



Ashford Residents Association Meeting – Barclays Bank AGC Statement

Good morning everyone, and thank you for being here.

Before I say anything else, I want to thank you — the community. Without all of you sharing information, signing petitions, spreading the word, and sending in objections, this gambling centre would already be a done deal. It isn't, because we've fought it every step of the way together. That shows exactly what Ashford can do when we stand up for ourselves.

So, where are we now?

Over 100 valid objections were officially accepted by the Council. That's a huge number for a town our size. Many more were sent in, but unfortunately couldn't be counted because of the strict legal rules about what reasons "qualify." But even those still tell the same story: Ashford does not want or need an Adult Gaming Centre in the middle of our High Street.

The next step is the Licensing Sub-Committee hearing at the Council Offices in Staines on Wednesday 8th and Thursday 9th October, starting at 10am. It's open to the public, and it will also be streamed live on YouTube.

I'll be speaking at that hearing on behalf of the Residents Association and on behalf of you — the residents who made your voices heard. My job is to make sure our case is strong, clear, and based on the rules the Council has to follow.

Here's the heart of what we'll be saying:

- First, crime and disorder. Ashford already has one of the highest levels of anti-social behaviour in Surrey. We don't have the late-night security, CCTV, or policing that bigger towns do. A 24-hour gambling shop here will only add to those problems.
- Second, children and vulnerable people. The site is surrounded by schools, bus stops, and community services. Kids and vulnerable adults walk past every single day. A big, brightly lit gambling shop in that spot is the last thing they should have to face.

There are a couple of other factors in our favour too:

- National policy. Even the government has realised this kind of thing is a problem. Just this week the Prime Minister announced a new programme called Pride in Place, which will give councils the power to block more betting shops, vape stores, and other unwanted uses. The law hasn't changed yet, but the direction of travel is crystal clear: communities should have more control over what happens on their high streets.
- The Sheffield case. Earlier this year in Sheffield, a judge backed the council's refusal of a similar gambling centre. The court said councils are right to think about "invisible harms" — like people struggling with addiction — and that conditions on a licence can't fix the risks outside the door, like loitering or exposure to kids. That case proves councils

can say no when the location isn't right.

So, in short, our case is simple: Ashford is a small, close-knit community. We do not have the infrastructure to manage the risks that come with this kind of premises. This is the wrong place for an Adult Gaming Centre, and we'll be asking the Sub-Committee to refuse the licence.

Once again — thank you. You've already shown how strong this town can be when it pulls together. We've come this far by standing side by side, and with your continued support, I believe we can win this fight.

We expect to hear the outcome within five working days of the hearing's conclusion.

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