

CASE STUDY



November 4, 2019



Donnington Valley Hotel

Neil Alder-Hindon, Group Property Manager

High res jpegs available on request

"Maintenance reborn" is the mantra for The Vineyard Group

With a portfolio of three, 4 and 5 star hotels and two prestigious golf courses in West Berkshire, as well as an hotel in Bedfordshire, The Vineyard Group has an established reputation for the providing the best in terms of hospitality, accommodation and beautiful surroundings. However, we all know that it doesn't matter how luxurious the towels, how tasty the food or how beautiful the interior, if we are physically uncomfortable then the experience will be marred.

Neil Alder-Hindon has been Group Property Manager at The Vineyard Group for nearly three years and during that time he has overseen a complete change of mindset when it comes to facilities management at the hotels, spas and club houses. "When everything is running smoothly in the plant rooms neither guests or management give the supply of fresh air or hot water a second thought. But, if the seemingly boundless supply is interrupted or conference facilities become too cold or too stuffy then things need resolving immediately."

The Donnington Valley Hotel and Spa, is located just outside Newbury and encompasses a 113-room hotel, a spa and an 18-hole golf course. The hotel element was purpose built in the 1990s, and the spa was opened 13 years ago. It became apparent when Neil joined the Group that key components such as water softeners, boilers & chlorifiers, and general pipework were all beginning to show their age and signs of neglect were evident across both elements of the site.

West Berkshire is notorious for its extremely hard water and this is one factor that Neil recognises as a contributing factor too some of the biggest challenges in

maintaining the hotel's services. "Not only did I inherit equipment that was starting to show signs of decreased efficiency, the similar could also be said for the approach to maintenance;" commented Mr Alder-Hindon.

Southern Maintenance Solutions, (SMS), were already working at the hotel, but as Terry Tarbox, Contracts Manager, explains, they were frustrated; "There was no obvious plan or logic to the repair and maintenance work we were being asked to do. It made no sense to us to service a boiler without checking that all the associated valves and controllers were functioning." This has now changed and all the Group's premises are subject to a comprehensive, planned maintenance programme. Not only does make it much easier to schedule work around the working requirements of the hotel, but it has also gone a long way to alleviating the number of emergency calls out to respond to failures and leaks etc.

In addition to the hotel, there are also five staff houses on the Donnington Valley site. With no mains gas, each of these was heated with an oil based boiler, located inside the property. It became clear that both the boilers and the two oil tanks that serviced the properties needed replacement, so SMS were tasked with the project.

"The five new boilers were all moved outside of the houses and the new oil storage tanks installed in line with the latest legislation. Not only is the external placement of the boilers safer, it removes any fumes for the occupants and gives them more space. We also managed the removal and disposal of all the old boilers and oil tanks;" explained Tarbox. Since the work was completed in 2018, there hasn't been a single call out and Neil is happy to confirm a 30 percent saving in terms of energy usage. Alongside more efficient heating, the hotel has recently upgraded all its lighting to LED, to further reduce its carbon-footprint.

Over the past two year's SMS' workload has increased five-fold, but both parties are convinced that their planned approach has delivered real benefits in terms of efficiency, energy saving and less disruption for the hotel's staff and guests. "We are now able to prove to the wider management team the value of investing in a planned, preventative maintenance programme. Yes, the unexpected does happen; pipes burst, rooms get flooded and we need it resolving immediately. When that happens, I know that I can rely on SMS to go beyond the bounds of their contract to do all that they can to keep the hotel functioning;" said Alder-Hindon.

"We hope that it won't ever need to be implemented but we recently sat down with Neil and worked through a plan to cope in a worst-case scenario. As a result, should the main boiler plant fail, we have a 48-hour contingency plan prepared and ready to run;" explained Terry.

With similar programmes and planning taking place across the Group's other sites; namely The Vineyard, Deanwood Golf Club and The Barns Hotel in Bedfordshire, both Neil and Terry's teams have a full programme of work. Maintenance was not given the right priority but under the guidance of Neil and his team a new approach has been implemented and the benefits are being felt across the Group's portfolio.

Background

Southern Maintenance Solutions UK Ltd was founded in 1995 and since then has established itself as one of the leading providers of commercial heating, cooling and air handling installation and maintenance services in South East England. It has had success in both the private and state education sectors, but also has long standing maintenance agreements with a range of commercial property managers for premises including various places of worship, modern gym facilities and office/manufacturing buildings.

In addition to its core activities, engineers at the company are also qualified to handle the installation and maintenance of a range of complimentary systems including electrical systems, water treatment, commercial kitchens and commercial pipework installation. The company recognises the need to invest in its staff and currently has three apprentices working towards industry recognised qualifications.

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