

Community support boosts a village pub

Now couple want to regain the popular local's past reputation

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After more than a decade of short term managers, a couple are seeking to reinvigorate the reputation of their once thriving village pub.

With the assistance of local tradesmen and villagers, Nigel and Carol Freedman have been winning back locals to the historic Fortescue Arms in Billingborough over the last few months, but it is the once wider popularity they are now battling to rebuild.

The husband and wife, who have worked in the catering and hotel trade for big chains for 28 years, took over the 300-year-old Fortescue Arms just over a year ago and found an eagerness within the community to revive the hospitality as a vital local amenity.

With village pubs under threat from developers and some having to be rescued by community buy-outs, Nigel said they have been grateful to generous-spirited tradespeople. He said: "We have had locals doing plastering, electrics and joinery work in return for just a few drinks - it is a proper community pub. They knew it was either use it or lose. People who had stopped coming years ago have now started returning because they know the food and the welcome is good. Now we need to get the word out further afield."

They have overhauled the heating, with cosy fires to add to the relaxed atmosphere and lighter painted interiors with better lighting mean diners no longer have to read



Carol and Nigel Freedman and the team in front of the original pub sign in the dining area.

their menus by torchlight, as Carol had once noticed. Even the external coat of arms has had a repaint, while the attractive courtyard has been given a new look, including outdoor heaters and rugs for customers, offering the ability to host wedding functions.

Carol is highly qualified in hotel and catering management as well as a trained chef, having moved to the area from Cheshire. She said: "I wanted to do my own fresh food. Everything we serve is fresh from the best local suppliers. Billingborough is a lovely area and the pub is stunning. I liked its many features and character. It is a Grade II listed building."

The couple have got to

work building up the bar, increasing the choice of ales, earning Cask Marque status and a certificate of excellence, as well as stocking over 45 different gins. The bar area is popular among regulars after work and is dog friendly, with a water station outside in the summer.

The pub is a significant local employer, with 15 staff, some in training. They are proud of high ratings on TripAdvisor and five star food hygiene.

Speciality nights such as gin and jazz have gone down well and tapas, with authentic Spanish ingredients, is a fea-

ture of their menu, alongside high quality English dishes.

While there, we tried some of the menu, including hot and spicy breaded prawns and the black pudding on

sautéed onions and mushrooms with rich peppercorn sauce. Both were moreish, as were the main dishes of a

hearty spiced Mediterranean bean stew and the melt-in-the-mouth pork fillet medallions. All dishes were generous and beautifully presented.

Carol said: "Once people come through our doors they cannot fault the service - just make that first step."

'Locals knew it was either use it or lose it' - Nigel Freedman, Fortescue Arms

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