**Dr Beccy Cooper MP**

Member of Parliament for Worthing West

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Chair and Members of the Planning Committee
Worthing Borough Council
Town Hall
Chapel Road
Worthing, BN11 1HA

11 July 2025

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

**Subject: Objection to Planning Application AWDM/0371/25 – Change of Use to Arcade and Bingo Hall**

I am writing to register my strong objection to this application to create a new gambling premises in a prominent family-oriented shopping area. As a public health consultant, MP for Worthing West, and Co-Chair of the Gambling Reform APPG, I am deeply concerned by this approach particularly in our town, where gambling harms are already acute and under-acknowledged. This proposal raises several serious concerns:

1. Elevated Public Health Risk

Nationally, 1.3 million people are known at risk of severe harm gambling with a shocking 14.5% of the population – some 7 million people – reporting some level of harm due to gambling. The true scale is higher still, as harm affects loved ones and the community alongside the individual. Much harm remains is often unseen and unrecorded due to stigma and the industry's obfuscation.
These harms are particularly acute in towns with high deprivation and visible clustering of gambling outlets.

2. Local Vulnerability

Anyone can be vulnerable to gambling harm due to personal circumstances, life events or mental health challenges. But certain risk factors are understood to create a higher risk of gambling harm and Worthing’s demographics and social conditions make it especially vulnerable to the risks associated with gambling availability:

- 488 households in temporary accommodation, nearly double the national average.
- 17 rough sleepers recorded in 2024.
- High rates of child poverty and mental health issues.

Furthermore, this location is in close proximity to several services for people who have significantly elevated risk factors in relation to gambling harm:

- YMCA Worthing, supporting disadvantaged young people.

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- CAMHS Acre Day Hospital, caring for children with serious mental health needs.
- Turning Tides and Worthing Homeless Project, working with residents in crisis.

Placing a gambling venue in this environment is incompatible with safeguarding and contrary to your duties under the Gambling Act (2005).

3. Conflict with Worthing Local Plan

This proposal contravenes:

- DM5 a) iii) make a positive contribution to the sense of place, local character and distinctiveness of an area
- DM5 a) vii) make a positive contribution to creating a safe and secure environment by integrating measures for security and designing out opportunities for crime
- DM6 a) The enhancement of the public realm in Worthing, particularly in the town centre and seafront
- DM13 b) Changes of use […] will be carefully controlled to ensure that they support, rather than detract from the successful functioning of the centres and their ability to meet local needs […] When considering all such proposals regard will be had as to whether they would:
    - i) make a positive contribution to the vitality, viability and diversity of the centre

Gambling venues erode retail character, deter footfall, and can generate crime hotspots and there is mounting evidence demonstrating a direct link between gambling venues and crime. An independent study commissioned by Ealing Council identified: “A clear and statistically significant increase in crime and disorder associated with the saturation of gambling premises.”
This included increased theft, fraud, antisocial behaviour, and violence placing additional strain on police and local services.

4. Legal Duty

Under the Gambling Act 2005, the Council has a statutory duty to protect children and vulnerable people from harm and exploitation.

I therefore urge you to:

- Refuse this application outright on planning, public health, and crime prevention grounds.
- Require a full Health Impact Assessment and cumulative impact review before any reconsideration.
- Strengthen local policy to prevent the clustering of gambling venues near sensitive services.

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This is not simply a change of use. It is a decision with lasting consequences for some of the most vulnerable members of our community and a retrograde step in the development of a thriving, healthy town centre.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Dr Beccy Cooper MP
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Co-Chair, Gambling Reform All-Party Parliamentary Group

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