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I N T E R N A T I O N A L



Burnham to scrap Aim to Permit in bid to “restore our high streets”

PLANNING

Prime Minister Andy Burnham has announced plans to revoke the **Aim to Permit** rule as of next year, with 24-hour AGCs requiring full planning permission from local authorities and communities given “a stronger say over whether new betting shops are right for their area.”

Andy Burnham has confirmed he will revoke the 2005 Gambling Act’s “outdated” Aim to Permit rule at the beginning of next year, to reverse what his government describes as adult gaming centres “spreading unchecked across struggling high streets.”

The measures, officially announced on 11 August, mean that AGCs will require full planning permission from local authorities, while local communities are given “a stronger say over whether new betting shops are right for their area.”

Given the rigorous criteria and regulatory demands of both the licensing authorities and the Gambling Commission, Burnham’s claim of AGCs “spreading unchecked” is false.

But one should never let the truth get in the way of a political magician’s sleight of hand: Burnham has proven himself to be the king of the political magic circle, having already conjured up an unchallenged coup d’état.

But he can certainly throw out a line or two. “For many people, the high streets they grew up with have been hollowed out and become unrecognisable over decades of decline,” he said. “The rise of vape shops, betting shops and rogue operators have replaced the shops, services, and community spaces that people are crying out for.”

“That’s not on. I said we would improve Britain’s high streets, and that’s exactly what we are starting to do. We’re putting communities back in control and giving local people a real say over what opens on their high street. Local councils will be given the powers they need to rein in unwanted shops and bring town centres back to life.”

The release announcing the proposals cites analysis from the Centre for Social Justice which claims Britain has lost nearly 1,800 pubs and bars, while “concerns have been raised about the clustering of gambling premises in local communities, particularly in more deprived areas.”

The proposals also refer to the London borough of Brent, frequently



used as an example of “overclustering,” where the town of Harlesden, he cites accommodates “ten betting shops within a 10-minute walk.”

These facts can be challenged: Brent has only 75 gambling premises of all kinds from AGCs to bingo to betting shops - if it were a city, it would rank in the top 15 in the UK with a population of over 350,000. Brent has 17 major town centres and key high streets - which equates to just over 4 gambling venues on each. Measure this up against 700 business operations in Wembley Central, 400 in Kilburn and the “spreading unchecked” claim loses potency.

But the stats are not the key

factor. “The measures will put communities back in control of their high streets by giving local people a real say over what businesses can open in their town centres and how local high streets should look, as well as tougher powers for the police and local authorities to crack down on rogue operators.”

“The maximum length of Closure Orders will also double from six to 12 months, giving police and local authorities more time to investigate premises linked to organised crime, pursue prosecutions, and prevent rogue businesses - from illegal vape shops, and dodgy barber shops - reopening before investigations are complete.”

Peter Hannibal: “The real hollowing out of the high street”

It’s fair to say that there is increasing concern at the irrational tone and direction of the commentary flooding out of Number 10 on gambling lately.

For Coinslot, the narrative leans dangerously towards prohibition, with worrying religious and moral connotations, and worse, lacking any expansive economic model.

For Peter Hannibal and the GBG, however, the position is somewhat less cerebral, and more realistic, practical and effective.

“It’s so important to maintain a balanced view here, and the Prime Minister’s statements are not really a surprise to anyone,” Hannibal said.

“But we should take note that the Starmer government came in and immediately ushered a note of fear and despair at how desperately bad the economy was. That downbeat tone led to their downfall. And Andy Burnham is in danger of delivering a similar downbeat message: if we don’t like your business model, we’ll tax you and then drive you off our high streets.”

This is not the message an ailing economy needs, Hannibal argues: “For any business looking to invest, this is a message that the UK is not open for business. And that is the worst signal you can send out as we’re trying to revive our high streets.” And he added: “If you want to revive our high streets, the Government will have to encourage and stimulate investment.”

The betting industry has already answered with the closure of 300 plus shops and thou-

sands of job losses.

“I’m not sure Burnham’s message is going to raise a smile on our high streets and in local communities. Lost jobs means more families without an income and high streets hollowed out with over 300 shuttered betting shops. We don’t need anymore of that. This policy proposal is not a viable measure to save the high streets, let alone fund the business rates gap to help support our pubs.”

Hannibal’s major concern, as it always has been, is that evidence rather than emotion should be driving policy. Regulation, he adds, is the best response to emotion.

“I think it’s going to be difficult for anyone drafting the consultation document that meets the requirements for changes to licensing rules when the reality doesn’t actually match the perception.”

Here, Hannibal is referencing the number of gambling venues which, contrary to common parlance, is falling - significantly.

“The starting point of Burnham’s case is the growing numbers of gambling operations on our high streets: well, in 2011 there were just over 12,000. In 2025, the Gambling Commission reported little over 8,000. By any calculation, a 25 percent fall is a significant reduction. We need facts, not fiction.”

Hannibal is equally critical of the gap between what’s happening on the ground to that in the senior offices of the authorities. “I don’t think there’s any dialogue going on here.

“Local authorities already have the powers to determine who operates on the high street as well as the enforcement powers when regulations are abused. And we need to be clear, it is not the gambling venues that cause the high street problems. The Local Authorities’ own stats simply don’t show this.”

Hannibal’s fear is that the hollowing out is yet to come: “I think the real hollowing out of the high street will come if the Government’s anti-gambling proposals are implemented. Our venues are the mainstay of the current high street, the major investors in properties, and the licence applicants who have been opening up the deserted old banks and shops that have been shuttered for years and years. Driving gambling venues off the high street will just re-shutter shops that no-one had wanted for years.”

And Hannibal had a final note of caution: “It’s vital we step away from the puritan perspective on business, because once that door’s open it won’t just be gambling. Who next? The off licence, the place of worship, the LGBTQ bars.

“We seem to be heading back to the prohibition mentality of the 1950s. Our high streets are where you go to do something ‘in-person’. If you can’t play on your own high street, where do these prohibition councillors want their constituents to gamble? Underground and online into the clutches of illegal and unregulated operators?”

“This isn’t just a fool’s errand, it’s an incredibly dangerous one.”