

The M Collective

Publication: The Caterer

Date: 9th July 2025

Country: UK

Wildhive Callow Hall

THE CATERER

‘We build hotel bedrooms within the wild’: Wildhive embraces the great outdoors



A hotel that doesn't feel like one is the goal for Wildhive group's co-founder Ed Burrows, the Catey-winning hotelier who is about to embark on his next outdoor adventure

“There's a few things we do at Wildhive Callow Hall that make it such a special place to visit,” says Ed Burrows, co-founder of the small hotel group. The Victorian gothic manor house in Derbyshire, on the edge of the Peak District, is the first property he bought with his business partner, Charles Randall, and which they reopened in 2021 after a four-year refurbishment.

The hotel offers 28 rooms, but not in the traditional sense. There's 15 in the 'main house', (which Burrows doesn't like to refer to as a hotel), two treehouses and 11 'hives' dotted around in the ancient woodland that makes up part of the 35-acre estate.

Burrows isn't the only person who thinks the hotel is a special place to visit, after it won the **Hotel of the Year – Independent** category at the 2025 Cateys, gaining recognition for the fact it has made Ashbourne a destination for visitors. Burrows puts the hotel's popularity down to several factors, the first being the team's ability to please guests, which is "what any guest coming to a hotel wants to experience, in an unobtrusive, unforced way. It's the first thing I look for when I'm hiring."

The second element is the "experiential accommodation... we build hotel bedrooms within the wild," he says. "It's not glamping, it's not camping – it's a bedroom suite in the woodlands." The two-bedroom treehouses sleep five and offer a proper kitchen, a sitting room and outside space and the 11 one-bedroom hives have outside decking – both are raised up in the canopy. The idea is to attract multigenerational families: older people are likely stay in the main house, while younger people prefer the treehouses.





The third is the food. “We pride ourselves on our local and British dishes,” Burrows says. The hotel’s Garden Room restaurant has 80 covers (with a 25-seat private dining room and a 30-cover wild dining space outside) and sits within a huge glass extension on the side of the building. Some of its producers are exclusive to Wildhive Callow Hall, including the meat for the burgers, which come from a nearby beef herd, and the dark golden butter, which is churned just four miles away.

“I tell the team to treat everyone as if they’re a friend of a friend – not too friendly or chummy, but respectful”

“We try to buy as much of our food locally or from nearby in the UK, such as our seafood, which comes from Northumberland. Our food bill is probably around £350,000-£400,000 annually and about £200,000 of that is local,” he adds.

The final key element for Burrows is “the subtleties in the decor. I like to ‘de-hotelify’ a hotel,” he says. “We don’t have customers, we have guests. I tell the team to treat everyone as if they’re a friend of a friend – not too friendly or chummy, but respectful”.

In contrast to many hotels, there aren't signs for the loos or any saying 'keep out, staff only'. "There's no sign for the loo in people's homes," he reasons. Instead, guests are shown the way to the toilets and the room numbers are very small and just above the keyhole, all contributing to the home-like feel. "I want an environment people can aspire to have in their own house," he says. "If they say, 'I love that wallpaper, what is it?' I don't want things that aren't out of people's reach."

Tourist hotspot

When it comes to staff, around 90% of the team live locally, some as near as a 10-minute drive, while others are a little further out but still in the county, meaning most of the £1.8m wage bill benefits the local community.

"We were forecast to increase the indirect spend in the area by £1.5m a year," explains Burrows, which he says has been exceeded. Guests shop in local areas such as Ashbourne, and Burrows says he's been "stopped in the streets there and thanked for putting my faith in the area. Since we opened, more really cool restaurants and cafés started to open up again."





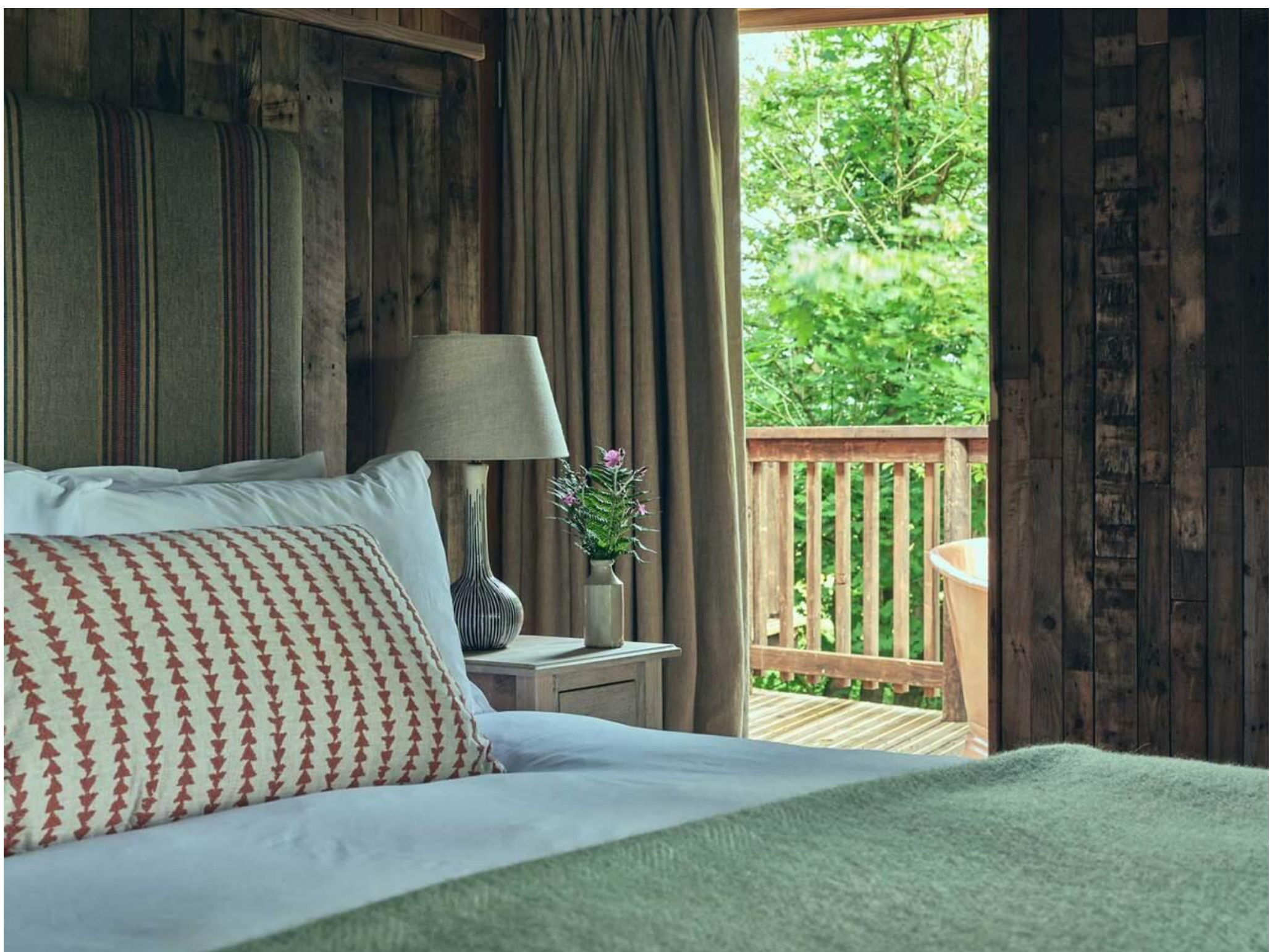
He's always conscious of the business's purse strings – “making a profit is running a tight ship” – so attention is paid to the small things, such as cutting down on waste. Although he says that it's easier making bottom line profit, rather than putting prices up, that became unavoidable this year after the government's increase to employer National Insurance Contributions, which he estimated will cost the hotel about £100,000 more, as well as the minimum wage rise.

Another, and likely more unexpected reaction following the increased minimum wage is how it's edged hourly rates far closer towards those on salaries. With minimum wage (for over-21s) at £12.21, working a 40-hour contract equates to earning £25,396.80. This then closes the gap between others, even managers, who might be earning £30,000. The founders have since had to “look at people's remuneration and have increased our wage bill to ensure everyone is paid accordingly”.

His business partner, Randall, comes from a financial background, balancing Burrows' operator and hotelier background. "We wrestle on some things, between what I want for the guests and what he wants for the figures", he says, but ultimately, it's down to the two of them. "He makes sure the figures are looked after, and I make sure the guests are getting the experience."

When it comes to occupancy, Burrows says it's around 75%: "During the summer we're about 94% and we are growing in the shoulder months too". Room rates start at £170 for a standard double (room only) in the house, £300 for the one-bed hives and £650 a night for the two-bed treehouses. "We always wanted to set up a brand that wasn't elitist," he says.

Although he thinks everyone has noticed a cooling off in the market, people are also increasingly booking more last-minute breaks, with time left for more summer bookings before thinking about price drops. To try and draw more people in during the quieter months, Burrows says the hotel is investing £250,000 into the wellness offering. The Coach House already offers treatments and classes such as yoga, sound baths and barre fusion, but there are plans to add facilities such as a herbal steam room. It's this sort of relaxation away from daily life that Burrows believes means there's always going to be a place for hotels: "People will always need to switch off and recharge – we provide that environment".





Facing the future

The background of constantly increasing costs will hit hotels in their investment budget, Burrows thinks, such as during the pandemic when many used their savings to get them through. “I’m a big supporter of minimum wage and people being paid well, but we need a bit of a let up,” he says, suggesting this could be in VAT or in other areas: “If you lose the hotel, it’s not only people’s jobs, it’s everything else in the area,” he warns.

He believes that as a small boutique hotel they should be able to get through it, but he also imagines that many others who have been in the industry a long time will be fed up with the ever-increasing fine line of profits and call it a day.

More positively, at the end of last year, **Burrows and Randall acquired Georgian manor hotel Eshott Hall** in Northumberland (“Northumberland is magical”), running it as it is until a full refurbishment planned for November before reopening in summer 2026 as a Wildhive hotel. Burrows is very excited about it and, of course, it will have the same wild accommodation element.

Burrows clearly has optimism about the industry picking up, and hospitality is evidently in his blood: “We’re always looking for new places,” he says. “We want to have five or six and we’d like that in the next 10 years”.