

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

The new normal is far from ordinary

As we head into another period of uncertainty, many businesses are struggling to make plans for the months ahead.

In the hospitality industry, we would, by now, have the festive period, with its associated Christmas parties and gatherings, Christmas Day, and New Year's Eve all booked up, and our sights would already be on the following year's events, such as Valentine's Day, Mothering Sunday and Easter.

Now, at The Riverside Inn, and sister pub, the Bateman Arms in Shobdon, we are wondering how we can make a celebration out of New Year's Eve, if everyone has to leave by 10pm. This time last year, we would not have thought, even in our wildest dreams, that we would be in the grip of a global pandemic.

Our chief concern, naturally, is for the safety and well-being of staff and customers. With that at the forefront our activities, we spend a great deal of time and energy each week adapting how our teams work in order to meet new regulations, adapt to new service methods, and on informing our guests of new rules, while still ensuring everyone feels nurtured and welcome.

On a very positive note, since lockdown ended, we have been overwhelmed by the support from our local community, with the hotel and restaurant 20% busier than last year. We are delighted that so many people hold both places in such high regard, and it's this affection from our clients that makes us optimistic about the future.

However, we know that for many establishments the ongoing uncertainty and restrictions will mean that significant numbers of pubs will not survive the winter. Many large operators such as Greene King, Mitchells & Butlers, and many more are now looking at large-scale closures of pub properties, which will result in many redundancies.

I appreciate that tackling Covid-19 infection rates is a hugely complicated issue, and the health of the nation is paramount. But, watching the decline of the industry you know and love is heart-breaking.

Even in these strange times, however, our passion for cooking carries on undimmed, and we are still using produce from the kitchen garden, and our stalwart local suppliers to create delicious dishes for everyone to enjoy.

Cooking and eating have shown themselves to be huge sources of comfort when life as we know it is on shifting sands. As autumn progresses, and the nights draw in, good food and a roaring fire will be more needed than ever.

We look forward to welcoming you.