.

The general appearance of the grounds was in accord with the style of the attraction being very well maintained and pleasing to the eye with some excellent use of brick weave style paths, hanging baskets, shrub and flower borders displaying good attention to detail with regard to enhancing first impressions and providing personal touches.

Plans to improve wheelchair access in some areas, following a full audit from the Access for All Project, have been implemented.

Entry

As previously reported, there is no designated reception or information point evident but the provision of an excellent high quality and prominent sign listing all the traders is well located close to the entrance.

Consideration is being given to providing appropriate means to dispense “schematic” style site plans and visitor information from this area once all alterations and new additions have been completed. In addition, as the business expands, the benefits of providing a prominent orientation type site plan were also discussed.

VAQAS QUALITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

Attraction

Overall, Wroxham Barns remains a high quality attraction with few obvious quality issues noted again this year.

Improvements made since last assessed include the following:

- The refurbishment of the restaurant and coffee shop
- The resurfacing of pathways now completed.
- New picnic tables and canopies for the patio areas.
- New “Crazy” golf course.
- Higher profile and improved disabled parking.
- Generally improved wheelchair and disability access.
- Refitted public toilets for the disabled.

Plans are also in hand for the following:

- Considering plans to further extend the Fun Fair element of the attraction.
- Introducing a new Piggery for the Junior Farm.
- Introducing a Micro Brewery operation.
- The provision of Schematic Plans of the attraction.

Other observations this year are as follows and should be read in conjunction with previous reports:

Retail

As previously reported, very good facilities in various shops with sales comprising mainly of an excellent variety of gift type products all very well presented in an attractive shopping environment. Service skills from friendly staff on a busy day were noted as very good again this year.

A less strong aspect was the large external garden display area which was untidy in some areas. In addition, the labelling of plants could be greatly improved upon and providing some more pictures of the plants could also be considered to further entice sales. Some damaged and worn laminated information panels also detracted.

Workshops

All workshop type sales areas remain well presented in various styles appropriate to the individual business. Staff all appeared to be approachable and keen to offer advice and assistance with their particular products and good sales opportunities also noted as being taken in most workshops visited.

No obvious quality gaps exist between the ways the different workshops / sales areas are presented with good attention to detail applied to pricing display, lighting and housekeeping with the best use made of available space in the converted farm buildings.

VAQAS QUALITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

Junior Farm

The welcome on arrival remains excellent overall from friendly staff member. A useful brief includes some basic hygiene rules and good attention to detail applied to the up-sell of animal food sales also noted. Good and well presented information notices include animal feeding times which also add value to the entry costs.

The farm remains a fun area with a good range of small animals appropriate to the style of the attraction and access around the farm is pretty straight forward but as previously mentioned, if the farm continues to grow it may be appropriate to provide a managed route to ensure all areas are visited and consideration could also be given to providing schematic plans of the farm which could also show feeding locations and times.

The current level of Interpretation and fun facts could be further developed in some areas such as the pond and the nursery and feeding points with times could be displayed on the paddock fencing where appropriate as discussed.

Fun Fair

The attraction appeared to be operating efficiently with no obvious issues evident except where machinery has been removed, a courtesy notice informing what is coming in to replace it could be considered.

The general area was maintained in a clean and tidy condition with good instructions on ticketing and token sales prominently displayed. However, displaying a notice advising of the nearest WC's for children may be more appropriate than the current information as discussed.

Sales at the ticketing / token booth appeared efficient and effective from the uniformed male staff member which also displayed a professional approach being taken.

The new "Crazy Golf" course appeared to be great fun and well organised.

Picnic and Playing Area

Well presented and attractive grassed areas with some provision made for traditional swings and slides etc but further development of these facilities could be considered in time which would add further value to a family visit.

Toilets

Gents public toilets were visited and assessed and found to be maintained in a generally clean and tidy condition when checked at 12.30pm and again at 3pm on the day. As mentioned last year, despite no obvious housekeeping problems, a slight odour remains evident which detracts slightly. Good practical quality maintained with regard to all fixtures and fittings with only minor wear and tear evident.

Consideration could be given to the provision of plugs for all wash basins and moving the clothes hooks in the cubicles to a more convenient location such as behind the doors rather than above the toilet roll holders.

VAQAS QUALITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

Catering

Overall, the refurbished Barn restaurant continues to operate at a much higher quality level than the average attraction and managed to exceed expectations in some areas again this year.

The more practical Coffee Shop located in front of the Old Barn Restaurant has been greatly improved over the last year which has reduced the quality gap between the 2 dining options. Service in the Coffee Shop was effective with female staff member noted as being both welcoming and friendly. In addition, the attention to detail being applied to the general cleanliness in the dining area and higher level dust and cobwebs noted last year, has been greatly improved upon.

The Old Barn Restaurant is very well furnished and equipped and is in accord with the high quality levels achieved in other areas of the attraction. The restaurant has benefited greatly from the recent refurbishment which has provided a higher degree of quality to the overall dining environment including free space and ease of movement.

The visitor was very well met, greeted and seated by a friendly male staff member who efficiently established under what name the table had been booked. First impressions were further enhanced by a good and appropriate uniform of dress which included name tags, which displayed a reassuring and professional approach being taken.

All staff portrayed a friendly and professional attitude to their work with some good social skills also noted which included some friendly interaction with customers. A very good level of trade skills also noted which included unobtrusive satisfaction checks and good pacing between courses.

Some other general observations with regard to lunch were as follows:

- Good labelling and pricing of cakes etc neatly displayed and appropriately covered on the service counter also help to entice sales.
- The provision of a designated baby buggy park now located outside the restaurant has greatly improved the entrance / waiting area.
- The "Wait to be Seated" sign is a lot more prominent and not easily missed.
- The opportunity to up-sell of Christmas Dinners has been well taken but as mentioned previously, the provision of some Table Talkers may be beneficial.

Other observations were as follows:

- Menus are well displayed both inside and outside the restaurant but they could include a note indicating if anything is home made or if any organic or locally grown products are used for example.
- The menu was interesting and enticing displaying some imagination and flair.
- Fuller descriptions to accompany individual menu options such as "Rocky Road Pie" could be considered.

VAQAS QUALITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

- When introducing the various menu options to diners, include what is the “Soup of the Day” option if this is not displayed on the menu.
- Staff product knowledge was noted as very good when questioned on various aspects of the menu.
- Good pro-active clearing of tables and cleaning of immediate areas between diners noted this year.
- Suggested ice is offered as an option with drinks rather than include regardless.
- The use of tea spoons with some pudding menu options like Bruleé, as opposed to the larger desert spoons, could be considered.

The visitor’s food choice of Tomato and Red Pepper Soup was accompanied by some excellent fresh bread choices and butter. The soup was served at a good temperature and consistency and was very strong in flavour. The main course of Salmon was served with Caper Mash, Rocket and a Tomato Dressing. Together, the dish had good strong and interesting flavour combinations that worked well together but the Mash appeared and tasted very “oily” which detracted slightly. The simple pudding option of Bruleé was neatly presented with delicious Shortbreads accompanying. Overall, this simple pudding was very tasty, had good colour, consistency and flavour and presented very well without being over garnished.

Key Observations

The following points represent the key observations from this year’s assessment: -

- Some minor observations mainly with regard to out of hours pre-visit information available via the phone. Information via the Website is excellent overall.
- The on going improvements and investment in Wroxham Barns is worthy of some praise again this year and with particular regard to the improved access now provided to wheelchair users and the impressive new “Crazy” Golf course for example.
- The improvements made to the Coffee Shop have greatly reduced the overall quality gap between dining options noted last year.
- The Barn Restaurant remains a very strong aspect of the attraction.
- The overall quality standards achieved in the workshops and small retail outlets are to a high quality standard but the general appearance of the garden centre sales area appeared less strong in comparison this year.

VAQAS QUALITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

General Observations

Wroxham Barns continues to offer the visitor an overall high quality leisure shopping, dining and family day-out experience with many aspects of the attraction either meeting or bordering on the excellent quality level again this year.

However, further fine-tuning of quality standards in some areas of the attraction, as detailed in the above report, could also be adopted, to further enhance the overall quality of the visitor experience as discussed in detail on the day.

Wroxham Barns fully merits the continued award of VisitBritain's accreditation of 'Quality Assured Visitor Attraction'.