

Verbal Statement to the Committee – Councillor G Neall

You will have read my representation given against the licensing of this premises for an adult gaming centre. That was prepared with the help of an Ashford Town resident, Mr R, who is also a gambling addict; this person lives 5-10 minutes walk from the proposed site and will happily meet with anyone who would like to know he is real – today, he's at work.

I have given many arguments in my representations but the one I wish to reiterate to you today is regarding the design of this building. It has no windows, it is dark, and it will be difficult to see anyone in the premises from the street.

Mr R was very clear to me that gambling addicts are fixated on the opportunity to gamble undisturbed. Mr R educated me on Betting Shops ("bookies"): "The thing with a bookies is that anyone could walk in: like a relative or an old mate from school, and the windows are all across the front so you can see in around the posters. It's a poor opportunity, so problem gamblers aren't fans of them; my guess is that around 50% of the punters have a problem, and it's probably not that bad."

In comparison: "These gaming centres are dark, there's no visibility from the street and you can see almost nothing through the entrance. That's only attractive to problem gamblers."

This is lived experience of a vulnerable person who has, at times, lost control of his gambling habit, and it raises a serious question of whether this premises is more dangerous to other such vulnerable people in the Ashford area. There are at least two large vacant properties in the same street with glass fronts, and they have not been selected by Golden Slots. I contend that this venue has been selected for the very reason that it's design will attract and retain problem gamblers more than other gambling establishments. This deliberate choice will result in considerable harm to those vulnerable people.

For objective evidence to support the relative dangers of such buildings, compared to other gambling establishments, I refer you to the latest figures for self-exclusions released by the Gambling Commission for 2024/25. The number of problem gamblers excluding themselves from Casinos was 5,046, for betting shops it was 6,688, over the course of that year. For Adult Gaming Centres it was 10,550 – 109% and 58% more respectively.

I believe the combination of testimony from a gambling addict with these latest regulator data shows this premises is unsuitable for the license applied for, because it is clear that vulnerable people, namely problem gamblers, will be harmed as a result of this premises being used as an Adult Gaming Centre.