

# OBJECTION LETTER

**To:** Licensing Authority, London Borough of Brent

**Re:** Premises Licence Application – Arcadia Casino Ltd, 1 Walm Lane, NW2 5SN (Adult Gaming Centre)

**Date:** April 2026

I write to formally object to this application for a new Adult Gaming Centre (AGC) at 1 Walm Lane. My objection is grounded in the three licensing objectives set out in the Gambling Act 2005.

Before addressing each licensing objective, I draw the Sub-Committee's attention to a recent landmark judgment that directly bears on how this application should be determined, and the legal framework within which the Sub-Committee is entitled to act.

## **PRIMARY SUBMISSION: THE SHEFFIELD PRECEDENT AND BRENT'S POWER TO REFUSE**

### **Royal Amusements v Sheffield City Council [2025] – Appeal Dismissed**

On 24 February 2025, District Judge Spruce sitting in Sheffield Magistrates' Court dismissed an appeal by Royal Amusements against Sheffield City Council's refusal to grant a premises licence for an Adult Gaming Centre at 9 Fargate, Sheffield (Case No. 142300413590). The District Judge found he was "*completely satisfied that the Licensing Sub-Committee approached its decision in a way which is entirely consistent with the established law and guidance*" [109].

This judgment is of direct relevance to the present application. It establishes, with detailed judicial reasoning, that: (a) the "Aim to Permit" in section 153 of the Gambling Act 2005 does not compel a licensing authority to grant a licence; (b) a licensing authority is not merely entitled but *statutorily directed* to assess locality-specific risks when determining whether a grant is reasonably consistent with the licensing objectives; and (c) where those locality-specific risks cannot be addressed by conditions on the licence, refusal is the lawful and proper outcome.

I respectfully submit that the Sub-Committee should apply the Sheffield approach to this application. The parallels between the Sheffield Fargate locality and the Walm Lane locality are striking, and in several material respects, Brent's evidence base is stronger.

## **“Aim to Permit” Is Not “Aim to Guarantee”**

The Appellant in Sheffield argued that the permissive regime of section 153 effectively required the grant of a licence, and that any concerns could be managed through conditions. The District Judge rejected this argument in clear terms:

*"The permissive approach articulated in Section 153 Gambling Act 2005 is manifestly subject to those matters set out in s.153(1)(a)–(d), the relevant codes, guidance and local authority statement of principles, when attempting to assess whether a grant of a premises licence is reasonably consistent with the licensing objectives. All of those policy and guidance documents draw attention to the need for local authorities to identify, set out and manage local issues priorities and concerns. It begs the question; What is the purpose of local area risk assessments if they are to be discounted and dismissed under the weight of the permissive regime?"*

— District Judge Spruce, [88]

The judge further noted at [85] that even the Government’s own White Paper (*High Stakes: Gambling Reform for the Digital Age*) makes clear that the “aim to permit” requirement “does not prevent the refusal of licences to minimise risk.” The permissive regime, the judge concluded, “stops short of being mandatory” [85].

## **The Licensing Authority Is the Proper Guardian of Local Harm**

The Sheffield judgment addressed the operator’s argument that the licensing authority had overstepped its jurisdiction. The District Judge’s response was emphatic:

*"When the Appellant complains that the Local Authority did not have the latitude to make the decision that it did; and further, that the Local Authority cannot be the sole arbiter of managing harm, I am forced to ask the question, ‘Who else is to be the guardian of it?’ Who else is to be the safeguarder of potential and prospective harms, if it is not the local authority?"*

— District Judge Spruce, [91]

This Sub-Committee is not merely permitted to consider the locality-specific risks associated with granting this licence. It is the body best placed to do so, and is directed by the Gambling Commission’s Guidance to Licensing Authorities (“GLA”) to take the lead on local regulation of gambling (GLA 1.7).

## **No Conditions Can Address Harms Beyond the Premises**

The most significant finding in the Sheffield judgment is the District Judge's conclusion that conditions on a premises licence are inherently incapable of addressing the wider gambling harms that arise from locating an AGC in a sensitive area. Sheffield City Council argued that "there are no conditions which can regulate the gambling harms which extend beyond the premises" [51]. The judge accepted this:

*"It is an unchallengeable position that there are no conditions which I could place upon a premises licence which might address these types of gambling harms. They are unknown and invisible harms; unidentifiable in advance of them occurring. Whilst I recognise that the proposed package of conditions go beyond what might ordinarily be expected for these types of premises, they only address what can be seen and what might occur largely on the premises. They ... are insufficient and incapable of addressing the protection of children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling, when applied to the wider definition of gambling harms and vulnerabilities contemplated by the legislative framework."*

— District Judge Spruce, [106]

This finding is directly applicable to the Walm Lane application. However robust the applicant's proposed conditions may be, they can only regulate activity inside the premises. They cannot prevent the normalisation of gambling for children passing the venue daily on their way to nursery and school (Hapoy Stars, Convent of Jesus and Mary and St Mary Magdalene's). They cannot reduce the accessibility of gambling for residents in financial crisis collecting emergency food parcels at the Brent Foodbank 0.2 miles away. They cannot address the invisible harms of addiction, debt, family breakdown and suicide that proliferate beyond the premises door.

### **Brent's Evidence Base Is at Least as Strong as Sheffield's**

Sheffield's case rested substantially on the oral testimony of its Director of Public Health, Greg Fell, supported by national research data. Brent has an even stronger foundation: a **completed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Gambling (2024)** that provides borough-specific, ward-level data of a kind that Sheffield did not possess at the time of its hearing. The JSNA establishes:

**6.2% of Brent residents** are categorised as problem gamblers – more than **double the national average** of 2.9%.

Gambling-related harm costs Brent an estimated **£14.3 million per year**.

Brent has **81+ licensed gambling premises** – one of the highest concentrations in London, making gambling facilities more accessible than banks, supermarkets, or schools.

There are already **more than ten gambling venues within a one-mile stretch** of Willesden, where the proposed site is located.

The JSNA confirms that individuals gamble out of financial desperation, that the cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated this, and that young people are **three times more likely** to exhibit problem gambling habits. Ethnic minorities experience “*disproportionately higher rates of harm*” – significant in Brent, where 85% of the population are from ethnic minority groups (2021 Census data).

In Sheffield, the District Judge found that the Director of Public Health’s evidence “*clearly establishes a link between gambling harms and the greater proliferation of those harms when gambling premises were located in sensitive locations and areas of risk*” [103]. Brent’s JSNA provides this link at borough-wide scale, with granular ward-level data, making the evidence case for refusal significantly more robust than the one Sheffield successfully advanced.

### **The Applicant’s Risk Assessment Must Be Scrutinised**

In Sheffield, the operator’s case collapsed in part because the applicant’s local area risk assessments were inadequate. The owner admitted he had never walked around the area, could not name any local vulnerabilities, and had only read his own risk assessments on the day of the hearing. His licensing consultant’s LARA was revised three times before it acknowledged the area’s sensitivities. The District Judge placed the **burden on the applicant** to demonstrate that the proposed site was not a location of unique vulnerability:

*“If the Appellant takes issue with the suggestion that 9 Fargate, Sheffield, is not a location of unique character, or that the location is indistinguishable from Royal Amusements’ other operations, then it is, in my view, for the Appellant to demonstrate that position on the balance of probabilities.”*

— *District Judge Spruce, [80(c)]*

I note that the applicant’s LARA for the Walm Lane premises describes Willesden Green as undergoing “gentrification.” This characterisation is inconsistent with the deprivation data set out above and in the Brent JSNA, and echoes exactly the type of inadequate locality assessment that the Sheffield judge found fatal to the operator’s case. The Sub-Committee should interrogate whether Arcadia Casino Limited has genuinely engaged

with the specific vulnerabilities of this locality, or whether it has applied a standardised template that fails to reflect local reality.

## **Recommendation to the Sub-Committee**

I respectfully urge the Sub-Committee to follow the approach upheld in *Royal Amusements v Sheffield City Council* and:

- (a) Request that Brent's Director of Public Health provide a formal representation to this application, drawing upon the JSNA on Gambling (2024) and locality-specific vulnerability data for the Walm Lane area, in the same manner as Sheffield's Director of Public Health did;
- (b) Consider the full scope of gambling harms contemplated by the third licensing objective, including invisible and intangible harms to children and vulnerable persons that cannot be addressed by conditions on the premises;
- (c) Scrutinise the adequacy of the applicant's Local Area Risk Assessment against the actual deprivation, vulnerability, and sensitive-location profile of the Walm Lane area;
- (d) Conclude, as the Sheffield Sub-Committee and District Judge both concluded, that where the locality-specific risks to children and vulnerable persons are of a nature that no conditions could adequately address, **refusal is the lawful and proper outcome under section 153 of the Gambling Act 2005.**

## **SUPPORTING EVIDENCE BY LICENSING OBJECTIVE**

### **1. Protecting Children and Other Vulnerable Persons from Being Harmed or Exploited by Gambling**

#### **Child Poverty and Deprivation**

Brent is one of only five London boroughs where the child poverty rate exceeds 40% ([Save the Children / DWP, March 2026](#)). The proposed AGC would sit in the heart of a community where a disproportionate number of children already live in hardship. Research consistently shows that AGCs cluster in the most deprived neighbourhoods: an estimated half of all UK adult gaming centres are located in the most disadvantaged areas.

#### **Intergenerational Addiction**

Gambling disorder has a strong intergenerational dimension. Family history accounts for approximately 50% of the risk of developing a gambling disorder ([source](#)), through a

combination of genetic predisposition and social-learning factors. Introducing a further gambling premises into a high-deprivation area increases the environmental exposure of children growing up in households already at elevated risk.

### **Proximity to Vulnerable Groups**

The site is approximately 0.2 miles from Willesden Green station and in close proximity to hostels serving vulnerable populations (e.g. Depaul UK Willesden Hostel) and the Brent Foodbank warehouse at 100 High Road, where residents in financial crisis collect emergency food parcels. Trussell food banks distributed 2.9 million emergency parcels across the UK in 2024/25, of which over one million were provided for children (Trussell, May 2025). Placing high-frequency gaming machines on the direct route between a transport hub and a foodbank in an already deprived area is inherently predatory.

In the Sheffield judgment, the District Judge placed particular weight on the proximity of the proposed AGC to sensitive locations including homeless shelters, substance misuse treatment services, mental health services, and student accommodation. The judge found that the *“footfall of vulnerable people within the specific location”* was a critical factor [63]. The Walm Lane site presents an analogous, and arguably more acute, vulnerability profile.

### **Cost-of-Living Context Amplifies Vulnerability**

Brent residents are under acute financial pressure. The application relies upon 2021 census data which, given the cost in crisis experienced by those Living in branch in recent years, is not indicative of the life Brent residents currently live. Rents in the borough have risen approximately 27% over the past three years, with housing costs consuming over 53% of average income. The IGD (Institute of Grocery Distribution) has warned that UK food inflation could reach over 8% by mid-2026 under adverse geopolitical scenarios, on top of food prices already 38% above pre-Covid levels. Brent Council has approved a 4.99% Council Tax increase for 2026/27. In this context, any household income diverted into high-frequency gambling machines directly compromises the welfare of children and dependants.

### **Problem Gambling Prevalence**

The Gambling Commission’s Gambling Survey for Great Britain ([GSGB](#), October 2025) reports that 2.7% of adults scored 8+ on the Problem Gambling Severity Index, equating to an estimated 1.4 million adults in Great Britain. Prevalence is higher in more deprived areas. Brent’s own JSNA records a 6.2% problem gambling rate, more than double the national average. In a cost-of-living crisis, a parent or carer experiencing gambling disorder directly compromises children’s access to food, heating, and other essentials.

## **Applicant's LARA Is Inadequate**

The applicant's Local Area Risk Assessment describes Willesden Green as undergoing "*gentrification*." This characterisation is inconsistent with the deprivation data set out above and suggests the applicant has not adequately assessed the risks to children and vulnerable persons in the locality. Furthermore, conclusions in the application are drawn based on 2021 census data which is at this stage out of date and flawed. In Sheffield, the District Judge found that an inadequate LARA was "*undermining of the approach envisaged*" by the legislative framework [80(b)] and treated the operator's failure to engage with locality-specific vulnerabilities as evidence that the application should not be granted.

## **2. Preventing Gambling from Being a Source of Crime or Disorder**

There is a well-documented association between gambling premises and acquisitive crime. Research indicates that 43% of individuals with gambling disorders report engaging in illegal acts such as theft to fund their gambling. As gambling debts accumulate, affected individuals are more likely to resort to shoplifting, aggressive begging, or other low-level offending.

The area around Walm Lane already experiences elevated crime, with a significant proportion of recorded incidents involving anti-social behaviour. Permitting a 24-hour gambling premises in this environment is likely to compound existing disorder. UK shoplifting offences have been rising year-on-year and are widely acknowledged to be at crisis levels, with poverty and addiction identified as key drivers.

The Sheffield judgment is again instructive. South Yorkshire Police initially objected to the Fargate AGC, citing the area as "one of our main hotspot areas" for violence and crime and linking "these types of premises" to crime [14]. Although the police subsequently withdrew their objection after agreeing conditions, the District Judge found this withdrawal unpersuasive: "*The withdrawal of the SYP objection does not necessarily mean that every aspect of the original concern is addressed, when one looks at the overall evidential picture*" [16]. The Sub-Committee should not treat the absence of a police objection as determinative if the wider evidence points to locality-specific crime and disorder risks.

## **3. Public Health: Gambling-Related Suicide and Addictive Product Design**

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) estimates that between 117 and 496 suicides per year in England are associated with problem gambling. Research by the University of Bristol (published in *Addiction*, 2025) found that problem gambling is associated with a fourfold increase in suicide risk among young adults over a four-year period.

The high-event-frequency machines found in AGCs are specifically designed to sustain play, leading to rapid financial loss and psychological distress. Unlike traditional forms of betting, these products have among the highest associations with harmful gambling outcomes (Bournemouth University, 2025). Those in the lowest income groups are most likely to experience gambling-related harm yet are least able to absorb the financial consequences. Introducing a 24-hour facility offering such products into a high-deprivation area directly conflicts with the licensing objectives.

The Sheffield District Judge accepted that public health falls within the scope of the third licensing objective (“protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling”), relying in part on *R (on the application of Porky Pint Ltd) v Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council [2013]* which established the overlap between public health and the licensing objectives [94]. This Sub-Committee is entitled to give weight to public health evidence, including the Brent JSNA, in determining this application.

#### **4. Corporate Transparency**

##### **Dormant Company Status**

Companies House records show that Arcadia Casino Limited (Company No. 12551756) has filed dormant company accounts every year since its incorporation in April 2020, including its most recent filing in January 2026. It is unusual for an applicant to seek a significant premises licence through a corporate vehicle that declares no assets or trading activity.

##### **Connected Entities**

Arcadia Casino Limited shares a registered address and directorship with Golden Slots (Southern) Limited, which already operates an AGC at 169–171 Cricklewood Broadway and other locations. The Committee should consider whether the use of a dormant shell company for this application raises concerns about transparency and accountability.

##### **Track Record**

In October 2025, Spelthorne Borough Council’s Licensing Sub-Committee refused a licence application for an AGC by Golden Slots (Southern) Limited, following 133 objections and over 2,300 petition signatures. That decision was based on risks to children and vulnerable persons and concerns about crime and disorder – the same licensing objectives engaged by this application. Brent should not become a path of least resistance for a business model that has been rejected elsewhere.

