

Ten out of ten!

In ten years The Broad Leys has been transformed from a disreputable dive into one of Aylesbury's top pub restaurants. It took vision and hard work, but, says owner Helen: 'It's been well worth it'...

When Helen Wood took over Aylesbury pub, The Broad Leys, some ten years ago it didn't have the best of reputations. Since then she has worked wonders, investing time, money and care into the building and the business and today it is one of the best pub and restaurants in the Vale. It also boasts some rather lovely, boutique-hotel-style accommodation.

The Broad Leys was originally The New Inn, a 16th century coaching inn at Walton, a parish on the main route into Aylesbury from London, (now Wendover Road). The back bar was a blacksmith's forge and the restaurant a barn/stables for the coach horses.

Walton, now part of Aylesbury, was quite rural in those days and a centre for breeding the now famous Aylesbury ducks. The pub looked out across the road to wide open fields, or broad leys, where housing now infills all the way to Walton Court and Stoke Mandeville. The name changed in the 70s as there was no longer accommodation and 'New Inn' was thought confusing.

When Helen took on the pub lease in 2002, she knew there was a lot of work to do. She could see potential though and has worked steadily to realise her vision, buying the freehold along the way.

It started with a lick of paint to get things up and running and continued with a refurbishment and extension of the bar area, the fitting of some much talked about, very stylish and contemporary, designer toilets

and the conversion of the adjacent barn, to provide restaurant space and room to extend and renew the pub's kitchens.

"We've tried to make it quirky and unusual," says Helen, "while keeping the character of the old coaching inn. There's a splash of glamour here and there but it's comfortable too. We have just introduced two luxury boutique style rooms for overnight stays and have another five on the way. We've also refurbished a small nearby cottage, with a pretty walled garden, to offer lovely deluxe, self-contained accommodation."



Helen Wood

Helen is originally from Kings Langley. She went to catering college and worked for Trust House Forte and Whitbread and managed The Crows Nest, Tring Hill and

The Plough on Tring Road, Aylesbury.

"The pub side of things is just as important to us as the restaurant," she says. "A lovely crowd of regulars has built up over the years for both. We also cater for functions, parties and family dos - we have a marquee for larger events and there's comfortable, covered, outdoor seating and a pleasant garden for when the weather's warmer."

The Broad Leys restaurant is open all day serving a full menu of modern English pub food. You can choose from a restaurant menu, a bar menu, sandwiches and snacks, or, from 4pm to 6pm, a pre-theatre menu designed for those on their way to Waterside Theatre, which is only a short walk from the pub.

"We have two excellent chefs," says Helen, "who have been with us for several

The Broad Leys



years. They are hard working, reliable and enthusiastic and have done a great job of developing the menu. We source ingredients from local suppliers where possible, meat from farms at Bicester, Brill, Ludgershall and Kirklington. We also have Aylesbury Duck on the menu, which is quite rare now, there's only one genuine, original flock left.

A meal could include: Ham Hock Terrine with Crusty Bread and pub's own Piccalilli, followed by Aylesbury Duck, with Fondant Potato, Parsnip Purée, Pak Choi and Cherry Jus and a Blueberry Pannacotta for dessert. There's also a fabulous brunch menu, served from 9.30-11.30am at weekends and Sunday roasts from 12-8.30pm.

"We are an independent business," says Helen, "and we've tried to add some personality and a sense of fun, so coming to the Broad Leys is a bit more interesting than your regular chain. At the beginning it was a dream, a vision, but now, ten years on, it really is the kind of place I'd like to come to."

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The restaurant



New boutique bedrooms

