

Objection to Application for Adult Gaming Centre (AGC), Ashford
(39 Church Road, Ashford, Surrey TW15 2QF)

Objection submitted by Surrey County Council Public Health
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1. Rationale

Gambling Act (2005) Objective: *Protecting children and other vulnerable people from being harmed or exploited by gambling.*

2. Spelthorne has a higher-than-average proportion of residents experiencing Gambling Harm

Spelthorne has a higher proportion of people scoring one or more on the Problem Gambling Severity Index 14.4%) compared to GB as a whole (13.4%). [GambleAware].

The estimated annual fiscal cost associated with “problem gambling” in Spelthorne in 2023 was more than £1.4m across services for health, welfare, and crime (National Institute of Economic & Social Research).

3. Electronic gaming machines are associated with gambling harm

Electronic gaming machines (EGMs), including slot machines as are intended for use in the proposed AGC, are most frequently associated with **harmful gambling**, contributing to severe health impacts. Their usage has been found to be the biggest predictor of someone going on to experience future gambling harms. Bournemouth University Group 2025 combined datasets for research for the Annual Great Britain Treatment and Support Survey. This data set included 40,000 participants who gamble across Great Britain, collected over a 3-year period.

The key findings were

- 76% of people using physical gambling machines experienced ‘problem gambling’
- Young adults aged 18-34 years predominantly used EGMs compared to older adults

EGMs provide a dissociative effect due to the immersive experience and are more likely to affect emotionally vulnerable individuals. The use of EGMs for emotional coping is linked to problem gambling.

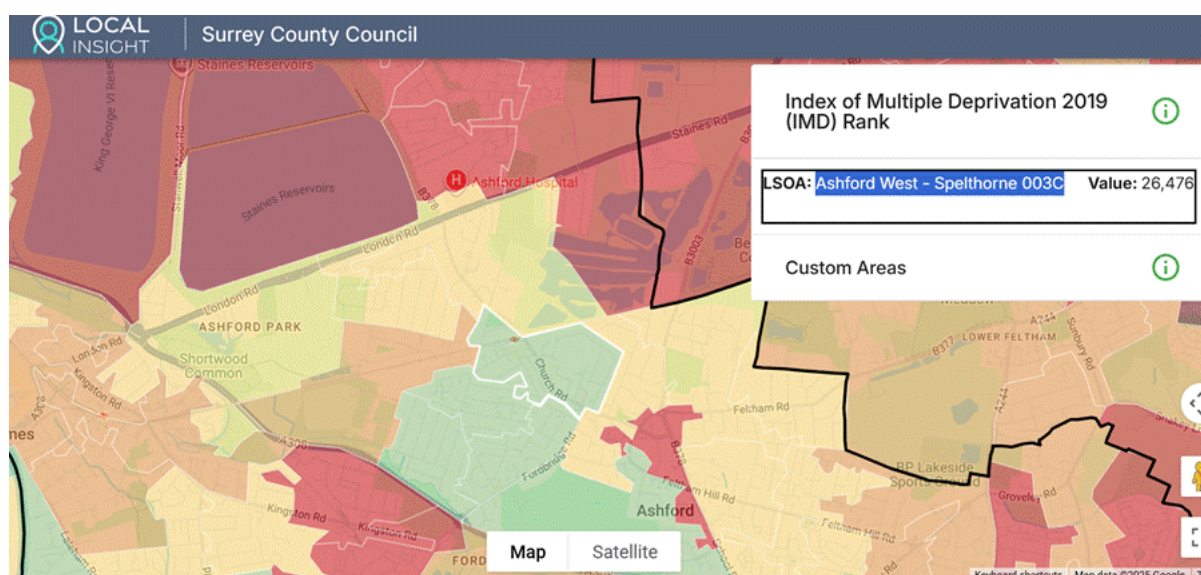
4. The proposed location of the Adult Gaming Centre is close to neighbourhoods and communities disproportionately affected by social deprivation and health inequalities

The location is in the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) Ashford West – Spelthorne 003C. (see map below with light green area with white outline - just below centre). It is within walking distance of seven LSOAs with higher levels of deprivation.

The [Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) identifies two of these seven areas as Key Neighbourhoods where resident populations experience the poorest health outcomes.

The distances below show how far the proposed Adult Gaming Centre is from the nearest residential areas within LSOAs ranked in the bottom 40% nationally for deprivation [based on Google Maps and Surrey County Council's Local Insight data].

Stanwell North & Stanwell Moor - Spelthorne 001B	IMD 6 666	1.7 miles from TW19 7DZ
Stanwell North & Stanwell Moor - Spelthorne 001C	IMD 9 197	1.2 miles from Town Lane
Stanwell South - Spelthorne 002C	IMD 7 818	1 mile from Ashford Hospital
Ashford East - Spelthorne 005B	IMD 10 099	0.4mile from West border
Stanwell South – Spelthorne 002A	IMD 11 655	1.5 mile
from Desford Way		
Staines South West - Spelthorne 007B	IMD 11 855	0.8 mile from TW15
3SF		
Stanwell North & Stanwell Moor - Spelthorne 001D	IMD 12 768	1.9 miles from
South border		
Staines South West - Spelthorne 007C	IMD 12 737	1.1 miles from Celia
Cresent.		



[Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) identifies and prioritises 21 Key Neighbourhoods - which are Wards that include the most deprived Lower Super

Output Areas (LSOAs) in Surrey, with populations most at risk of experiencing the poorest health outcomes.

There are two Key Neighbourhoods close to the proposed AGC location: Stanwell North & Stanwell Moor and Stanwell South, and another three LSOAs close by – that are ranked in the bottom 40% for deprivation in the UK.

A 2024 review by University of Bristol [What-social-and-spatial-inequalities-exacerbate-gambling-harms.pdf](#) states: evidence shows that the geographical positioning of Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs) may cause harm at an individual level, with the placement of EGMs within certain locations (e.g. close to supermarkets or pubs) and in specific environments (e.g. venues within easy reach of low-income neighbourhoods) increasing the risk of harms.

[PHE Gambling Related Harms Evidence Review \(2023\)](#) states: “there was a clear association between gambling at all levels of harm and increased alcohol consumption. This association is evident for overall gambling participation but is greater for at-risk and problem gambling.”

There are 9 pubs/bars/sports clubs selling alcohol less than 1 mile and in walking distance from the proposed AGC venue: Elle & Fee (0.2 miles), Kings Head (0.4 miles), The Kings Fairway (0.5 miles), The Ash Tree (0.6 miles), Freeman Arms (0.7 miles), W.R Sports Club (0.7 miles), The District Arms (0.8 miles), Harvester Bulldog (0.8 miles), Ashford Community Centre (0.9 miles). 8 of these have a gaming/club machine permit.

[University of Bristol \(2024\)](#) systematic review and meta-analysis of available evidence indicating the prevalence of gambling disorders in substance use treatment suggests:

- around 14% of patients demonstrate comorbid pathological gambling
- around 23% suffer conditions along the broader spectrum of problem gambling

5. The proposed location of the AGC is close to facilities for vulnerable people and exposes them to increased risk of gambling harm

This includes:

- 5 homeless shelters/ temporary housing locations between 0.3 and 1 mile away
- A Pupil Referral Unit 0.4 miles away (Fordway Centre)
- Senior boys school 0.4 miles away (St James) and a college 0.6 miles away (Thomas Knyett)

In addition, gambling harm has been recognised as a theme in the Surrey Suicide Prevention Strategy published. This based on:

- Firstly, national evidence. A longitudinal 9-year birth cohort [study](#), (2,801 participants) by the University of Bristol (2025), found that compared to someone who experiences no gambling harms, problem gamblers face triple the suicide risk one year later, and quadruple the risk four years on.
- Secondly, local insights. Gambling was identified in several cases of death by suicide in 2023 and 2022 Surrey suicide audits. (We are unable to share exact numbers due to data reporting thresholds).

6. The proposed AGC would increase the density of licensed gambling premises locally

Recently published Department of Health and Social Care indicators for the determinants of health show that Spelthorne has a *higher number of gambling premises* per 100,000 population than South-East England – 12.5 vs 10.7. ([Fingertips](#)). There are two betting shops very close to the proposed AGC location: a William Hill betting shop within two minutes walk and a Coral betting shop within four minutes walk.

References

Local Authority Gambling Harms Prevalence Data – GambleAware 2023

Office for Health Improvement & Disparities/PHE (2023). Research and Analysis: Gambling Related Harms an Evidence Review. A Summary.

Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2019).

Surrey Suicide Prevention Partnership Strategy (2025).

Wang, R., et al (2025) Bournemouth University: Relative Risk of Gambling products within Great Britain: Findings from a rapid review of literature and secondary analysis project.

Wheaton, J., Collard, S., & Nairn, A. (2024). Experience, Risk, Harm: What Social and spatial inequalities exacerbate alcohol related harms. University of Bristol Research Hub.