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OPINION

OPINION: A big dose of foodie optimism at a time of crisis

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Jenny plating up food at The Deli in Jarrold, Norwich - Credit: Danielle Booden

One of the things I love about working in the food and drink sector is the relentless optimism of almost everybody I encounter. Despite the hospitality industry in particular being one of the quickest ways to get rid of money outside being best friends with a bookie, there is always a steady stream of foodie enthusiasts willing to take the risk – and to make our lives immeasurably richer for it.

For those wondering how on earth they are going to be able to afford to heat their homes this winter, it can be difficult to sympathise with businesses which are going through their own energy crisis. Yet at least we householders are protected to an extent by the price



will depend on extending those very same payment).

For businesses, there is no price cap, no government rebates, in fact, no help at all. And bear in mind that the vast majority of businesses in the UK – and especially in our region – are not major corporations making obscene profits, but instead are small businesses working hard to pay their staff, their business rates, and their local suppliers.

At the weekend, the media was full of stories about hospitality businesses which are facing ruin due to soaring energy prices. One newspaper highlighted a fish and chip shop which is facing a six-fold increase in its energy bill to £36,000 a year. During a cost-of-living crisis it can hardly charge north of £30 for a portion of fish and chips, and so it will inevitably fold, throwing all of its staff onto the dole.

In this environment, it is a wonder that anyone is planning any kind of future, and yet here in Norwich at least, we are seeing several new ventures which are confronting the crisis and going full steam ahead anyway.

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I have written previously about the new food hall, Yalm, which is rapidly emerging in the Royal Arcade, in the space formerly occupied by Jamie's Italian. This is an enterprise which will support local producers, chefs and hospitality businesses, and will be a very welcome addition indeed to the city's food and drink scene.



The cheese available at The Deli at Jarrold in Norwich. A new extended cheese section is due to open soon - Credit: Archant



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For months now visitors to Jarrold's lower ground floor will have noticed a large part of the space hidden behind screens as workmen beaver away. Well, in the next few weeks, we will see the results of those labours: a much-enlarged deli counter, a second wine bar, and, for me, the most exciting innovation of all: a proper cheese room.

Inspired by the wonderful La Fromagerie in London's Marylebone High Street (without doubt the best cheese shop in the UK, at least until now), the new cheese room at Jarrolds will be a mecca for anyone who loves anything to do with fromage.

Here we will be able to buy rare and wonderful cheeses from Norfolk, the rest of the UK and further afield, properly matured and perfectly kept.

I am not privy to what kind of investment that Jarrold has made in the new venture, but having had a sneak preview behind the scenes, I can only surmise that it has been impressive – this on top of the significant amount already ploughed into making the store's lower ground floor a real foodie mecca.

However much has been spent, this is a local business employing local people which is demonstrating a confidence in our city, and in the current climate in particular, this is very important.

Just as the Yalm food hall deserves to succeed if only because of its winningly wild optimism, so does the new Jarrold food venture.

It may be all about cheese, but I really believe that this is one optimistic investment which won't turn out to be crackers.