

My name is _____ and I have been a licensee for _____ years. I own _____ freehold pubs in _____ plus a _____. I have never leased a pub or been involved with a pub company or pub-owning brewery.

Over the years I have seen the industry change a vast amount, resulting in trade today being at its lowest in over a decade. The economic climate for pubs is extremely challenging, and I say this being completely free to choose my products and where I buy them from, and answerable to no one but my bank and HMRC.

For the past year I have been involved in the Licensees Supporting Licensees (LSL) group and _____

It is through the members of this group I have been informed of the enormous wrongdoings of the pubcos. Previous to my involvement in LSL I, like a many people with no experience of ever owning a lease, felt that 'you signed the lease, you live with the consequences'. Through listening to the stories, and seeing the evidence of the members of LSL, I can fully understand how lessees are not only duped into thinking they are doing the right thing by taking on these leases, but are then very unfairly treated by their 'pubco partners'.

Daily we have members who are facing no other option but to leave their pubs, often after years of hard work and investment, the lucky ones with nothing to show for it, the unlucky ones in thousands of pounds worth of debt and in many cases bankrupt.

I hear stories of rent reviews that don't happen, or the ones that do ending in increases despite trade decreasing. Or of bullying BDM's with no empathy, no understanding of the situation and no desire to help the licensee. Or of arbitrary fines from readings from a flow monitoring system that isn't recognised by Weights & Measures. Or of grievance procedures that are delayed time and again by emails going missing, BDMs changing, a multitude of excuses. Or of lost custom because of high prices and lack of choice. Or of not being able to fix a leaking roof, repair a broken toilet or to redecorate the bar through lack of funds. But what affects me most is the result of this behaviour by the pubcos - stories of despair, of licensees who have given up because they are too confused, too intimidated, too stressed, too exhausted and with no money left to fight on anymore. It's simply not right that this is happening, in this country, in 2013.

I as have stated, I am a freeholder, I have nothing to gain from supporting pubco reform and the MRO option, perhaps I may even lose something, but it is time that tied lessees were given the ability to earn a living, to invest in their pubs and for the pub industry to thrive again. It is a simple case of knowing what is right and what is wrong.

It is obvious that the large pubcos have treated self regulation with disdain. I have heard the argument - once from Norwich MP Chloe Smith - that it needs to be given time, but all that has done has closed more pubs and left more licensees with no job, no home and no money. A statutory code for pubcos with over 500 premises is essential, as is a voluntary code that is strictly adhered to for those brewers with less.

I believe strongly that a tied licensee should be no worse off than a free of tie one, and for this to happen licensees must be offered the life line of MRO, with the option of staying tied but with a Guest Beer Option. This ensures that the licensee has a choice, that they are given the ability to run

their pubs how they see fit, choosing products to suit their venue and customer and at a price that allows them to make a living. It is a choice that will not only benefit the licensee, but customers and small brewers too.

I sincerely hope, for the sake of tied licensees and our pub industry as a whole, that I am not the only one that knows right from wrong.