

ONROUTE PLANS BETTER TRUCKSTOPS FOR DRIVERS

Onroute Truckstops has acquired several truckstops and is on the lookout for more to meet planned expansion.

It currently owns Avon Lodge, near Bristol, Ulceby in North Lincolnshire, Junction 29 at Chesterfield, close to the M1, and recently added Swindon Truckstop to its portfolio.

Truckstop News recently spoke to its Operations Manager, Alisdair Shearer, who told us expansion is the plan, but any new acquisitions must be a good fit. "Our parent company, Mabanafit Limited, wants to create a comprehensive network across the UK which offers drivers consistently good quality services and facilities. We are currently in the process of acquiring a fifth truckstop which is exciting, hopefully this will be announced in the coming months.

"While we'd love to buy land and build a new truckstop from scratch, to date acquiring existing truckstops has been the best way to grow; either way we are open to any opportunities to expand our facilities."

"When we first acquire a site we usually do an initial rebrand to let customers know that we have taken over, then work to align other things such as the core menus, while allowing each location to retain a level of individuality through the specials it offers. We always keep on the existing staff and bring them into the fold."

He continues: "Buying a truckstop is not simply a case of putting a new logo on uniforms and signs, it's about improving them, making them better for customers in all aspects – facilities, quality and value," says Alisdair.

"We look at the facilities we are acquiring and decide where and how they need updating or if the layout needs improving. We want to invest in improving our sites as much as possible; for example we have resurfaced Junction 29 and will soon be upgrading the showers and toilets at Swindon. Other small improvements include installing new barista style coffee machines at all our sites to provide customers with freshly ground Lavazza coffee. We also invest in ongoing training for staff, such as recent courses in mental health awareness and wellbeing."

Alisdair likes to listen to drivers; "We did a survey and found that drivers rate security above all else, so we are in the process of upgrading our CCTV systems and are working to achieve Park Mark Freight across all our sites. Avon Lodge has an



automatic gate which provides a secure compound, we also now have overnight manned security at Ulceby, Swindon and Junction 29, so drivers can get a good night's sleep knowing they are safe.

"Security is by far the biggest issue, but we are also working to improve our facilities and our menus, which we constantly review to ensure we deliver both quality and value. With increased costs of labour, energy, food products and other items, keeping price increases to a minimum is a challenge, but we are doing all we can to manage operational costs while continuing to provide good quality meals and service."

Alisdair has always worked in hospitality. He was at Everyman Cinemas when approached for the role of operations manager at Onroute and was attracted by the challenge and opportunity it presented. He says: "I started at Everyman as a venue manager and ended up working across 36 sites throughout the UK. I managed staff training, introduced systems to improve business efficiencies and oversaw maintenance and compliance - all skills I can use at Onroute. I also learned how a successful hospitality brand operates which will be key to growing our network in the UK."

He says he's excited for the future of Onroute Truckstops. "We have a strong foundation to build on and great people to work with. We have ambitious plans to grow and there will be plenty of opportunities for staff to progress. Top of my to-do list is to achieve consistency across our sites which having started out as independent, family-run businesses are all quite different. At Everyman, each cinema is also very different, but you always know you're in one of their venues. This is down to brand consistency and it's what I want to achieve at Onroute."

He hasn't lost sight of what the role of a truckstop is: "We're here to serve the drivers, be a 'home away from home' for them. They don't necessarily care where they buy fuel, but they do care about clean, well-maintained facilities, great service and good food. They need to know they can expect the same Onroute welcome and quality of service whichever of our sites they visit."



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