

The Old Mill Hotel, Bath



Photos: Courtesy of Old Mill Hotel

Overview

The Old Mill is a 27 bedroom hotel situated by the River Avon, near Bath. As well as leisure breaks, the hotel offers facilities for conferences and weddings throughout the year.

The river that runs alongside the gardens is a major feature for the hotel, forming part of an attractive environment for guests to enjoy. However, the river also poses a threat to the business in the form of flood risk. The business has noticed a significant rise in river levels - up to about 3 metres in the last few years. This can have a devastating effect on the hotel gardens, making it difficult, for instance, to convince customers the gardens will look lovely for summer weddings.

Water levels have also been known to rise above the steps leading up to the hotel, threatening the property itself. In 2000, the Old Mill was flooded, resulting in the restaurant being out of action for 5 weeks and the lodge for 9 weeks.

Since climate change is likely to bring increasing frequency and severity of flooding events, the Old Mill Hotel recognised that it is essential to adapt and ensure that they are fully prepared for the impacts of climate change.

Climate change adaptation actions

- Installed temporary flood boards for use in the event of heavy rainfall
- ‘Tanked’ the underneath of the restaurant – i.e. sealed it so that water would not rise up from below
- The catering facilities and staff are prepared so that managers are able to move the working kitchen and restaurant to a second kitchen and function room upstairs, enabling trading to continue even in the event of a flood
- Management are briefed on how to install flood boards and respond to a flood
- The laundry store was moved from the basement to an area behind the lodge
- Close contact is kept with the Environment Agency, to monitor the level of risk so that the hotel is continuously aware and prepared

Benefits

- There is now minimal disruption to the business from flooding, thereby avoiding loss of earnings
- The hotel managers have greater peace of mind and confidence that the property, staff and customers are protected
- Following discussions with their insurers, the adaptation measures taken resulted in lower insurance premiums
- Adaptation measures add to the value of the business, as being protected means that it is easier to sell the property on
- The measures all help to reassure customers that they are protected, as staff are frequently asked about whether the hotel and restaurant are at risk

Challenges

The whole process, from securing the necessary money from the bank (as the total cost of the measures was quite high) to completing the measures took quite a long time. However, this was seen as a very worthwhile venture for the reasons laid out in the ‘benefits’ above and in terms of long term cost efficiency.

Before approaching the bank for the loan, the Old Mill Hotel contacted the Environment Agency for a full report of the flood risk to the business, including the likely risk increase due to climate change. This provided sound evidence to back up the business’ request and helped to secure the money.

Further thoughts

Mike McDermot, manager of the Old Mill, strongly urges other businesses in flood risk areas to make the initial investments necessary to adapt, as it really is worth the money. The Old Mill is fortunate that it has other areas on site which enable it to continue trading despite a flood, but other businesses may not be so lucky.

The Old Mill found The Environment Agency to be a particularly good source of information and advice when looking at how to adapt the business.

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Relevant links:

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