

## small producers

### Investment by Cottage Delight's Cope funds brewery expansion

Staffordshire real ale producer Leek Brewery has expanded into a 10,000 sq ft unit on its site at Cheddleton after Cottage Delight founder and chairman Nigel Cope took a stake in the business.

The brewer – which also operates the Staffordshire Cheese Company from the adjacent unit on Churnetside Business Park – now plans to install a high-speed bottling line that will take capacity to 1,500 bottles an hour.

A spokesman said the move would help Leek Brewery capitalise on the busy Christmas period as well as contract-bottling for small local companies that would otherwise need to transport products to Manchester or Birmingham for filling.

Leek Brewery was founded in 2002 by Adrian Corke and Susan Carline, and the pair later bought the neighbouring Staffordshire Cheese Co from founder John Knox. They now make six cheeses, including two Protected Designation of Origin recipes: Staffordshire Cheese and Dovedale Blue.

Cope, who says he is “very excited by the potential of both businesses”, is now a director and shareholder but has no day-to-day involvement. However, Cottage Delight is now distributing some Leek Brewery products.

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**Brewers and cheese-makers work in adjoining units in Cheddleton**

## farm shops

### National Trust scraps farm shop plans after ‘substantial loss’



**Polesden Lacey store was to be the model for a dozen farm shops at key sites**

By **PATRICK MCGUIGAN**

The National Trust has scrapped plans to open a chain of farm shops after its recently opened flagship branch made a “substantial loss”.

The Trust opened the shop at Polesden Lacey in Surrey last year as part of a three year, £3.5m programme of improvements to the visitor facilities at the site.

The shop was due to be a pilot for a chain of farm shops in other National Trust sites, with a second outlet due to open at Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire and up to 10 more after that.

However, the entire project has been abandoned after disappointing sales and the shop is currently being converted into a café with a small retail offering.

Keith Jordan, who was appointed regional farm shop operations manager to drive the development, has now left the organisation.

“In terms of standards and presentation the shop was excellent but it just wasn’t delivering the business we had hoped for, so we had to take some fairly radical action,” said Simon Bird, head of retail operations.

“We didn’t succeed in building up a local following. We were too reliant on general visitors

and tourists and the average spend with that type of person was just not high enough. There is also a lot of competition in the area from well-established farm shops and a strong high-end supermarket offer such as Waitrose.”

He added: “The location was also factor. It’s a place you have to make a special trip to. A lot of our properties are off the beaten track, so it’s always going to be an issue for us. The shop ticked the boxes of supporting local producers, which was great, but we couldn’t afford to operate it at a loss, and quite a substantial loss at that.”

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### BUYING ‘LOCAL’ ISN’T ALWAYS ENOUGH

Sir, I was interested to read the recent correspondence in *FFD* about deli buyers, and also your ice-cream feature which focused on the importance of quality. I would like to share a trend I have noticed regarding ethnic products.

As a curry sauce producer with many Great Taste Awards under our belts, we like to think we are fairly well known in the speciality market. However, in recent months, I have noticed a trend for independent retailers to say they are only stocking products local to them. One deli said: “Unfortunately I won’t be able to put your fab sauces etc into the shop. We have a strict local ethic on products – up to a 50 mile limit from here.”

Supporting local producers and reducing food miles is admirable on many levels. It also makes commercial sense to give customers what they want. Indeed, I benefit from this in my local area. But I am concerned

retailers could be missing a trick by dismissing out of hand all products made elsewhere.

Curry sauces, for example, will vary widely in ingredients, production methods, concentration, strength, etc. Rather than turning down a product because it is made out of the area, my advice would be to discover more about the products and how customers can use them. My products, for example, are free from sugar (except for some chutneys), dairy, gluten, onion and garlic, and are suitable for vegetarians and vegans, so they appeal to a wider audience. This must be equally true in other food and drink categories: local suppliers cannot supply quality products to fill every niche.

Consumers are discerning. If they like something they will return. Please give them the chance to try products with a real point of difference – regardless of where they are based.

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