



Edited by Gemma McKenna  
 gemma.mckenna@william-reed.co.uk

# Punch: 'beware of ratings rogues'

Gemma McKenna  
 gemma.mckenna@william-reed.co.uk

Punch has warned licensees to be wary of rogue traders who guarantee large reductions in rateable values and offer to carry out business rates appeals.

The warning comes as a record number of licensees face huge rates increases from April. Jerry Schurder head of rating at property consultancy Gerald Eve told the *Morning Advertiser* in November that the average rateable value increase across pubs in England and Wales would be 27.6%, and 3,900 would see their assessments more than double.

Punch's group property and development director

Neil Griffiths said: "We are aware of incidents where licensees have been charged excessive fees of £500 to £700 for these rogue services."

"These firms tend to be cold callers with a hard sales technique who require the signature of a binding contract and payment up front. The small print in these contracts then ties licensees for all future revaluations with associated cost implications and in some cases, rent reviews as well."

"A number of licensees

**27.6%**  
 predicted increase in average rateable value

have been pursued aggressively through the courts for payment by these firms."

Punch lessees are already offered help from qualified rating surveyors, who review and lodge an appeal on their behalf where appropriate. Most other tenanted pubs offer a similar service.

Last week Carlsberg boss Isaac Sheps said more than 200 of its customers were pursuing rates appeals through the *We Deliver More* website. The site offers advice on business rates, how to save on utility bills and improve staff training.

■ Have you been approached by a firm offering to help cut your business rate bill? Contact gemma.mckenna@william-reed.co.uk.



Mothers Huff Cap Inn: sold for an undisclosed sum

## Urban takes total to 14

Urban & Country Leisure (UCL) has taken on a new site, bringing its estate to 14 pubs.

The managed multiple operator plans to invest £850,000 in refurbishing the Mother Huff Cap Inn near Alcester in Warwickshire.

Christie+Co sold the former Punch freehold to a private investor for an undisclosed sum, though offers in the region of £300,000 were sought. The new owner then granted a lease to UCL.

Located in Great Alne village, the Mother Huff Cap, which dates back to the 18th century, incorporates a main bar, a snug bar, a games room, a function room, and three-bedroom owner's accommodation.

The business, which takes its name from the days when most pubs brewed their own beer – Huff Cap being a 16th-century term for a strong ale

which would "huff one's cap" or make the head swell – also benefits from a 50-space car park and a beer garden.

UCL will start work on the refurbishment in February and rename the pub the Greedy Pig.

The firm is headed up by Ross Sanders, who started his career working behind the bar at a Paul Salisbury pub before joining Luminar opening Chicago Rock Cafes.

In November, UCL opened three new sites: the Greedy Goose in Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, the Coach & Horses in Beedon, Berkshire and the Old Volunteer at Caythorpe, near Nottingham.

The company recently secured £10m funding from three private investors including Bridgehouse Capital. It also announced plans to more than double in size, adding 15 pubs in two years.

## Essex community aims to buy its local

A community co-operative in north Essex is hoping to raise more than £425,000 to buy the Plough Inn at Radwinter.

The group has founded the Radwinter Pub Company to organise the deal.

Dixie Walker, founding member, said the group was

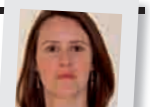
"getting close to a position where we could purchase the pub". The pub, privately owned by a local couple, has been closed since August.

In the meantime, the group has set up "Plough 2" in the village hall, as a licensed venue one Sunday

afternoon a month. It offers locals a chance to catch up, along with drinks, food and pub games.

"The idea is to provide the facility we are missing, and to get people together. In a village such as ours the pub is very much the hub."

## The agent Lucie Tagg, sales manager, Redwoods Dowling Kerr



“  
**All buyers are in the market for what they feel is a 'good deal' or a bargain**

A critical mistake that most pub owners make when selling their business is to make their business look "too" attractive. A question you may be asking yourself now is – how can I make my business look "too" attractive to a buyer?

Buying a business is not dissimilar to buying a house. For example, the buyer may have different taste and feel they need to decorate the house to make their mark before moving in. This is no different for a business!

All buyers are in the

market for what they feel is a "good deal" or a "bargain". This does not mean you have to sell yourself short when selling your pub – it simply means that you need to present your business strategically and add value for your buyer so they believe that they are getting the best deal.

Many sellers feel they need to exhaust all avenues before marketing their business, but this is not the case. A good broker will be able to identify value drivers that exist within your pub

and highlight the value of these to any interested buyers. This could be as simple as serving food to benefit from an additional income, or as complex as a change of direction in your marketing and/or theme of your pub. The key is to not make these changes, but highlight the value of these if a new licensee were to take your place.

This is far less stressful for you as an owner and will create an opportunity that cannot be missed for the buyer. Every buyer feels that

they can add more to the business than you have, so why not let them and still benefit from this financially.

By choosing a good broker to work with you, together you can highlight the benefit of these value drivers to potential purchasers and/or their lenders. This will result in a much higher price being paid for your pub, an immediate sale as opposed to one delayed by the value-adding plans and without the hard work of actioning these plans yourself.