

Support your local pub

By Andy Link, chef/proprietor at The Riverside Inn, Aymestrey

According to the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), 378 pubs closed their doors between July and December 2018. That's an average of 14 pubs per week closing their doors for good. And, sadly, the number of small pubs has almost halved since 2001.

On a slightly more optimistic note, the rate of closures has slowed down slightly - at its peak, around 20 pubs per week were going under.

Although the dramatic slide has slowed somewhat, things remain precarious for smaller operators, so public support is greatly needed.

A few weeks' ago, we took over the Bateman Arms in Shobdon. This is a friendly, local pub, with a strong community following. Our aim is to keep it as a proper pub, maintaining its character and ambience, and applying little more than a superficial spruce up to make the place look cared-for.

In rural areas in particular, the pub is an important meeting place, a democratic space where people can mingle and chat over a glass of beer and a meal. It's clear that people feel passionately about their local boozer, but it's very easy to take the presence of the local pub for granted until it's under threat.

As cultural changes, and cheap alcohol from supermarkets has kept drinkers away from pubs, it's the smaller, independent operations that have suffered most, particularly if they are far from popular tourist destinations. Large chain-owned places can weather the storms of financial up and downs more easily than small places, where the margins can be very tight.

All too often struggling pubs are bought by developers, who then turn the plot into housing, once the venture finally flounders.

One pub to avoid this fate is The Bell at Yarpole. Villagers worked together to raise the £275,000 to buy the pub, and keep it open. The pub is now run as a freehold by professional publicans on behalf of the Mortimer Community Benefit Society.

So, next time you're near a welcoming local boozer, don't walk past, but step in for a drink. Besides, the time could not be better to take an interest in ale, as there are now more micro breweries in the UK than at any time since the 1940s, all providing characterful, interesting beers.