



21 April, 2017

Dear Ms. Patel,

I understand that there is a licensing application for the shop No. 322 in Neasden Shopping Centre, to be changed into another gambling centre. The original Planning application was turned down by Brent Council. The applicant appealed to the Government against the decision and they decided in favour of the applicant asking Council to issue the license.

I have been actively involved in community work for over 30 years and helped the Brent Council and Met. Police in bringing huge improvements in Neasden area which included re-generation of Neasden Shopping Centre, introduction of Control Parking Zone and setting up Neasden Neighbourhood Watch. I am very disappointed to note that my name has not been included in the consultation list for such an important issue concerning Neasden.

Before I give my opinion on this most sensitive issue, I would like to give you some idea of how much Neasden has suffered in the past because of some greedy business people operating in the Shopping Centre. I decided to move into Neasden about 35 years ago simply because this was considered to be a very nice and peaceful place to live. The shopping Centre used to attract a huge number of customers from the neighbouring areas because there were a couple of bakeries, cafes, school uniform shop, shoe shop, a couple of news agents run by elderly couples, green grocers and fruit shops etc. Plus we had a few wine bars and small pubs where families used to meet after work particularly at weekend and enjoy the evenings in the company of their friends.

In addition, we had a very big pub called "Three Barrel" and a dancing hall facing each other. They attracted a large number of customers from neighbouring areas. The reports started coming about the loud music being played in these two premises and the residents were not happy about it. Further reports of drug dealing, gambling and regular fights taking place were also coming which was the cause of a great concern not only to the community but also to Met. Police who were called in repeatedly to take control of the situation. The customers would be wandering about on the streets of Neasden at night in complete drunken conditions, shouting, swearing, fighting, urinating in the front gardens of the properties until the next morning which not only disgusted the residents but also degraded the area. In order to tackle this huge problem, I teamed up with late [REDACTED] of Neasden Residents' Association and started a campaign against this notorious pub and the dancing hall. It was welcomed by the residents and fully supported by the police.

Finally, after a few years' of battle, the "Three Barrel" and the "dancing hall" were shut down and the community was happy to see them leaving Neasden. The premises were taken over by a couple of big shops plus Tesco Express catering good quality food, vegetables and fruits etc. which was welcomed.

Neasden had and still have problems such as anti-social behaviour by students causing disturbances in the shopping centre. Some of the senior students were seen in and out of two gambling shops. In addition, we have gangs known to the police who are involved in anti-social behaviour, gambling and drug dealing. They also use gambling premises as their base. They have been operating in the area for over 10 years and is quite worrying for the community. The police unsuccessfully tried to remove them on many occasion in the past. Insp. Peter Weaver arranged a couple of police operations after he had meetings with Neasden Neighbour Watch. He was successful in chasing them out but the gangs came back once the operations were over. The community is facing the following problems and feel helpless in dealing with them:

1. anti-social behaviour by the students and members of gangs;
2. gambling premises which attract undesirable characters including some from Press Road area who are well known to the police for their criminal activities; and
3. drug dealing in and outside the gambling shops.

All these activities by the young boys lead to crime and disorder in the community which needs to be protected.

I am not sure that the same people who allow gambling shops in such a small shopping centre, are part of the gambling industry. As I said above these youngsters and even some grown up people turned gamblers are caught up in this evil habit. This is a national problem and does not belong to any particular area or any race. How much profit people like William Hill, Ladbrokes and Machine shops are making at the cost of these innocent people. Sometime, I wonder why schools never teach their students about this evil habit which not only destroy their own life but also people around them. I have seen a number of boys who first got involved in this gambling habit as a fun and then they gradually moved to drug taking and finally ended up in jail. Some of them could not take the pressure and ended their precious life that God has given them, leaving behind their devastated families. I met a number of families during my counselling work and found out that gamblers don't hesitate to lie, steal or borrow money from their friends and members of the family on false pretexts which they never pay back.

The licensing officers and the Government obviously have no idea of the struggle some gamblers go through and the hard work and strength it takes to change their life around. Gambling and drug taking is a deadly, vicious and aggressive disease and has no mercy on its victims.

I would like to say to our respected members of the Council and the Government that the grant of a license for another gambling shop in Neasden Shopping Centre would only mean that they are encouraging to increase crime and criminal activities in this area which would bring more harm to the community. They should open gambling centres on the High Streets only away from the local community and the schools.

In view of the situation explained above, I would like to register our **OBJECTION** on behalf of Neasden Neighbourhood Watch to turning 322 Neasden Lane into another gambling shop and almost next to the gambling machine shop. The Government should consider bringing a students' uniform shop or shoe shop or a small cafe for elderly residents, or a charity shop which would be more useful to the entire community than gambling centre to a single greedy bookie who doesn't really care about the community. We unfortunately lost a nice library right in the heart of Neasden Shopping Centre which was extremely useful to all of us.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the sender.

Neasden Neighbourhood Watch

Copy to:

1. Dawn Butler, Member of Parliament for Brent Central
2. Insp. Peter A. Weaver
3. Insp. Adrian.Hanna
4. Cllr. Krupesh Hirani, Dudden Hill Ward
5. Paris. Hodgkinson-Black, Dudden Hill Safer Neighbourhood Team
6. Ann Wells, Brent Neighbourhood Watch Association
7. Preety Mitra, Neasden Residents Association