



## Gambling Business Group

# A budget to protect the high street? Gambling Business Group breathes a sigh of relief for the land based economy

PETER HANNIBAL CEO GAMBLING BUSINESS GROUP

The Gambling Business Group has been one of the strongest advocates for the land based sector and the revival and regeneration of the UK's high streets. CEO **Peter Hannibal** examines the Budget Statement and draws attention to its strengths and weaknesses.

**I**n stark contrast to the extremist public debate on taxing gambling businesses that we've endured over the past month, the chancellor has delivered a more measured and rational outcome than the one expected for the land-based gambling sector.

Considerable credit must go to the case presented by everyone in the industry which explained in detail and with evidence the harsh realities of what a tax rise on machines in pubs, bingo clubs, arcades, FECs, pool halls and social clubs would have had on businesses.

Their fears of decimation were not exaggerated and the freeze on MGD and the lifting of bingo duty will be a vital boost to the high street's efforts for survival.

We should look back at this recent episode and collectively take some pride in a job well done by everyone who spent time gathering and sharing evidence, attending endless meetings and shouting our case from the rooftops. It just shows that when we work together with the same objectives we can be pretty effective!!

At the same time, credit must also be paid to the Chancellor herself who appears to have listened to these arguments and understood the challenges facing the UK high street, including the crucial role our businesses play in bringing them back to life.

There is still, however, significant work for the Treasury to do in the high street arena, and the very strong views from both UK Hospi-

tal and the BBPA on the overall impact of this budget must be heeded. Both bodies have expressed their deep concerns on the disproportionate impact the current business rates reform proposals will have on high street businesses, and for GBG members too, this is one of the most challenging costs on the ledger - particularly at a time when they are all paying additional funds to the Gambling Levy.

We all recognise that the business rates system is broken and that reform is vital, but it's crucial that the government focuses on a coherent strategy that controls the excessive costs faced by high street businesses.

And it's important to also sound a note of caution to the chancellor when it comes to reviewing their rates proposals: a large number of entertainment centres are occupants of the bigger high street premises. We hope that their hospitality status will offer them protections when rates are adjusted for higher value properties. We mustn't ignore how important these operations are in delivering footfall to the high street.

We have heard so much talk about regenerating the high street, but in reality little had been delivered in practical terms. This budget has not delivered the potentially devastating blow, but there are still more costs coming our way, so we hope for more joined up action plans for the land based economy in further budgets and legislation changes to come.

As one would expect, there was a sting in the tail of this Budget - the chancellor

has applied the highest rise in taxes, almost double, for remote gaming and online betting. We will have to monitor very carefully how this plays out, particularly with reference to the impact it might have on contributions to the Gambling Levy and the transition of players to the black market, both of which will have a serious impact on our ability to protect the vulnerable.

It's also important to recognise that the additional rise in the Minimum Wage will undoubtedly have a negative impact particularly on employment with hospitality businesses still reeling from the NIC increase last year.

Finally, and probably most importantly, we need to keep a focus on growth. This budget has offered a reassurance of short term survival to the land based sector, but is has not facilitated economic growth on the high street.

What we now need is joined-up government with the DCMS pushing forward with the Gambling Act Review and delivering a framework that enables the amusements, gaming and gambling industry to have the confidence to invest and the ability to modernise.

The timeframe for implementing a proactive Gambling Act is now entering its seventh year; by the time the additional consultations introduced following the general election get processed, we will be heading towards the third year of this government.

That is three years out of modernising the industry and driving investment and innovation forward.

We cannot keep delaying this process.

## Bingo Association

# "Transformative moment" for bingo as time called on duty

MILES BARON CHIEF EXECUTIVE THE BINGO ASSOCIATION

**"Today's announcement is a transformative moment for Britain's bingo clubs. The abolition of Bingo Duty is a powerful vote of confidence in our sector and a clear recognition of the unique community value we provide."**

**"After years of rising costs and economic pressure, this decision gives clubs the stability and headroom they need to**

**reinvest, modernise and secure thousands of jobs across the country. It ensures that bingo clubs can continue to thrive as a safe, affordable and much-loved part of British life."**

**"We welcome the Government's willingness to act. This change will make a real difference to the communities we serve."**

