

The Queen's Head is looking to the future



↑ The Queen's Head pulls in a good crowd in the evenings

The award-winning Monmouthshire micropub has survived the past 16 months and is now looking to serve the local community again, with expansion plans on the drawing board

The Queen's Head micropub is a hub for the local community in Chepstow.

It is a place where typically 25 or more people would meet on Friday or Saturday nights for a drink with their friends.

But all that stopped when the Covid-19 pandemic struck. Wales was hit harder than many parts of the UK, with more and extended lockdowns.

"It has been a very challenging time, as it has been for many businesses, but even more so because of the restrictions in Wales," said owner Glen Ellis. "The Welsh Government has taken a much more cautious approach, which has frustrated a lot of people, but I can understand both sides of the argument.

"Both the UK and Welsh governments have come under fire, but they have been a big help in terms of financial assistance. It

could have been catastrophic for the business, but thanks to the furlough scheme and the grants received, I have managed to keep my head above water."

Over the last year, Ellis estimates he has lost £20,000 in takings: roughly two-thirds of his income. But because he applied for and was approved to trade as an off-licence, he was at least able to provide a take away service.

"Being able to run a take away service was a godsend really, to keep us ticking over and help pay the rent," said Ellis. "We were fortunate in that we were able to do so in Wales as pubs in England weren't able to for a long period."

Ellis, who is a passionate real ale and craft beer drinker, got into the pub trade aged 19, working part-time pulling pints at his local while studying at college. His first full-time job was as bar manager at the Tower Hotel in Talgarth.

From there, he progressed on to managing pubs across the country before deciding to branch out on his own. After seeking advice from contacts in the business and visiting the Arvon Ale House in Llandrindod Wells, the second micropub to open in Wales, he launched the Queen's Head six years ago and has never looked back.

"I had all the necessary experience behind me and decided the time was right to try and make it on my own," said Ellis. "I did it on a shoestring budget of £6,000 and it was a bit daunting at first doing things like my own books, but it has gone great so far, bar the last 12 months."

At 14x16 foot in size and with no electric entertainment, as well as a temperature-controlled cellar, the Queen's Head, which was awarded CAMRA's Gwent Pub of the Year for five consecutive years between 2016 and 2020, is a micropub in the true sense of the word. It is located just a stone's throw from the medieval port walls near the heart of the town.

Ellis has put in an application for planning permission to build an extension to the premises, which is a listed building and was previously a 250-year-old pub before being turned into offices in 2001.

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Glen Ellis, The Queen's Head

The submission is currently before Monmouthshire County Council, with a decision pending. If approved, it will be financed by proceeds from a fundraiser Ellis is running. Patrons can donate £25 in return for a Queen's Head t-shirt or £50 or more to have their name on a brick in the wall of fame at the back of the extension.

The pub stocks a range of local brewery beers, including from Mumbles Brewery, Zulu Alpha Brewing and Grey Trees Brewery in Aberdare. Among the most popular tipples among punters currently are Grey Trees Mosaic Pale Ale (Ellis claims he can't order enough of the stuff) and Afghan Pale Ale, and Oystermouth Stout from Mumbles (which contains real oysters).

Ellis estimates he has spent around £1,000 on implementing safety measures, with £500 going on screens alone. However, he said that the two-metre social distancing rule has proved the biggest challenge, given the size of the micropub.

"Two metres is basically one-third of the length of the pub," said Ellis.

"But we just have to do what we can do and make the best of the situation."

Ellis reopened most recently on Monday May 17th and is adhering to the NHS's test and trace system as well as asking customers to sign into a book. But, while focusing first and foremost on people's safety, he is also keen not to let it spoil their fun too much.

"The pub is a lifeline for the local community, particularly those people who live on their own, for whom it's about the only time they see anybody," said Ellis. "At times, with all these restrictions, it doesn't necessarily make sense to be open from a business perspective, but sometimes you have got to look past that and try to do the best thing for others."

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