

83

OPERATOR CASE STUDY

CHICKEN HUT
ILFORD

Building and sustaining a resilient high-street food business through major disruption, changing customer economics and nearly a decade of operational refinement.



ROLE

Owner, Director & Operator

PERIOD

2017-Present

BUSINESS

Fried chicken & fast food

TEAM

Approx. 8 staff

HOURS

10am-2am | 3am weekends

LOCATION

83 Ilford Hill, Ilford

From tired restaurant to resilient operation

The site at 83 Ilford Hill was acquired by the family in 2017 as a tired Indian restaurant. At 18, Moeen Sajjad took full-time operating responsibility and led a complete strip-out and conversion into a fried chicken shop. The objective was straightforward: build around a format he understood deeply, then make the operation simple enough to survive changing conditions without constant owner intervention.



THE CHALLENGE

What changed

- Covid reduced daily footfall from hundreds of customers to roughly 30-60, while pedestrian access outside the site remained heavily disrupted for an extended period.
- Ilford became increasingly price-sensitive, with changing local demographics and less discretionary spending forcing a rethink of the product and value proposition.
- Delivery platforms added sales but imposed commissions that made the economics unattractive, particularly when combined with intense online competition.
- Late-night trading required a licence that did not exist when the site was acquired, with concerns from the council, police and local residents needing to be addressed.
- An increasingly competitive local market meant the business could not rely indefinitely on historic footfall or a fixed menu.

THE RESPONSE

How the model adapted

- Streamlined food cost, tightened waste control and refined rotas so the business could withstand a prolonged drop in demand rather than chasing unsustainable sales.
- Rebuilt the menu around value: more filling meals, greater use of rice and fries, carefully controlled protein portions and loss-leader or rotating offers where useful.
- Reviewed pricing regularly, monitored wages weekly and scrutinised stock at the end of each week.
- Moved away from delivery platforms when commissions and competition outweighed their strategic value; customers continued to collect directly.
- Recruited for reliability and versatility, then delegated purchasing and routine management gradually while retaining oversight.
- Built and maintained the systems required for food safety, cleaning, allergens, stock control, reporting and licensing compliance.



Resilience through control, not constant expansion

The strongest result was durability. When trading conditions deteriorated, the response was not to protect headline turnover at any cost. The business was reshaped around controllable costs, value, staffing discipline and operational consistency until footfall recovered.

RECOVERED

TRADING LEVELS

Returned to pre-Covid trading levels after a multi-year collapse in passing trade.

c. £500

PER WEEK

Operator-estimated reduction in avoidable waste after tighter controls.

9+ YEARS

OPERATING

Continuous involvement from the 2017 conversion through 2026.



KEY OUTCOMES

- The business survived a multi-year collapse in passing trade and recovered to pre-Covid trading levels once local footfall returned.
- Structured cleaning, food-safety and staff-training controls were embedded into routine management rather than relying on constant owner intervention.
- Waste and stock monitoring were embedded into weekly management, with an estimated c. £500 per week reduction in avoidable waste-related cost.
- The menu was materially repositioned as local spending power changed, protecting customer value without abandoning margin discipline.
- Delivery platforms were removed once their economics became unattractive; direct collection demand remained sufficiently strong to support the change.
- Staff turnover remained unusually low, with long-serving employees progressing into trusted roles and some continuing across the wider business group.
- A late-night refreshment licence was secured despite stakeholder concerns and then operated within its conditions over the long term.

A practical lesson in market adaptation

The local customer base changed significantly after 2020. Rather than insisting on a premium product mix that no longer matched the market, the offer was redesigned around stronger perceived value: filling rice-based meals, more efficient use of fries and carbohydrates, and tighter control over expensive proteins. The principle was simple: adapt the proposition to the customer while protecting the economics of the business.

WHAT THIS DEMONSTRATES

Built to be managed, measured and adapted

Chicken Hut Ilford demonstrates a different kind of operator experience from a short turnaround. It shows the long-term discipline required to keep a high-street food business trading through nearly a decade of competition, regulation, cost pressure, local disruption and changing customer behaviour.

COMMERCIAL CONTROL

Weekly wage monitoring, stock scrutiny, menu reviews and channel decisions kept attention on contribution and controllable cost rather than turnover alone.

PEOPLE & DELEGATION

A low-tension working environment, careful recruitment and gradual delegation produced unusually strong staff retention and reduced day-to-day owner dependency.

REGULATORY DELIVERY

Food-safety systems, allergen controls and a successfully obtained late-night licence demonstrate the practical work needed to operate within a regulated environment.

MARKET ADAPTATION

The offer changed as Ilford changed. Product mix, portion design, pricing and value positioning were adjusted rather than relying on a model that had worked in the past.

CROWNHILL RELEVANCE

The operating experience behind the consultancy

This experience informs CrownHill's approach to independent hospitality businesses: understand the actual trading environment, separate structural problems from controllable ones, measure the cost base, build systems staff can repeat, and adapt quickly when the market changes. The aim is not to impose theory on an operator. It is to identify which practical changes will make the business more resilient, more controllable and less dependent on constant owner intervention.

"Adapt the business before the market forces you to."

Long-term operators do not get to choose the trading environment. They can only control how quickly they recognise change, protect the numbers and redesign the operation around what customers will actually buy.

Operator Case Study: this document describes work undertaken by Moeen Sajjad as owner/operator of Chicken Hut Ilford. It is not presented as a third-party CrownHill consultancy engagement. The c. £500 weekly waste figure is an operator estimate rather than an independently audited saving. Commercial turnover and profit figures are intentionally withheld.

