

## Gambling Business Group political consultants Henham Strategy know the industry from both sides

**C**oinslot: You are in the unusual position of having worked both as a betting shop manager and in DCMS - does the insight that has given you help in your role with the Gambling Business Group?

Nick King: Absolutely yes! I don't think many people have worn both of these hats and I can therefore bring to bear both industry expertise and a working knowledge of the policy-making process.

It has allowed me to develop an appreciation and an understanding of both these worlds - and to be able to talk with first-hand experience about the vital social and economic role taken by land-based gambling premises. I am sure that this will provide additional value in the work we do with the Gambling Business Group.

Coinslot: What other sectors is Henham Strategy

**Nick King**, managing director of political consultants Henham Strategy, is in the unique position of having worked at DCMS and managed a high street betting office! He provides a suitably balanced perspective on how the industry can contribute to the levelling-up debate, the chances of the government introducing a statutory levy and the odds on Boris Johnson being the leader of the Conservative Party at the next general election.

active in and are there any synergies that you can draw on?

Nick King: We cover a lot of different topics from international trade through to working with charities. Perhaps some of the work we can most usefully draw on to help the GBG is our work on the levelling up agenda and with local authorities. Ultimately, most attitudes and decisions are local - so our work on place, and with places, is a huge benefit when it comes to understanding how the industry is perceived and how it can best position itself in the future.

Coinslot: What does the Henham team comprise?

Nick King: We are a relatively small team, but growing. We have senior leaders from a range of different backgrounds and a first-class research and analysis team. We also have the flexibility to bring in top class external advisers when needed.



**Please don't misunderstand me**  
But there is also a great deal of misunderstanding about the industry - how it operates and how much people value it. And it is absolutely the case that that misunderstanding makes it harder to advocate for positive change, including what many would see as common-sense measures.

**Is the levy dry?**  
The deliberations over this go to the heart of the differences in opinion held across Government with no10 and no11, in particular, reluctant to see a new mandatory levy being introduced.

Coinslot: When it comes to the gambling industry why do you think the mainstream narrative is so toxic and how much of a hindrance is that narrative in terms of advancing the business?

Nick King: Clearly, some issues exist. Accepting that fact and acting to address those issues is always an essential first step when it comes to overcoming negative perceptions.

But there is also a great deal of misunderstanding about the industry - how it operates and how much people value it.

And it is absolutely the case that that misunderstanding makes it harder to advocate for positive change, including what many would see as common-sense measures.

Coinslot: In your opinion how likely is the introduction of a statutory levy to fund RET?

Nick King: Becoming increasingly less likely I'd say. The conversations we're having with people in Government suggest many are coming to realise it's unnecessary at best, actively problematic at worst. The deliberations over this go to the heart of the differences in opinion held across Government with no10 and no11, in particular, reluctant to see a new mandatory levy being introduced.

Coinslot: Does this administration have a problem with gambling?

Nick King: I don't think this Government feels particularly different to any other recent ones with regard to gambling. I think there is a widely held view that legislation needs updating, given the most recent Act was drafted at a time when internet gambling was nowhere near as prevalent.

It's actually rather surprising it's taken this long!

Coinslot: Do you think Licenced Gambling Operators can contribute to the Levelling-Up agenda and in what ways?

Nick King: Of course! Levelling up is all about the success of places - as economic hubs, socially buzzing locations and the sorts of places that people would want to visit.

In each of those regards, well-run, well-managed Licenced Gambling Operators can play a clear and obvious role. I know this all too well from my own time managing bookmakers - and am determined to help ensure that this argument is heard in Government.

Coinslot: According to the British Retail Consortium the number of empty shopfronts is 1 in 7 rising to 1 in 5 in the north east - do you think that the investment in the high street by gambling brands is recognised by constituency MPs and the Government?

Nick King: Like with lots of things in policy and politics, I think that is very much determined on a case-by-case basis.

Of course, you get some MPs who recognise this - and I've been lucky enough to talk to plenty of them. But not everyone recognises this argument - and some simply don't accept it in the first place.

The fact that not everyone will agree with you is just a fact of life - but it does make it all the more important that you have the best arguments and a clear intellectual case at your fingertips to convince any naysayers!

Coinslot: Lastly, do you think Boris Johnson will lead the Tories into the next General Election - if you were managing the Betting Shop what odds would you be offering?  
Nick King: It's a long time since I set odds and if I had been particularly good at it, I would probably still be doing it now! But ever since questions started being asked about Boris' future, I've reminded people it's a very high bar to get rid of a PM. So, if I were a betting man (which I am!) I would be happy enough betting on him to carry on as leader for a while yet!