



Quality in Tourism

Visit Report
Self-Catering Standard

The Northumberland House

Alnwick



Self Catering

Assessor: Elizabeth Fry

Visit date: 25 Jun 2009

Visit type: Day

QiT No: 83904

Executive Summary

Summary

Under the British Common Standard for Self Catering THE NORTHUMBERLAND HOUSE achieves a FIVE Star rating.

Part of the Standard is that all critical areas of the property; cleanliness, living areas, bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchen must each achieve a grade commensurate with the overall rating.

Following this assessment the establishment meets these requirements, enabling the rating indicated above to be confirmed.

It is positive to note of the continued investment made within the business since the last assessment. This allied to a well organised management ensures that the property continues to achieve a Five Star rating for the coming year and which sits comfortably at the top end of the rating banding.

Physical areas

The Northumberland House is conveniently located and is an ideal base from which to explore the area. The property continues to provide it's guests with an excellent standard of comfortable and extremely well equipped self-catering accommodation.

It is most encouraging to note of the large investment which continues to be made within the property, and since the last assessment this most notably includes the upgrade of a selection of kitchenware, crockery, glassware etc, two new dishwashers, new bedroom sofa, new barbecue as well as decor refreshment both internally and externally.

Subsequently the excellent quality standards continue to be comfortably maintained, and the business has also recently achieved a number of both local and nationally recognised awards. Guest satisfaction continues to be easily achieved and this is reflected within the comments as read within the visitors book.

Best wishes are extended to the proprietors for their continuing efforts to achieve such high standards.

Management efficiency and cleanliness

The Northumberland House continues to be extremely well managed by the proprietors, and this is well organised throughout every stage from enquiry to departure. The printed marketing information provides very positive initial impressions and represents the property very well. The proprietors are very accommodating in arranging extra services to meet specific guests needs. Arrival procedures are well established, and am sure that all the guests enjoy the complimentary hamper selection.

With care and attention to detail, cleanliness is evident to excellent standards throughout the property.

Minimum Entry Requirements

Unit: The Northumberland House
Standard: Self-Catering
Designator: Self Catering
Rating: Five Star

To be recognised within the VisitBritain Quality Assessment Scheme a property must meet all "Minimum Entry Requirements". Also any "Additional Requirements" or "Key Requirements" needed at the designated level must be provided. Quality standards also need to meet the minimum level in all areas of the operation.

At the time of the visit all 'Minimum Entry Requirements' and 'Additional Requirements/Key Requirements' were provided.

The term 'Progressing' is used to indicate that the establishment is working towards providing the missing items, facilities or services listed.

Quality Scores

This section of the report contains information with regard to the quality grading awarded to the property. The quality indicator terms used are to express the different levels of quality.

Your assessor might also have added observations, suggestions or advice. These are suggestions only and can be acted upon or disregarded.

It is hoped that the information contained within this report will provide a valuable management tool and assist in the maintaining, developing or improving of quality standards in the future.

Unit / Group: The Northumberland House

	Score (%)	Level
Overall	97	5
Cleanliness	100	5
Bedroom	94	5
Bathroom	100	5
Kitchen	97	5
Public Areas	100	5

Visit Report

This section of the report contains information with regard to the quality grading awarded to the property. The quality indicator terms used are to express the different levels of quality.

Your assessor might also have added observations, suggestions or advice. These are suggestions only and can be acted upon or disregarded.

It is hoped that the information contained within this report will provide a valuable management tool and assist in the maintaining, developing or improving of quality standards in the future.

Unit / Group: The Northumberland House

Exterior (1 - Common Standards Reference)

Excellent (93%)

Appearance of buildings

Excellent

Appearance of buildings and signage

Excellent

The property continues to be of a very good and well maintained external appearance. Since the last assessment the exterior timbers have benefited from redecoration.

Grounds, gardens, roadways and car parking

Excellent

Grounds, gardens and garden furniture

Excellent

The garden continues to develop with many mature shrubs and herbs being very well tended and of a neat presentation. The garden furniture is well maintained and a new barbecue has been provided. The water feature is most relaxing. The bin area is well screened.

Car parking surface, signage and illumination

Very Good

A suitable amount of parking is available to the front of the property, and the gravel surface is of a suitable thickness. Well considered external lighting ensures of a safe passage during darkness.

Environment and Setting

Very Good

First impression on arrival

Very Good

First impressions continue to be most favourable.

Environment

Very Good

The property is positioned within a quiet residential estate within a rural village. It's location is a great base from which to explore the surrounding area. Both the Northumberland coastline and the popular market town of Alnwick with it's many amenities and attractions are a short distance away.

Pre-arrival information including brochure**Excellent**

Pre-arrival information including brochure

Excellent

Much as previously assessed. The same extremely professional and detailed marketing material, postcards, website and booking forms are still in use. Booking procedures are most efficiently completed and are well established. Am sure that the guests appreciate the personalised booking service through which the proprietor is able to tailor services to any specific guest requirement.

Welcome and arrival procedure**Excellent**

Welcome and arrival procedure

Excellent

All guests are personally greeted upon arrival and provided with relevant details regarding the operational aspect of the property. Fresh flowers and a welcoming card are thoughtful gestures, however a large hamper filled with a wide selection of luxury but locally sourced Northumberland products is also provided. It is positive to note that since the last assessment the property has also achieved a Gold Award via North Northumberland Local Food Award 2008.

In-unit guest information and personal touches**Excellent**

In-unit guest information and personal touches

Excellent

The property is extremely well equipped with thought given to every possible guest requirement. A wide selection of amenities are provided from Internet access, childrens dressing-up clothes as well as a selection of books, games, DVDs etc. The information regarding the local area and property is most informative, and has been sub-divided for an ease of guest reference.

Public Areas (4 - Common Standards Reference)**Excellent (100%)****Decoration****Excellent**

Decoration in lounge and dining areas

Excellent

The decor throughout the living areas continues to be pristinely maintained, and it is positive to note that the property has benefited from an almost complete paint work refreshment throughout. Exposed stone walls and beams are quite a feature within the garden room.

Decoration in other areas e.g. corridors, stairs

Excellent

Coat hanging facilities are well provided, although as suggested perhaps a shoe rack may be a useful addition upon which to place and store shoes upon entering the property.

Flooring**Excellent**

Flooring

Excellent

Throughout the ground floor the limestone flooring is impeccably presented and maintained. Its offers both practicality and durability.

Furniture, furnishings and fittings**Excellent**

Furniture, furnishings and fittings

Excellent

The upholstered seating within the separate lounge is of an excellent quality. Although the sofas within the open plan living area must receive more wear, it is noted that these are well maintained and regularly steam cleaned. A major investment since the last assessment is the purchase of new dining tables which are of a very sturdy quality and which are usually glass covered which should provide ultimate protection from any future markings. Within the open plan area, the dining tables have been re-sanded, and the all the occasional furniture continues to be very well maintained in presentation.

Lighting, heating and ventilation**Excellent**

Provision and controllability of heating and ventilation

Excellent

Under-floor heating provides very comfortable standards of heating throughout, and am sure that when in use, the wood burning stove and the gas 'log effect' fire both create ample warmth and ambiance.

Position and controllability of lighting

Excellent

Dimmer controlled lighting provides a high intensity and evenly distributed illumination, with task illumination benefiting over the dining areas. As suggested on this assessment and previously, an angled poised standard lamp within the lounge would be ideal for sewing or reading purposes.

Space, comfort and ease of use**Excellent**

Space, comfort and ease of use

Excellent

For the intended number of guests, the living space provides an excellent amount of space and flexibility. Undoubtedly the layout will appeal to a wide range of guests, and the main dining / garden room is ideal for seating all the guests in comfort.

Bedrooms (5 - Common Standards Reference)**Excellent (94%)**

Decoration			Excellent
Decoration	Excellent	The bedroom decor is of a similar style and standard as seen throughout the living areas.	
Flooring			Very Good
Flooring	Very Good	Limestone and wood flooring is once again extremely well maintained. Bedside rugs may add comfort underfoot when the under floor heating is set at a low level.	
Furniture, furnishings and fittings			Excellent
Furniture	Very Good	Both the built-in and freestanding bedroom furniture provides ample storage space and continues to be of a very good external appearance. Some attention to select interiors within the built-in wardrobes is required. It is noted that a new sofa benefits the top floor bedroom.	
Furnishings and fittings	Excellent	The bedrooms are thoughtfully co-ordinated. Both high quality blinds and curtains attractively drape the windows.	
Lighting, heating and ventilation			Excellent
Position and controllability of lighting	Excellent	Recessed spot lighting is supplemented with task illumination being very well appointed to the bedsides and dressing tables.	
Provision and controllability of heating and ventilation	Excellent	As throughout the property the heating can be readily controlled by the guests to suit personal requirements.	
Beds			Excellent
Mattress, bed bases and headboards	Excellent	Securely fitted headboards continues to be extremely well maintained in presentation, and both the pocket sprung and water mattresses offer an excellent standard of comfort and support.	
Bedding and bed linen			Excellent
Bedding and bed linen	Excellent	High quality and crisply laundered bed linens continue to be closely monitored by the proprietors to ensure of the highest standards. Throws and scatter cushions further visually enhance. It is positive to note that the pillows and duvets continue to be of a suitable weighting.	
Space, comfort and ease of use			Very Good
Space, comfort and ease of use	Very Good	The bedrooms vary in size, with both rooms 1 and 6 being extremely spacious, nevertheless all provide a very good circulation and access to the furniture, and electrical sockets appear conveniently placed.	

Kitchen (7 - Common Standards Reference)**Excellent (97%)**

Decorations		Excellent
Decorations	Excellent	The kitchen decor and it's high level splash backs are of an excellent presentation and are most practical.
Flooring		Excellent
Flooring	Excellent	The high quality flooring can be easily serviced.
Furniture, fixtures and fittings		Excellent
Furniture and fitted units including handles and light fittings	Excellent	The kitchen units are of a solid construction and provide ample storage space for both guest food items as well as the kitchen inventory. Granite work surfaces further compliment and provide durability.
Lighting, heating and ventilation		Excellent
Position and controllability of lighting	Excellent	Recessed spot lighting is supplemented with task illumination over the hob and to the work surfaces. It is noted that the light fittings above the work surface have been recently been replaced.
Provision and controllability of heating and ventilation	Excellent	As throughout the property, the ventilation is most efficient of which is most important when the kitchen is part of an open plan layout.
Electrical and gas equipment		Excellent
Kitchen equipment, cookers, fridges etc	Excellent	High quality appliances continue to be presented in a pristine working order, and it is noted that both the dishwashers have been recently renewed. The kitchen is extremely well equipped with two ovens, two fridge freezer and two dishwashers. A wine fridge, ice maker, kettle and toaster are all new additions.
Crockery, cutlery and glassware		Excellent
Crockery, cutlery and glassware	Excellent	The high quality Royal Worcester crockery selection has been extended and is supplied in a more than ample provision. Select glassware, drinks jugs, mugs, knives etc have also been upgraded.
Kitchenware, pans and utensils		Excellent
Kitchenware, pots, pans and utensils	Excellent	As above select kitchenware has been upgraded to ensure that the continued excellent standards of quality are achieved. The kitchen is overly equipped with all possible items required when catering for such numbers.
Space, comfort and ease of use		Very Good
Space, comfort and ease of use	Very Good	Although the kitchen is not overly spacious, it's layout has been carefully considered in reference to ease of use, and all the equipment is close at hand. The separate and spacious utility adds convenience.

Cleanliness (2 - Common Standards Reference)**Excellent (100%)****Living and dining areas****Excellent**

Living and dining areas

Excellent

The proprietors continue to achieve exacting standards with regards to the cleanliness throughout the property.

Bedroom**Excellent**

Bedrooms

Excellent

The floorings were pristinely presented, and bedroom drawers and surfaces were dust free.

Bathroom**Excellent**

Bath and shower rooms

Excellent

Kitchen**Excellent**

Kitchen areas

Excellent

As previously noted, the cleanliness and attention to detail that is paid to this most important area continues to be maintained to ensure that housekeeping standards are of the highest levels.

Notes for Proprietors / Managers

The copy of our Visit Report provides information on our assessment of your accommodation and services. The form may be amended from time to time if we discover that this information can be presented in ways that are more helpful. When making quality assessments the assessor is assessing each aspect against the standards of excellence established by VisitBritain. Assessors are trained to ignore their own personal preferences and prejudices when making these assessments. This report is provided in confidence and its contents may not be displayed in any printed material or via electronic media, or indeed quoted verbally. This restriction also applies to any verbal comment made by the assessor at the time of the visit.

PLEASE NOTE

The observations in the Visit Report are intended to be helpful by drawing particular points to your attention. There is no implication that it was these aspects alone that influenced the overall assessment, or that, if they are acted upon, a higher overall grade would be necessarily achieved. Should a proprietor/manager disagree with the grade given, there is an Appeal Procedure, details of which are available from Quality in Tourism (QualityInTourism@GSLGlobal.com, Tel 0845 300 6996). A separate charge is made for an appeal assessment.