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A wise investment

While a career in catering and hospitality can be fulfilling in its own right, many have also found it to be the perfect springboard to an exciting new lifestyle - running their own pub.

Ian Wright is one person who has made the transition. Along with his wife, Julie, he took on the Kingfisher in Cockermouth five years ago - and hasn't looked back.

Originally from Surrey, the couple had moved to Cumbria 12 years earlier. As a trained chef Ian stayed with his trade and achieved a major ambition by opening his own restaurant in 2001.

"The business worked well but, with us living off-site and with a growing young family, we needed to make a move," he said.

"With transferable skills and experience, running a pub made a lot of sense for us. I can follow my passion for cooking and it provides a social working environment that we enjoy. We also live on-site to give us more time with our children."

Added to that Robinson's stable four-year tenancy agreement provided a business framework at an investment level that suited them.

A smooth transition

From the point when Ian and Julie identified the Kingfisher as the right opportunity, it was just three weeks before



Satisfying and compact: Ian Wright has describes his business

they moved in.

"The discussions with Robinson's were refreshingly transparent and up-front," said Ian. "Since then the level of mutual trust has continued to grow which makes for a very good working relationship."

Ian immediately set about developing the food offering at the comfortable riverside pub - with imagination being the only limit.

Making the right offering at the right price has been the key to his success and, with a roast dinner at £5.95, he regularly serves 650 customers a week.

So successful is his formula that the wet/dry split is now profitably 20/80 in favour of food. This means that, despite 60 covers inside and a further 40 in the garden, customers queue most Sundays for an early table.

"Over the first six months we were able to optimise the menu," said Ian. "Regular specials nights also give me plenty of opportunity for creativity, and the business is doing well."

As a shrewd operator who understands that managing costs build his bottom line,

he describes his hands-on operation, with just two part-time staff, and waitresses to cover his busiest periods, as compact and satisfying.

Working together

Ian's earlier background had prepared him well for life in the pub trade. But for those who need more assistance, Robinson's offers its own five-day licensee training courses where a team of experts share their vast experience. A tenant support manager is also on hand to take every licensee through their business start-up and then continue to provide support throughout their tenancy.

An unrivalled support package is then ongoing with assistance only ever a phone call away. In Ian's case this came in the form of negotiating down his utilities which have improved his margin.

Overall he now sees himself very much as an all-round businessman and not just a chef.

"From day one Robinson's has supported my business plan allowing me to develop the pub the way I want to."

Creativity: Limited only by imagination