

From:
Sent: 03 May 2013 15:57
To: Pubs Consultation Responses
Subject: Personal submission

432.

Please note that this submission is made in my personal capacity as a pub goer and consumer; in particular as a consumer of traditional real ales. In my work life I am an experience addictions professional and have worked with people with alcohol and other drug problems for over 30 years. I am actively involved as a volunteer at national level in alcohol education and research charities and have managed community alcohol treatment services in paid roles,

I have long been concerned about the demise of local pubs as venues for communities to gather and to drink in moderation. Traditionally, well run pubs have been venues where people have literally learned appropriate drinking behaviour. Bad conduct is managed, ameliorated and subject to informal peer sanctions and the benefits of convivial alcohol consumption are maximised.

For this to hold true licence holders should be part of the community with a business model that encourages longevity and building a genuine stake in the business and the area. Pubco conduct, milking excessive profits, restricting consumer choice through cartel-like (or indeed actual cartel) behaviour has militated against this for decades. As a consequence a higher proportion of pubs are managed by short term appointments. The companies routinely set unreasonable targets for sales – making it hard for people running local pubs to make a reasonable living – or even retain their position.

The consequences of this short termism include:

- Increasing the cost of on-sales – thus widening the differential between on-sales and off-sales – reducing viability of local;
- Increasing churn in staff – especially managers resulting in venues that are less identifiable with a management culture ethos and style – the character of an establishment. The whole culture of the pubco organisations – attempting to build pub brands as opposed to developing appropriate community orientated establishments – has resulted in the increasing turnover of staff and the lack of connection, thus loyalty and mutually beneficial relationships – with the communities they ought to be seeking to serve.

Pubcos misunderstand the basic nature of their business. They just trundle on regardless as if alcohol were any old commodity to be knocked out at maximal price points to deliver shareholder dividends. In fact, pubs are community resources and well run, they deliver long term relationships and mutually beneficial loyalties and income develops over the longer term.

To address these essentially simple problems the Government should undertake the following actions:

- Implement all 12 of the recommendations made in NICE Public Health report 24 which addresses everything from licensing and minimum alcohol unit pricing to training and responsibility and health and social care professionals – a properly developed integrated policy response;
- All my experience in the alcohol field and as a consumer have convinced me that self-regulation in this industry absolutely does not work – either to the benefit of the health of the country; for consumers; for staff working in the industry or for communities in which pubs are based. alcohol is the most prevalent addictive drug in our society; it should be properly regulated and controlled. Venues for consuming alcohol should similarly be regulated to ensure that the purveyors of this controlled substance work in the best interests of communities and wider society and not against them. there are still major profits to be made in well run pubs as well as rewarding employment

opportunities that benefit local people.

- Introduce a statutory Code of Practice for the operation of Pubcos – which should apply to all but the smallest companies (i.e. any pubco with more than 5 premises)
- Fair market rents should be a statutory requirement.
- Consumers should have the right to a choice of products and the current operation of the tie militates against this. As a long standing member of the Campaign for Real Ale my belief is that the vibrant and diverse beer producing industry in this country confers great benefit to society.
- This industry cannot be trusted to self-regulate: an independent ombudsman – or their equivalent – should be appointed to ensure observance and compliance of the new regulations.

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