

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...A REGIONAL PROPERTY MANAGER



by Fiona Dickie, Pubs Code Adjudicator

As part of the PCA's efforts to ensure we are connected to both pub owning companies and their tied tenants, I recently spent a day in trade visiting four sites with Star Pubs' Regional Property Manager Amy Hulme in Manchester City Centre.

Visits such as these are invaluable in enabling me to get a handle on what is happening on the ground in the trade, and how the tied relationship is working.

The publicans involved on the day weren't aware that the visits would involve me in my capacity as Pubs Code Adjudicator, we wanted to ensure that the visits were as they would be on any normal day of business.

The first pub we visited was the Salisbury situated on Wakefield St close to the Opera House and Oxford Road Station. The publican, Matt has been involved with the site for many years and had previously run another pub with a different pub company.

Matt is keen to position the pub as a Manchester Institution and over the years he has worked hard to modify and update the pub's offer, for example a few years ago they started doing pizzas as a food offering and they haven't looked back since.

The Salisbury is designed to be appealing to a broad range of consumers, from shoppers to day trippers, office workers and gig goers alike.

In the time we had with Matt, Amy was able to have a wide-ranging discussion about the pub covering aspects from complex roofing repairs to other repair guidance. I was able to gain valuable insights into the nature of Matt's agreement with Star, which involved quite substantial repairing responsibilities on his part.

I was pleased to see that by agreement the balance of costs and responsibilities for a challenging historic maintenance problem seemed to have been fairly and pragmatically shared between the publican and the pub company.

I had a good discussion with Matt regarding his knowledge and awareness of the Code. We discussed the possibility of the Market Rent Only (MRO) option, the provision of information relating to the Code and the nature of negotiations between publican and pub company, all of which seemed balanced and well thought through on both sides.

Visits of this nature give me a worthwhile opportunity to witness first-hand the sorts of issues that are important to both parties, including regarding advice and guidance given regarding issues with trees on a neighbouring National Rail site.



Fiona and Amy with Mark Wrigley Atlas Bar Publican

It was good to have a frank discussion with Mark on the nature of the relationship with Star, which he said had improved significantly but was not without its challenges. Fundamentally the relationship he described was positive, but with some occasional disagreements as can be the case. Mark was clear though that from a regulatory perspective Star were even handed and always contactable.

The third pub on our tour was an Irish pub, O'Shea's on Princess Street, run jointly by publicans Dom and Paul. It's an award-winning pub with a great food offer and Guinness that they claim is some of the best you'll find outside Ireland.

Since a refurb a few years ago the pub has been running hugely successfully. I had an interesting discussion with the publicans about the MRO right. They had considered asking for a MRO offer but decided against it, having seen no reason to take it up in the current circumstances. I was also pleased that Dom had also received, and reviewed, all the necessary information regarding the Code and the Adjudicator.



Fiona Dickie -Pubs Code Adjudicator and Matt Muzynski- Salisbury Publican

The second site we visited was the Atlas Bar in the Deansgate area. The Publican Mark prides himself on a high-quality offer of not just beer but spirits too, and they have a great beer garden to boot.



Fiona with Dominic Winters the Publican of the O'Shea's Bar.

The final stop for us was Churchills – which has been renamed The Church on Chorlton Street, taken over recently by publicans John and Antonio. They've extensively refurbished the pub which they took on just before Covid hit.

The pub had suffered in the past from a poor reputation, but John and Antonio were keen to return it to former glories, which they've done. The business has totally turned around since they took over. That said, frustratingly the publicans weren't available on the day, that can be the nature of such "surprise" visits.

Although there were some issues that Star was keen to explore with the publicans, sometimes it is impossible to make timings work for all parties concerned.

It was really positive to gain another genuine insight into the roles and relationships involved on the ground in the partnership between publicans and pub companies. I am grateful to Star Pubs and the businesses involved for making these insights a possibility.

I feel it is an important part of my role to witness first hand the nature of these relationships and negotiations, to fully understand the tensions and pressure points, but also the positive elements too. I look forward to more of these visits in future.

To find out more about the Pubs Code go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/pubs-code-adjudicator>