



What does it take to run a pub?

By John Lawrence

Arina Piskunova and Eamonn England were crowned Licensees of the Year by the British Institute of Innkeeping for their stewardship of The Windsor Castle pub in East Finchley (The Archer, July 2026), a huge achievement in a national award scheme. We sat down with the couple to ask what it takes to run a successful pub in these tough times for the hospitality industry.

When you look at the challenges they face, it's a wonder we've got any pubs left at all. Soaring business rates, rising costs of employing staff and VAT payments at 20% mean profit margins, if any, are wafer thin.

"Even a successful pub is not making much money," says Eamonn England, sitting alongside Arina Piskunova in The Windsor Castle in The Walks, N2. "We're constantly up against it. We are a small pub in a location away from the main road, but we still had a £46,000 VAT bill last year."

Arina and Eamonn are vigorously backing the 'VAT's the Problem' campaign, fronted by celebrity chef and publican Tom Kerridge, to give pubs and restaurants some breathing space by reducing the VAT rate for hospitality to 10%. Across the country, 270,000 people have signed the campaign's petition.

Arina and Eamonn have run The Windsor Castle since 2022 and are only too aware of the financial tightrope they walk. They employ six members of staff, including a chef, and work behind the bar and in the kitchen themselves from 4pm to closing time Tuesday to Sunday.

When they're not open, they might be taking deliveries, negotiating deals with suppliers, managing the staff payroll, running the Windsor's

social media accounts or designing its menus and marketing materials. On Mondays they often visit other pubs to see what the competition is doing.

"There are so many cogs behind the scenes in a pub that customers don't see, just to keep it running from week to week," says Arina. "But this is the job and the career we've chosen to do, so a lot of it doesn't feel like work."

"When the doors are open and customers are coming in, it's all about connection. For both of us it's such a great feeling when the pub is buzzing and everyone is having a good time."

The couple were grilled in huge detail as they worked through the process that resulted in them winning the Licensees of the Year Award. There were unannounced pub visits, forensic inspections of their accounts and Dragons Den-style interviews to conquer on their way to the title. Before coming to East Finchley, Arina was a development officer for the Royal Institute of British

Architects and Eamonn was working in marketing in the music industry, as well as being a contestant on the BBC's Masterchef in 2020. When they decided to look for a pub to run, they came in with a five-year business plan and most of what customers see in The Windsor Castle today was in that plan.

It started with a major refurbishment funded by then-owners McMullen's (the pub transferred to Punch earlier this year) and was followed by Arina and Eamonn introducing a monthly quiz night, a folk music night, Sip and Paint classes and, soon, a jazz night. In the background they reopened the kitchen serving a home-cooked menu with farm-sourced food. So what do they see as their biggest success? Their answer is unanimous. "It's the human connections again," says Arina. "We love to see the mix of customers we get in here... young families, people in their 20s talking to people in their 80s on the next table. Lots of people have made friends visiting the Windsor." With a national award under their



Inn business: Eamonn and Arina have run The Windsor Castle for more than four years. Photo John Lawrence

belts, a busy bar and a lively beer garden many nights of the week, Arina and Eamonn are

certainly doing something right. Let's hope government legislation and tax rules let them carry on doing it.

Table tennis club celebrates ten years

East Finchley Table Tennis Club was established in 2015 and held its first session at the Green Man Community Centre on the Strawberry Vale estate in 2016. Originally with one session a week, it soon expanded to two.



Table tennis players in action at the Green Man Community Centre

To celebrate the club's first decade, 22 members and friends enjoyed a dinner and dance at the Club House of North Middlesex Golf Club on Friern Barnet Lane in June.

The evening kicked off with a glass of prosecco on the terrace overlooking the golf course and finished with a rousing chorus of Sweet Caroline to cheer on the England men's football team as they set off across the Atlantic to 'bring back the cup'.

"New members are always welcome," said Stephen Ross, club Chair. "We play social table tennis - having fun rather than furrowed-brow competition is the order of the day."

Sessions are held at the Green Man Community Centre on Tuesdays, starting at 2.15pm, and on Thursday from 10.15am. Stephen added "if any readers would like to have a go, just drop into one of the sessions".

Surprise visit from Bluey on a morning of fun

By Joan McCarthy

During the summer term, Holy Trinity Primary School hosted its much-anticipated Holy Trinity Games, welcoming not only its own children but also local nurseries. The event was filled with lively and engaging activities that kept the little ones busy.

Cartoon character Bluey made a surprise visit, delighting children and some of the adults too.

Organisers at the school in Eagans Close, N2, sent out a big thank you to Bishop Douglass Secondary School, Push2Perform and Fixation Academy for their support.

Support for children with complex health needs to find help

By David Melsome

A major project led by University College London has been launched to transform how children with complex health needs are supported at critical moments in their lives, with a strong focus on families in Barnet and Haringey and across north London.

The SPROCKET Innovation Hub has been awarded £6.2m over the next five years to develop and implement practical ideas that help children and



Bluey entertains children

families. Potentially difficult stages being looked at include a child moving from primary to secondary school when families have to navigate the process of securing special educational needs support. Another is when a child with special needs leaves hospital with a requirement for adaptations at home and ongoing support in the community.

Parent co-investigator Meaghan Kall described the reality many families face: navigating multiple services, repeating their story, and managing long delays for essential support. "There is no road map and no guidebook," she said. Find out more by going to www.ucl.ac.uk and searching 'Sprocket hub'.