

## Consuming the market

I've been around for a while and have been "eating out" on a fairly regular basis for over 40 years. In that time I've seen some major changes in the restaurant/cafe/pub market.

**Nationally I would say that the market has gone from polarisation to an even line back towards polarisation.**

When I was younger, most people ate out in pubs and cheap eateries on what was considered a "regular" basis, and infrequently went to a higher class restaurant for a special occasion and ate what was at the time something quite exotic - in my 1962 edition of "Goldfinger" James Bond sat for a "*spaghetti a la bolognese*" - note the italics for what is now standard student fare of "spag bol"! In the later 1960s and through the 1970s and 1980s a new style of restaurant emerged - the first Wimpys were considered to be restaurants, as were Pizzalands, Pizza Expresses and others, which gradually appeared on all our High Streets. Who recalls the days of Rupali, Don Vitos, Mekhani, Godfather, Koh-i-Noor, La Stalla and others vying for trade and around £4 for a lunch or £7 for an evening meal, together with the "posh" restaurants such as Terry Laybourne's 21 Queen Street and the "greasy spoons" - most tastes and budgets were well catered for. And restaurants were scattered.

But I have noticed two trends recently. Pubs have always had "circuits" (Joe Robertson made the Bigg Market/Cloth Market/Groat Market an area of predominantly pubs; one could have a drink in each bar and walk no more than a couple of hundred yards before one wouldn't be able to walk - at least in a straight line!)

But now it seems that polarity is returning



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together with "restaurant avenues" in Newcastle. Two of these that I would identify are the East Quayside - Luis, Victors, St Vincent and Dood among others, and Grey Street where there are pubs with a substantial dry trade such as Bar Luga and Pleased To Meet You, leading into Dean Street where both Marco Polo and Prima have moved substantially up market, to be joined by Kaltura and Doyles.

Lots of restaurants in a city centre is only to be expected - I could add the food court at Eldon Square. But there are two other "avenues" that maybe weren't quite down at heel, but which have become the centres of restaurant trade - West Road heading out to Fenham and Chillingham Road in Heaton. Have you seen the bright lights in the evening on either? West Road buzzes at night, mainly with lower end menus, and Chillingham Road now boasts numerous restaurants including Nest, where a 8 course taster meal with wine pairing could set you back £124 a head.

Which brings me back round to polarity. As much as few would have considered either of these roads a place for a night out only 15 years ago, few would have thought that Terry Laybourne would open more £50-plus a head restaurants, or that such venues as Kenny Atkinson's Solistice and House of Tides would be viable on limited opening hours and menus running off £180 a head (including wine) - but they are.

I think this is in one regard encouraging (that there are sufficient people in the area with money to keep these in business) - there is a concerning return to polarisation, and with a trend upwards. I am concerned that those restaurants at the lower end, who work on higher volumes and lower margins, are suffering. My firm acts for a number of these and I am getting more cries for help now than I can recall in my 45 years as a property advisor and nearly 34 years on my own. Politicians don't seem to realise that increased costs to suppliers won't help consumers - they'll be just as hurt.

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