

Amex serving up Moore quality

There's more to a football club than 90 minutes of action. Mike Ward unearths the individuals who have one thing in common... a love of the Albion



Flat beer. Cold coffee. Greasy chips. Meat pies with a notable absence of meat. Oh, and not forgetting those grey, anaemic burgers reheated from days ago, topped with a flabby slab of day-glo plastic.

If you're a fan of any of this traditional football-ground fare, I'm afraid I have some really bad news for you: you won't be getting any of it at the Amex.

Sorry, not a scrap. Elliott Moore (pictured right), the new stadium's catering chief, will see to that.

The company Elliott works for, contract caterers Azure, recently signed a five-year deal to supply all the food and beverages within the stadium complex.

And they're insisting Albion fans deserve the best.

"Food and drink is all part of the experience of going to a football match," says Elliott, "and with the Amex it's going to be very different from what fans have been used to at a lot of other stadiums.

"The Amex is going to be state of the art. The catering will reflect that. We want to raise people's expectations."

And these new standards, he stresses, will be introduced right across the board. "I believe very much that someone who's bought a public ticket should get no less of an

experience from their food and drink than somebody in the directors' lounge.

"The service and the quality of food they receive should be no less just because they're buying a pie.

"Those in hospitality are obviously very important but the other 80 percent or so, the fans coming through the turnstile and buying a pint of beer or a hotdog, they're my biggest market."

So what exactly can supporters expect, come August?

"Well, the pies, for example, will have a 75 percent meat content. Traditionally you're probably looking at 30 to 40 percent maximum.

"The hotdogs will use real sausages, sourced from Sussex, in proper buns with onions.

"The cheeseburgers will have real slices of cheddar. And all the bread

will be fresh on the day, delivered from the local bakery."

Sounds marvellous. But won't the prices reflect this?

"We're very sensitive to the cost issue," Elliott stresses. "So we'll make it affordable. I want people to arrive at the stadium early and stay behind after the game, so we'll be in line with most clubs in terms of our pricing."

Elliott is bringing a wealth of experience to his new role, having previously worked at Highbury, the Emirates, Wembley and the O2.

"The O2 taught me a lot about thinking outside the box," he reflects. "I was working for an American-run company and they're the masters of delivering fast food of a high quality.

"I spent some time in the States at the big stadiums, watching and learning from their operations, so I've been able to bring that with me.

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"It's not just the quality of the food that needs to be top-end but the customer service as well.

"There'd be no point in me employing a chef who's trained at the Dorchester [as is the case for the 1901 Club] if the waiting staff weren't up to standard."

But again, Elliott is keen to stress it's not just about the hospitality lounges. "All our fast-food outlets will have a qualified chef in each kiosk to deliver the food," he tells me. "Most stadiums use people with no catering background."

Azure will also be selling and marketing the stadium on a seven-day-a-week basis, making facilities available for a range of functions. Which means, yes, we'll soon be

witnessing our very first Amex wedding.

"We can even do evening weddings on match days," Elliott adds. "Because of the way the stadium's set out and the facilities available, we can turn it around very quickly. We're licensing the premises so we can arrange the whole wedding-day package."

No doubt about it, then: Elliott Moore will be a key figure in the new stadium's commercial success.

But don't go imagining this is some faceless corporate outsider. A born-and-bred Brightonian, Elliott has actually been supporting the Albion since his dad first took him to the Goldstone at the age of four.

"I can't remember much about my first match," he admits, "except that it

was a cup game and I was freezing cold. And my dad spent about 20 minutes trying to explain to me why there was penalty shoot-out."

So I take it he doesn't remember his first Goldstone burger?

"I don't think I ever ate when I went to the Goldstone," he says. "But I do remember Gillingham's burgers. They were really ropey..."

Elliott later trained at City College, before embarking on the career path that would indeed take him to the O2 and some of the country's best stadiums. But do they pale into insignificance compared to his new role at the Amex Stadium?

"Absolutely," he declares without hesitation. "I'm at the best of the lot now!"