



# Planning relaxation opens up new opportunities

With Barking and Dagenham trying to enforce a 400m exclusion zone around betting shops, the UK's central government has temporarily lifted the use class system for commercial property.

PLANNING

**T**he UK government has introduced new laws to help revitalise the high street which provide an opportunity for bookmakers despite the constant complaints from anti-gambling lobbyists on the 'clustering' of betting shops.

On the back of the Mary Portas report on the high street, the government has decided to relax the use classes for commercial property allowing a betting shop, normally in class A2, to open up in other classifications. For a one off period of up to two years, the developer only needs to notify the Council beforehand.

Communities and Local Government secretary Eric Pickles explained: "To create opportunities for new and start-up businesses and help retain the viability and vitality of our town centres, we will allow a range of buildings to convert temporarily to a set of alternative uses including shops (A1), financial and professional services (A2), restaurants and cafes (A3) and offices (B1) for up to two years. We will continue to keep the operation of the use classes system under review to ensure it is as flexible as possible and promotes sustainable development."

So for the next two years buildings designated as A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, B1, D1 or D2 classes are fair game for new betting shops. This open approach is not being welcomed by some local councils, with Barking and Dagenham in particular making a concerted effort to prevent more betting shops opening in the borough.

The council has launched a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) entitled 'Evening the Odds': curbing the proliferation of betting offices. Among the measures put forward in the consultation is a 400m exclusion zone around existing betting offices to prevent the clustering and concentration of such premises, effectively stopping any further betting shop developments.

Cabinet member for regeneration Councillor Cameron Geddes said: "This has been a concern for the Council for many years and we have been trying to tackle it head on. We consider that it is in the interests of our residents and the vitality and viability of our town centres that this proliferation needs to be carefully controlled."

"Research has shown that the number of betting offices in an area not only restricts the retail choices available to local communities, but can also have a damaging effect on people's health and finances."

The six week public consultation for the Article 4 Direction and the draft SPD started on Wednesday 15 May and will run to Wednesday 26 June 2013

The Association of British Bookmakers has been particularly scathing of the council's approach: "At a time when one in eight high street shops stand empty, and a further 60,000 are expected to close by 2018, we are surprised by the actions of Barking and Dagenham Council."

"Local councils already have sufficient powers to prevent bookmakers from opening where there is evidence that it will cause harm to the local community. Article 4 Directions are just one example. However, they should only be used where there is evidence. In Barking and Dagenham, no such evidence has been provided."

"The truth is that bookmakers are one of the few industries that continue to invest in the High Street while other sectors take their business out of town. Nationally, we employ nearly 60,000 people, many of who are aged 18-24, and we offer twice the number of jobs than the average to those without formal qualifications. For each betting shop that opens over £100,000 is invested in the local economy, providing work for local carpenters, glaziers and electricians."

Licensing expert David Clifton, who has just launched a licensing and gambling consultancy called Clifton Davies, commented: "I think the interesting thing here is that Barking and Dagenham are putting

forward this proposal for consultation with a view to using planning processes to restrict the number of betting offices whilst the government is at the same time introducing flexible use legislation. The council's website refers to a six week consultation period not only in relation to the draft SPD but also an Article 4 Direction. In light of the new relaxations that came into force on 30 May, I believe the latter would need a 12 month consultation period on restricting the new rights in order to avoid potential compensation claims."

## ANALYSIS

Bookmakers benefiting from planning relaxations was an unexpected development given the negative press of recent years, but the Barking and Dagenham consultation is much more in line with expectations. David Clifton pointed out that problem gambling concerns are 'more properly the remit of the Licensing Authority insofar as issues of protection of the vulnerable are concerned and should not be usurped by the Planning Authority'. He suggested that the move might see the return of something akin to the old demand test, but under wholly separate legislative means.



# Commission for match fix education pr

A jointly funded initiative between the g Commission has provided a three day a

EDUCATION

**L**ast month saw the first three day seminar on education against match fixing as part of a project jointly funded by the online betting industry and the European Commission. Organised by EU Athletes, the federation of player associations in Europe representing 25,000 athletes, the seminar highlighted the vital importance of all sectors working together to educate professional sports people about sports betting integrity.

EU Athletes' three day tutor training seminar heard first-hand from the police, the online betting industry, and former athletes on how to behave properly in rela-

tion to sports and betting. The purpose of the seminar was to give the player associations' tutors tools to use during the locker room visits, when they are educating the players face to face.

Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for sport, said: "Match-fixing is a complex problem with many sides to it. But one very important element that the European Commission focuses on in our efforts to tackle match-fixing is prevention. In this respect, educational programmes and awareness raising campaigns can have a significant impact by reaching those most at risk of being