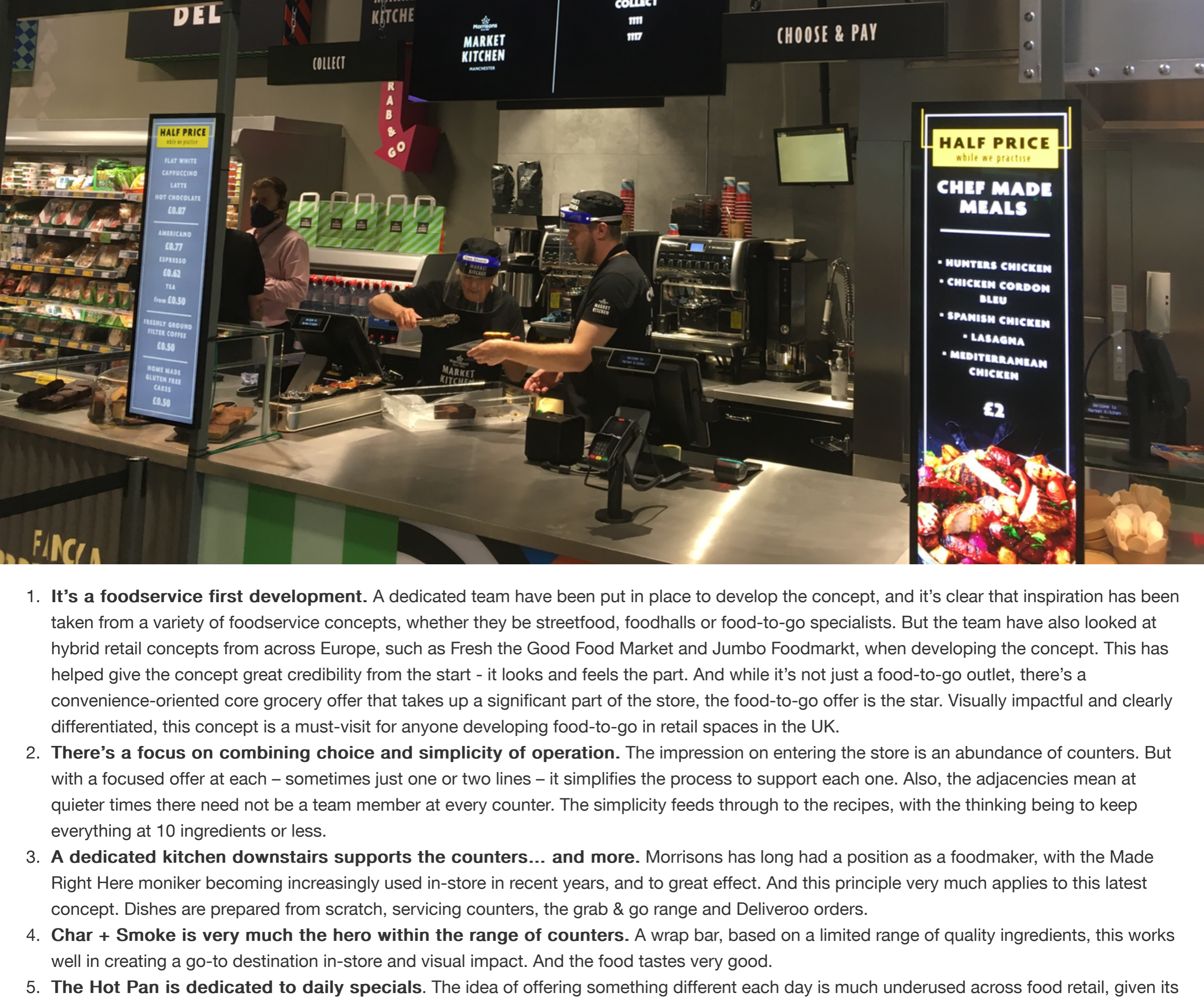


In 10 points: Morrisons Market Kitchen

Morrisons Market Kitchen in Manchester is its first standalone Market Kitchen concept and a considerable evolution from the already impressive first Market Kitchen in London's Cannon Town. It opened its doors last week, and we visited to check it out. We were highly impressed at how far the concept goes beyond what Morrisons has done in the past - here are some of the key things we took from our visit:



- It's a foodservice first development.** A dedicated team have been put in place to develop the concept, and it's clear that inspiration has been taken from a variety of foodservice concepts, whether they be streetfood, foodhalls or food-to-go specialists. But the team have also looked at hybrid retail concepts from across Europe, such as Fresh the Good Food Market and Jumbo Foodmarkt, when developing the concept. This has helped give the concept great credibility from the start - it looks and feels the part. And while it's not just a food-to-go outlet, there's a convenience-oriented core grocery offer that takes up a significant part of the store, the food-to-go offer is the star. Visually impactful and clearly differentiated, this concept is a must-visit for anyone developing food-to-go in retail spaces in the UK.
- There's a focus on combining choice and simplicity of operation.** The impression on entering the store is an abundance of counters. But with a focused offer at each - sometimes just one or two lines - it simplifies the process to support each one. Also, the alignments mean at quieter times there need not be a team member at every counter. The simplicity feeds through to the recipes, with the thinking being to keep everything at 10 ingredients or less.
- A dedicated kitchen downstairs supports the counters... and more.** Morrisons has long had a position as a foodmaker, with the Made Right Here moniker becoming increasingly used in-store in recent years, and to great effect. And this principle very much applies to this latest concept. Dishes are prepared from scratch, servicing counters, the grab & go range and Deliveroo orders.
- Char + Smoke is very much the hero within the range of counters.** A wrap bar, based on a limited range of quality ingredients, this works well in creating a go-to destination in-store and visual impact. And the food tastes very good.
- The Hot Pan is dedicated to daily specials.** The idea of offering something different each day is much underused across food retail, given its ability to deliver theatre and more frequent repeat visits. Here it's done to great effect, with seafood paella available on my visit, with menu boards communicating not just the day's special, but also what to come back for on subsequent days.
- There's a strong selection of gluten free options across the range.** A principle is that where there's an option to make a menu item gluten free, they will aim to do so, for example at the barista bar where the cakes offer is entirely gluten free. In line with the food maker principles, cakes are baked fresh each day on site.
- The concept has all day appeal.** Breakfast and lunch have a dedicated focus, but trading has so far remained strong into the evening, with a combination of people on their way home from work and passing general city centre footfall in what is a very central location.
- Good mix of digital and analogue signage to help create right feeling and ambience in-store.** One key screen shows images of the food preparation and completed dishes, while for the juice bar, a digital menu is used to show what's available on a particular day. Where digital isn't needed, it's not used, and simple - though characterful and attractive - signage is used to create ambience and impact.
- We increasingly believe that a combination of grab & go and counters is key to maximising food-to-go appeal and sales. And both were done to great effect in this store.** Grab & go is prominent on entry, with the counters located along the back wall. Packaging and presentation draws on a variety of sources for inspiration, but all very much in keeping with food-to-go specialist credentials.
- There is a lot in this store that will support wider learning for Morrisons,** not just in rollout of standalone Market Kitchens, but also in potentially looking at how elements of the proposition can be rolled back into main estate.

So where next? Further plans have yet to be confirmed at this stage, but here are some thoughts:

- Seating area development.** The nature of the site, plus covid, meant it wasn't possible to add a seating area into the store. Undoubtedly this would add further appeal to the concept, in the right location. If and when Morrisons opens a Market Kitchen with seating, they will be well-served to do this in keeping with the look and feel of the Market Kitchen concept, rather than thinking of it as a standard supermarket seating area.
- A stronger call out of the made fresh in store today.** In fairness, this is already part of the plan for this store, but it makes a lot of sense to develop this as a selling point for the grab & go range as much as for the counters.
- Building the Market Kitchen brand further to create new opportunities.** The store offers a catering menu, and the quality of the food is very good. Further focus on communicating the strengths of the Market Kitchen in its own right could expand the audience for this, and expand reach and awareness via online platforms such as Deliveroo. This will also help in retaining the essence of a brand if and when it gets added into larger store formats.
- Add seasonality into the mix.** For several benchmark food-to-go specialists this forms part of their DNA. It also drives freshness in the offer. This isn't about wholesale reinvention of the offer every quarter, but incorporating more seasonal dishes and ingredients can help drive relevance and repeat visits.
- Don't stop the concept development.** Those that are best at this have a modular approach and a suite of options to make the food-to-go solution relevant for the particular site. This may on occasion feel like overkill, but we know that competition in this space will intensify, and shoppers have a lot of choice. And newness and innovation are vital to helping brands reinvent - adding a new feature in every new store was for a long time a core part of the story behind Whole Food Market's success, helping to drive innovation led thinking alongside local relevance. Ensuring the concept fits as neatly as possible to meet the needs of local shoppers will therefore be increasingly key.