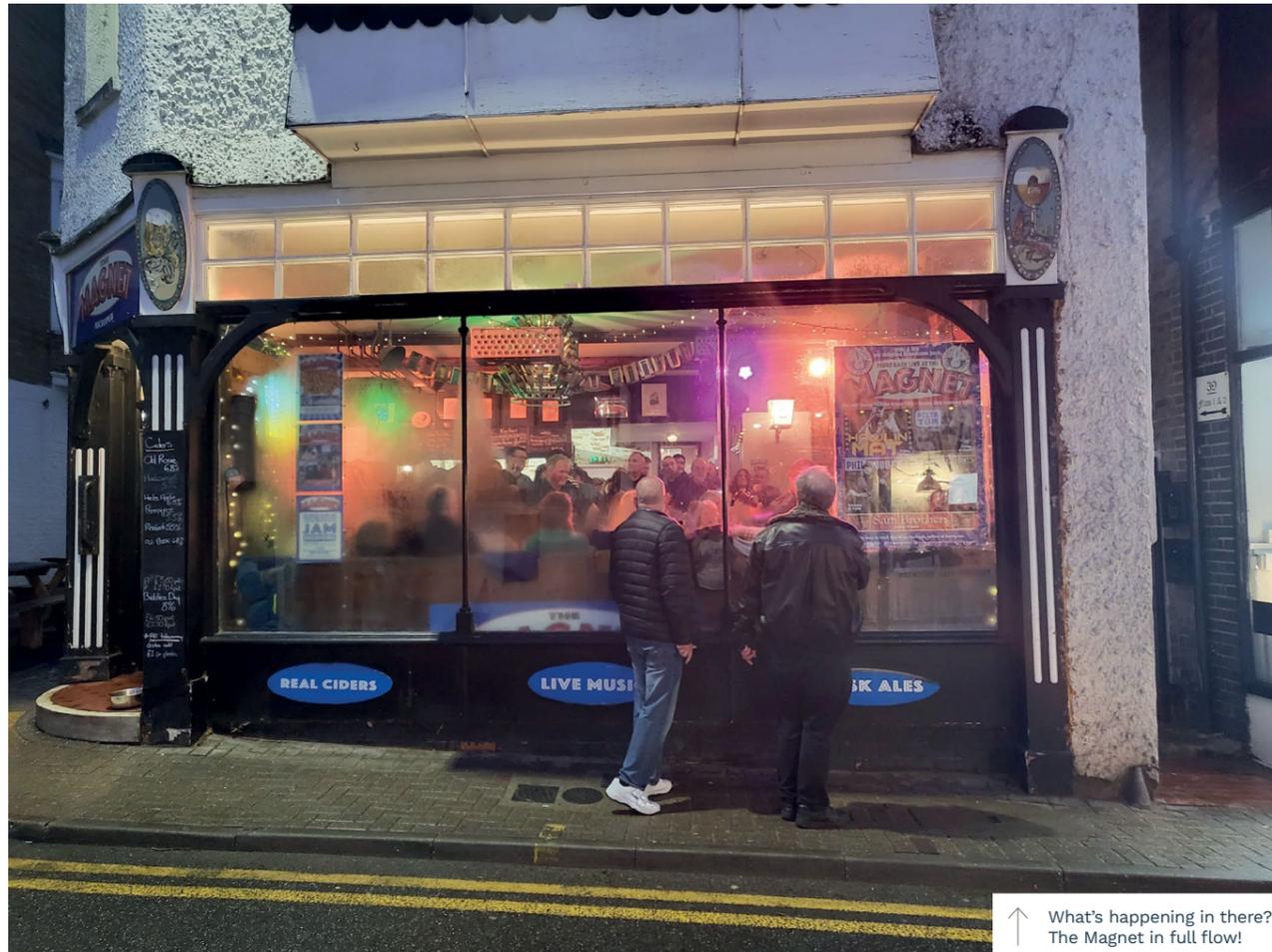


A Magnet for the local community



Launched in 2019 and having survived Covid lockdowns, The Magnet micropub continues to 'attract' plenty of customers.

Alex Wright reports

When Nikki Munn and her partner Will Leeves decided to set up their own micropub, **The Magnet**, they wanted it to be in the heart of the community. That's why they chose Broadstairs in Kent, which already had a thriving micropub scene.

But by basing themselves in the centre of town, they were quickly able to build a loyal band of regulars and establish the micropub as a destination in its own right.

"We had absolutely no idea what we were doing at first," admitted Munn. "But everyone has been so welcoming and supportive, and

we have built such a nice little community hub here that it feels like home.

"We are very much people's people; we love the community and being a part of it. So, this was the perfect match for us."

Having had families that worked in the pub trade, Munn always had a long-standing wish to get into the industry, but she put that on the backburner during her advertising career. It was only after Leeves, who was previously a DJ for weddings, came into some money when his endowment matured that they decided to take a leap of faith and follow their dream. →

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A Magnet for the local community

“Rather than go into semi-retirement, we decided it would obviously be a better idea to start a micropub,” joked Munn. “Little did we know at the time how much work we would be taking on.”

Location, location, location

After looking at several locations across Kent, from Gravesend and Medway to Sevenoaks, lured by the picture postcard coastal town of Broadstairs, the pair were immediately sold. After taking over the leasehold for the site in January 2019, because it was previously a gastropub, it did not require too much work, so they were able to open the following month.

“We deliberately wanted to keep the costs to a minimum in case it didn’t work out,” said Munn, whose main outlay was the £40,000 lease.

“It was just us two working for the first six months, so we didn’t have any major overheads, and, thankfully, we made it work.”

The micropub, which is open seven days a week, is crewed by a five-strong team, including Munn and Leeves. It has capacity for 50, with outdoor space too, or if the customers fancy it, they can order a four-pint bladder bag and go and drink it on the beach.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck in March 2020, the duo used the time during lockdown to renovate the premises, opening up the bar area and installing male and female toilets.



↑ Owners Nikki and Will (blue shirts) with their recent CAMRA awards

including backgammon, bagatelle, cards, chess, cribbage, dominoes, monopoly, shove ha’penny, snakes and ladders, and table skittles, to name but a few. They also run pub quizzes as well as a Subbuteo league every other Wednesday, which sometimes gets “a bit competitive,” according to Munn, and games nights to raise money for Porchlight, Kent’s largest charity for homeless and vulnerable people.

“It has been just what we needed after the last couple of years with the pandemic,” said Munn. “People

“**Rather than go into semi-retirement, we decided it would obviously be a better idea to start a micropub. Little did we know at the time how much work we would be taking on**”

Nikki Munn, The Magnet

Despite being restricted to opening for a short window between the two lockdowns and finally reopening again in April 2021, thanks to grants and loans from Thanet District Council, and selling ‘hero hampers’ containing beer and mugs, they were able to stay afloat.

Brexit has also had a profound effect, with a drop-off in customer numbers as many of the European teachers and students from the local language schools have left the country, according to Munn. The cost-of-living crisis is also starting to significantly eat into customers’ disposable income, she said.

Award-winner

The Magnet is renowned for its quality beer, sourced from Kent microbreweries such as Cellar Head Brewing Company, Iron Pier, Kent, NorthDown, Ramsgate, Tonbridge, and Whitstable. It also does guest swaps with other breweries across the country.

At any one time it has three to four casks and four kegs on, as well as six real ciders. Among its most popular styles are milds, pale ales, porters, and stouts.

In recognition of its beer and friendly atmosphere, it was awarded the Campaign for Real Ale’s Traditional Pub of the Year 2022 for Thanet.

As we start to emerge from the pandemic, so the hope is there will be many more accolades to add to it.

“Being based in Kent, we are spoilt for good microbreweries,” said Munn. “The beauty is that we can rotate our beers regularly and our customers love coming in and trying something different or something they have not had for ages.

“It is also a big draw for single women who like to come in and

enjoy a pint of real ale. They can feel safe because it’s a friendly and welcoming atmosphere where they won’t get hassled.”

A big part of the micropub’s attraction, are the live music events that the couple regularly put on. The music ranges from folk to jazz and blues, with jam sessions twice a month and live acoustic sessions every Thursday.

Previous acts from across the country have included The Accidents, a rockabilly band; The Beard Conspiracy, which plays “modern songs with a Bavarian beer festival twist;” and Wolfe Hogan, a violinist who plays “in the Ed Sheeran style.” The furthest flung was Scott Mickelson, a Grammy nominated artist and producer from San Francisco.

In addition, Munn and Leeves have a plethora of traditional pub games on hand for patrons to play,

have loved being able to come back in and reconnect with their friends over a pint.”

It is that community spirit which has made the Magnet such an appealing proposition for locals and out-of-towners alike. As the word spreads further and wider, so the hope is that it will gain even more popularity.

“We’re very much a community-focused micropub,” said Munn. “You can come in, sit down and have a chat, and enjoy a nice beer, play a board game or two, or just listen to some eclectic music.”

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↓ Packed house for music night!