

## Statement to Licensing Sub-Committee – Gambling License, 39 Church Road, Ashford

Good morning Councillors. My name is Nik Urquhart. I live directly opposite 39 Church Road and I am speaking both as a resident and on behalf of the Ashford Residents Association.

I recognise that under section 153 the Committee aims to permit gambling where it is reasonably consistent with the licensing objectives, the Commission's Codes and Guidance, and your Statement of Principles. Today is about whether this specific location and this specific risk profile can be made reasonably consistent with those objectives.

Your own Statement of Gambling Policy is clear that location matters. Section 2.3 flags proximity to schools and vulnerable adult centres, and areas with high concentrations of children, as potential causes for concern and expects applicants to show how those risks are overcome through a robust local risk assessment that engages with Spelthorne's Local Area Profile.

Section 2.11 lists concrete measures the authority expects for Adult Gaming Centres including staffing, supervision, CCTV, opening hours and safeguarding protocols.

This site sits on Ashford High Street with regular child and youth footfall. **Clarendon Primary School** is roughly **340 yards** away on Knapp Road, **St Michael Catholic Primary School & Nursery** is about **600 yards** on Feltham Hill Road, and **Thomas Knyvett College** is around **½ mile** on Stanwell Road. Church Road is also served by regular buses - including **117,216** and 290, bringing pupils past the frontage throughout the day. This is exactly the kind of sensitive setting your policy expects operators to address in their risk assessments.

Ashford also records persistent anti-social behaviour. Police data for the Ashford area shows anti-social behaviour as one of the most reported categories in recent months, which increases the risk of loitering and disorder around a late-opening venue that handles cash and machines. The applicant's risk assessment should have reflected that local reality and not treated Ashford as if it were a typical large town centre. We don't have the kind of late-night economy or heavy security presence that bigger towns do.

The Gambling Commission's Guidance is clear: the "aim to permit" is not absolute. Licensing authorities are entitled to refuse where risks cannot be mitigated, particularly where risk assessments fail to engage with the *local* picture. The National Guidance also stresses the importance of robust, site-specific risk assessments that genuinely respond to your policy and local area profile, not boilerplate documents copied from elsewhere.

There is a recent and very relevant court decision. In February 2025 the Sheffield Magistrates Court dismissed an appeal against refusal of an AGC on a prominent city centre street. The District Judge accepted that conditions cannot control harms that occur beyond the doorway and that councils are entitled to assess invisible harms and unidentified vulnerabilities in a particular locality. The court also criticised risk assessments that treated one city like any other

rather than engaging with the actual local profile. That decision confirms that refusal is open to you where the risks in this locality cannot be adequately mitigated.

That same principle of local accountability is also reflected in wider national evidence about how the gambling industry is operating in practice.

Recent national investigations have shown serious failures within the Adult Gaming Centre sector in meeting this objective. A BBC *File on 4* investigation broadcast on 17 June 2025 revealed that only one of fourteen AGCs visited successfully prevented a self-excluded gambler from accessing slot machines. The Gambling Commission described those findings as “very concerning” and has since opened a formal inquiry.

If such breaches occur across larger and better-resourced towns, there can be no confidence that a small AGC in Ashford would uphold the standards of fairness and openness required by the Gambling Act.

Residents are not against responsible businesses, but fairness and openness must mean more than promises on paper. Until the Gambling Commission itself can guarantee that national protections actually work, it would be unsafe to introduce a new AGC into a community like ours.

Finally, while you must decide this case under the current Gambling Act, it is telling that government policy is now shifting. The recently announced *Pride in Place* programme will give councils stronger powers to refuse new betting shops and other unwanted uses. National policy is moving toward giving communities like Ashford greater control, exactly in line with what residents are asking you to do today.

The local facts, national policy direction, and real-world evidence all point in one direction, that approving an AGC in this location would carry unmanageable risks.

Bringing this together: this location has regular youth footfall, schools in close proximity, and a record of anti-social behaviour. In that context, no set of conditions can realistically mitigate the off-premises risks to children and vulnerable persons, or the risk of disorder on the High Street.

On behalf of Ashford residents, I respectfully ask you to refuse this license as not reasonably consistent with the licensing objectives in this locality, when read alongside your Statement of Principles and the Gambling Commission’s Guidance.

If, however, the Committee is minded to grant, we would ask you to adopt tightly drawn conditions to reduce risk, including restricted opening hours, minimum staffing, SIA supervision, and strict safeguarding protocols, which I have submitted in writing.

Thank you.

## **Evidence Pack – Golden Slots, 39 Church Road, Ashford**

Prepared by: Nik Urquhart, Ashford Residents Association

Submission deadline: 30 September 2025 (12:00 Noon)

This evidence pack has been compiled by Nik Urquhart, speaking on behalf of the Ashford Residents Association and local residents who submitted valid representations. It provides supporting material relevant to the three licensing objectives under the Gambling Act 2005 and demonstrates why the proposed Adult Gaming Centre at 39 Church Road cannot be considered reasonably consistent with those objectives.

### **Sheffield AGC Refusal Case (February 2025)**

In February 2025, Sheffield Magistrates' Court dismissed an appeal against the refusal of a premises licence for an Adult Gaming Centre in the city centre. The District Judge confirmed that licensing authorities are entitled to refuse applications where risks to the licensing objectives cannot be effectively managed, even if conditions are proposed.

Key findings:

1. Invisible harms and unidentified vulnerabilities – Licensing authorities may consider the impact on vulnerable people who may not be visible or identifiable.
2. Locality-specific risks – Risk assessments must engage with the particular local area, not just generic factors.
3. Limits of conditions – Conditions cannot mitigate all risks, especially those occurring outside the premises such as loitering, antisocial behaviour, or exposure of children and vulnerable people.

This case demonstrates that refusal is a lawful and proportionate option where an AGC would undermine the licensing objectives due to its location and context, even if conditions are offered.

Reference Links:

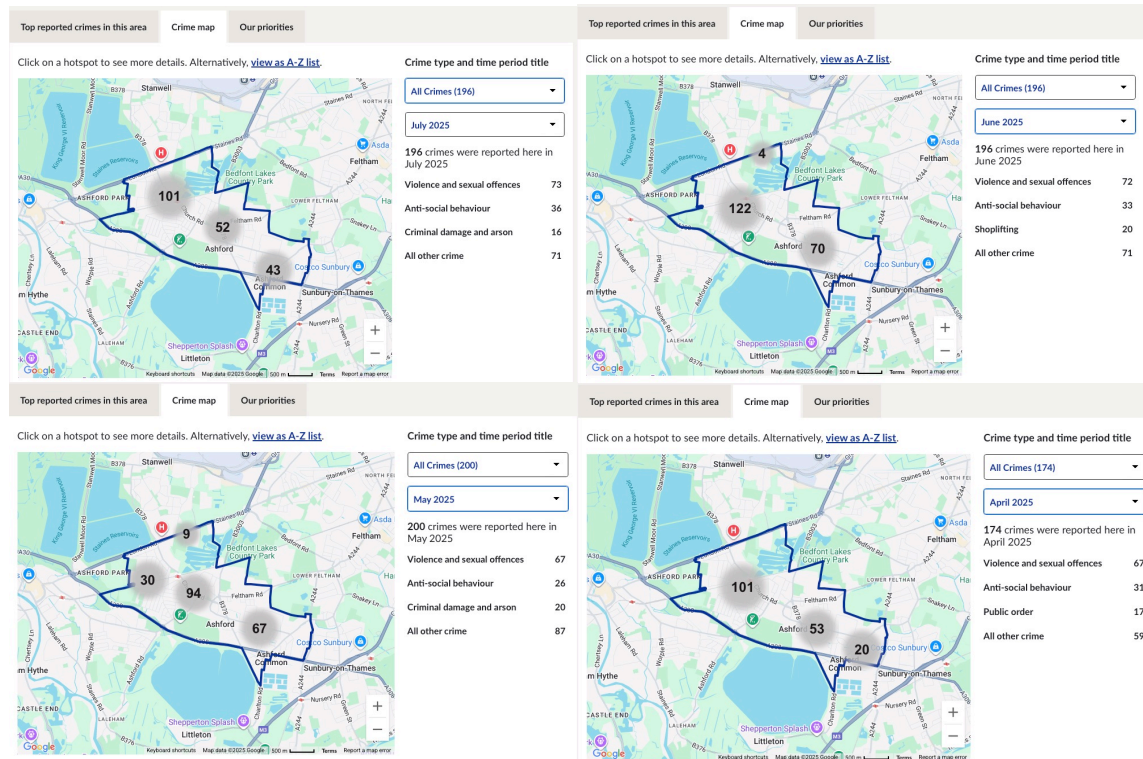
<https://www.ftbchambers.co.uk/news/news-view/licensing-appeal-for-adult-gaming-centre-dismissed>

<https://instituteoflicensing.org/network-news/local-authority-perspective-on-sheffield-aim-to-permit-case/>

[https://www.ftbchambers.co.uk/images/uploads/documents/Royal\\_Amusements v SC C - Judgement %28Final%29 - 24.02.25.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.ftbchambers.co.uk/images/uploads/documents/Royal_Amusements_v_SC_C_-_Judgement_%28Final%29_-_24.02.25.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

### Surrey Police Crime Heat Map for Ashford (April–July 2025):

<https://www.surrey.police.uk/area/your-area/surrey/spelthorne/ashford/about-us/crime-map>



**BBC File on 4 investigation (17 June 2025)**

A BBC File on 4 investigation broadcast on 17 June 2025 revealed that only one of fourteen Adult Gaming Centres tested successfully prevented a self-excluded problem gambler from accessing slot machines. The Gambling Commission described these findings as 'very concerning' and has since opened a formal inquiry.

The programme exposed widespread failures in enforcing self-exclusion schemes that are supposed to protect vulnerable customers. It demonstrates that the AGC sector is currently failing to ensure gambling is conducted fairly and openly, and that existing safeguards are not reliably enforced in practice.

This evidence directly relates to the third licensing objective: Ensuring gambling is conducted in a fair and open way. If large, established operators are unable to comply consistently with these standards, there is little confidence that a small, late-opening venue in Ashford could do so safely or effectively.

Reference:

BBC Radio 4, File on 4: 'The Cost of the Spin – Gambling and Self-Exclusion Failures', broadcast 17 June 2025.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002dmmn>

Quote from the BBC summary:

“Only one of 14 Gaming Centres refused entry to a self-excluded gambler – others allowed him to play despite national bans.”

### **Other Reference Links:**

Gambling Commission – Guidance to licensing authorities

<https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-to-licensing-authorities/part-1-statutory-aim-to-permit-gambling>

<https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-to-licensing-authorities/part-5-licensing-objectives>

SBC Statement of Gambling Policy 2025-2028

[https://www.spelthorne.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-09/Statement\\_of\\_Gambling\\_Policy\\_2025-2028%20for%20website-v2%20.pdf](https://www.spelthorne.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-09/Statement_of_Gambling_Policy_2025-2028%20for%20website-v2%20.pdf)

## **Conditions List (Fallback if Granting)**

1. Hours limited: 09.00–22.00 daily.
2. Minimum 2 staff on duty at all times, incl. named manager.
3. SIA-licensed door supervisor from 18.00–close on Fri/Sat & bank holiday eves.
4. Full digital CCTV coverage, 31-day retention, entrance + machines covered.
5. No external ATM; no signage encouraging cash withdrawal.
6. Windows to remain obscured; no child-appeal advertising visible from street.
7. Challenge 25 age verification + refusals log.
8. No entry under 18; no entry if accompanied by under-18s.
9. Membership of Shopwatch/Betwatch & active radio use.
10. Incident/welfare log (refusals, exclusions, police contacts) → reviewed weekly, available to Licensing/Police.
11. Written safeguarding protocol: staff trained in brief intervention, clear referral routes to National Gambling Helpline.