The value of licensed gambling premises to local communities

RAIL STRIKES

Peter Hannibal, chief executive of the Gambling Business Group, is one of the featured experts sharing his insight with readers of LINK, the magazine produced by the influential Institute of Licensing. In a positive and persuasive article he puts the case for the broadly-based gambling industry as a positive part of the UK high street and a supplier of socially responsible entertainment. The following are excerpts adapted from Peter Hannibal's article.

We know that the vast majority of consumers who participate in gambling in Licensed Gambling Premises do so benignly, without harm, and derive recreational pleasure and social engagement from this entertainment activity. Speak to any bingo player or any punter in the betting shop and they see their spending as simply the cost of enjoying their gambling activity, exactly the same as other leisure and pleasure activities.

For many bingo customers, the once or twice a week trip to the bingo club is their only regular social interaction, which they look forward to as the highlight(s) of their week. For others, it is an escape from the pressures of their daily lives.

Similarly, for most betting shop customers their visit is just part of the trip out of the house.

Licensed Gambling Premises are an integral part of our communities, our high streets and the daily/weekly lives of the British public.

We also know that there is a small number of the population that at times are not able to stay in control of their gambling, but this needs to be balanced against all of the positives that the vast majority of people enjoy through their gambling.

Would we block Burger King or Pizza Hut from opening a new premise because we think some people will become obese and end up dependant up the NHS - no we wouldn't.

The Value of Licensed Gambling Premises to local Communities.

Words by Peter Hannibal

The British public choose to go-out for any number of reasons, including to meet friends and socialise, for leisure, pleasure and enjoyment, and to also to do something different to the everyday mundane things that fill most of our daily lives. Some people go to the cinema or the pub, some partake in recreational activities such as walking, running or cycling or even visit their local leisure centre. Others spend a morning or afternoon retailing or going out to eat, whether it is into town or to the local retail park.

For anyone going out and engaging in the things listed above, they will inevitably spend money doing so. Some activities will cost more than others, but they will all come home from their leisure and entertainment with a few quid less to their name.

All of these activities most of us would regard as 'normal' and 'acceptable'. So why is gambling perceived differently?

We know that the vast majority of consumers who participate in gambling in Licensed Gambling Premises do so benignly, without harm, and derive recreational pleasure and social engagement from this entertainment activity. We also know that it costs money to gamble, as it does for all of the other activities that the public choose to take up. Speak to any bingo player or any punter in the betting shop and they see their spending as simply the cost of enjoying their gambling activity, exactly the same as other leisure and pleasure activities.

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There is another view that companies should not make profits from people gambling. All successful businesses make a profit, that is how they exist in the long term.

At the Institute of Licencing 2021 training week in Stratford-upon-Avon we asked a room full of Local Authority delegates how many had encountered problems or issues with Licensed Gambling Premises - none raised their hands. Incidents involving crime and disorder relating to Licensed Gambling Premises are few and far between, certainly no more than any other type of premises and suggestions that a new Adult Gaming Centre will attract crime and disorder cannot be supported with evidence.

We should also discuss the likelihood that children will be tempted to gambling if new Licensed Gambling Premises are permitted to open. We know that it is a mandatory Licence Requirement to carry out regular 'test-purchases' to ensure that adequate precautions are in place to prevent underage gambling. Licensed Operators also have to record all of their age check interventions of under 25s. Actual incidents of children under the age of 18 trying to gamble in a Licensed Gambling Premise are very rare (when we exclude incidents purposely set up as test purchases).

The Gambling Commission themselves have openly said that children are not gambling in the regulated sectors. Operators are very proficient with their age controls but besides all of these facts, Licensed Gambling Premises are simply not attractive places for children to want to go to.

According to the Gambling Commission's latest statistics, the estimated number of problem gamblers in Great Britain has more than halved from 0.6 percent of the population to 0.2 percent.

Operators of Gambling Premises are instinctively alert to the fact that that a very small minority of gamblers can lose control of their gambling activity. They are also very aware that potential problem gamblers need to be identified and protected wherever and whenever possible.

One of the most under recognised attributes of Licensed Gambling Premises Operators is that they are on 'first name terms' with over 90 percent of their customers. This level of know-your-customer is an important and inherent component in the culture and service levels they use to run their businesses.

The impact of this relationship is that they are able to provide a level of tacit care to those customers they know well, including spotting changes in their gambling behaviour and making relevant interventions. They are also very aware of the small number of consumers that they are not on first name terms with and will supervise them accordingly, applying similar concerns and slightly different observations.

Your local Bingo Premises, Betting Shop or Adult Gaming Centre manager is just like the conscientious pub landlord, who creates a social environment where patrons enjoy themselves and feel safe and comfortable, just without the alcohol (in the latter two cases).

High Street investment is not happening frequently enough and when it does come along, it should be viewed with an open mind and all of the positive attributes set out proportionately against the real facts relating to concerns, those same concerns that are genuinely shared responsibly by the Operators themselves."

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