

Islington Gambling Policy 2010 - 2013

Business and Town Centres Team Consultation

Gambling premises (betting and gaming) have noticeably been on the increase in both Archway and the Nag's Head town centres over the past few years. This increase has not gone unnoticed and has been brought up by the Town Centre Management Groups in Islington. The issue of gaming premises has most recently been highlighted with regards to the forthcoming opening of the new Agora gaming premises, which is due to open on Junction Road in Archway.

The biggest concern of local businesses is the increase in numbers of these (betting and gaming) premises and effect that this has on the appearance of the high street and the retail offer which is available to the public. In the Nag's Head area, over the last 2 years, there has been an increase in betting / gaming premises from approximately 4 to 16 premises, which is an increase of 300%.

There may be a possible hypothesis that there is a relationship between the numbers of betting shops in an area and the perceived level of deprivation of that area. This in turn could negatively affect the local economy by making the areas less attractive to prospective new businesses and also acts to dissuade potential customers from visiting the area.

The new policy, whilst taking into consideration the location of new establishments to sensitive premises such as schools and religious centres does not make any reference to existing similar business types in the area. **There should be a percentage limit on the number of certain types of businesses within a given area.** As highlighted in the Islington Retail Study (Policy S18) town centres are limited to have no more than 1/3 of units to be in non-retail use. Whilst such stipulations are already in place, could further parameters be set which further dictate the proportions of specific retail usage? In some areas, through the recent growth in the gambling trends they have reached a point of perceived saturation in gambling premises. When considering new premises applications, consideration should be given to the current makeup of the area in order to prevent further saturation.

During consultation on the Gambling Act in 2005 many council's called for the power to restrict the number of bookmakers on the high street which is a view supported by the LGA.

Under section 14 the documents states that 'Interested parties' are entitled to make representations to premises applications based on a person living or having business interests in the vicinity to the planned premises. **Business representative bodies such as Town Centre Management Groups or Business Improvement Districts in the area should be invited to make formal representations on behalf of the business community.** Whilst not necessarily having premises in area, with regards to the wider interests and history of the relevant area, these bodies are best placed to analyse the implications of applications.

Whilst the current emphasis is on 'interested parties' to investigate premises applications in their area and it is only responsible authorities who must be notified. It might be suggested that **as a matter of course, those with dwellings / business interests / community interests (e.g. youth clubs) within an immediate radius to an application should also be formally notified.** Whilst it does allow for a more comprehensive consultation, there is the understanding that this would require a vast array of resources which may not be practical.

When analysing the suitability of an application the social and economic indicators of an area should be explored. There are significant indicators that the level of deprivation (measured through wide variety of parameters) attributed to an area has a strong correlation with the incidence of vulnerable persons present.

With money being a concern for many family's in Islington, an increase in gambling premises increases the danger that those who can least afford it will be tempted further into debt. In 2008 a spokesperson for the LGA said that "they were concerned with the number of betting shops opening in poorer areas" and feared that "they are taking advantage of people's desperations and concerns".

One of the clear objectives of the Gambling Policy is to "protect children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling" and therefore by this very fact **the policy should examine the level of deprivation in any given area when considering an application.** There is a feeling that under the current economic climate that bookmaking organisations are seeking shops with cheaper rents, which invariably means they are drawn to opening in poorer neighbourhoods.

As town centre managers, when speaking with businesses, there is often a misconception regarding the power of the Council to prevent particular (in this case gaming) premises from opening, as highlighted by the recent Agora application which was contested by the Council. **It is important for businesses and the wider community to have a better understanding of the council's involvement in this process in order to manage future expectations and courses of action available against future applications.** As part of the policy there should be a clearer explanation of the grounds under which appeals can be made and the process that this takes.