

Casino will bring Degeneration not Regeneration, says the Social Justice Policy Group

This is the interim report of the Gambling Working Group of the Social Justice Policy Group. The working group is chaired by Professor Mark Griffiths, Professor of Gambling Studies at Nottingham Trent University. This paper will be followed by a full report in May 2006 outlining the full extent of the negative social impact of gambling and its close relationship with other social problems, including family breakdown, drug and alcohol addiction, and serious personal debt.

The decision to oppose the plan to site Britain's first super-casino in Manchester, is motivated by the wish to protect the city and surrounding area from the negative impact this action would have.

Degeneration not Regeneration

There are an increasing number of problem gamblers in the U.K, whose lives could be adversely affected by a new super-casino, not to mention the detrimental impact this could have on local areas and communities with regards to crime and associated social problems

Problem Gambling is on the Rise

There are approximately 300,000 problem gamblers in the UK, although these figures should be considered in the context of relatively limited gambling opportunities available to the public at the time of the survey in 1999, the expansion in online gambling means it is likely to be far higher. Perhaps most worryingly, the levels of problem gambling appear to be much more severe among adolescents.

Manchester is the worst possible location

Many of the social problems which face the nation today, can be seen to be especially prevalent in this region, and would be further exacerbated by the decision to place a casino in their midst. Greater Manchester can already lay claim to having some of the highest levels of crime in the country,

- Manchester had the highest numbers of robberies
- the second highest level of vehicle crime per four towns in the top ten for burglary levels are within the Greater Manchester Police Force area (Oldham, Stockport, Manchester and Bolton),
- the same four make the top ten in the highest crime cities.¹
- Violent Crime is endemic

These adverse components are more likely to be present in East Manchester- the area which has been chosen for the trial, as they are disproportionate to those of a lower socio-economic background. In this part of the city;

¹ Reform compiled data on levels of recorded crime in 2005 for each city in England and Wales with a population over 100,000. Crime levels were divided by population numbers drawn from the 2001 census, or the individual London boroughs, from the ONS -2004 mid term estimates.

- 50 percent of the population is economically inactive and totally dependent on the state
- Life expectancy for men is 7 years less than the national average and 4 years less than the national average for women
- Unemployment in East Manchester is 5.6 percent of the working age group compared to 2.8 percent in the country as a whole
- 13.3 percent of the population of working age is on incapacity benefit compared to 4.5 percent in England and Wales²

Problem Gambling and Socio-Economic Disadvantage

People in lower socio-economic groups are most likely to be affected by problem gambling.

Research suggests that the link between problem gambling and general “disadvantage” should be noted,³ indicating that **low income** is one of the most consistent factors associated with problem gambling worldwide. It states that although people on low incomes may not spend more on gambling in absolute terms, than those on higher wages, they do spend a much greater proportion of their incomes than higher socio-economic groups. Other associated factors, include:

- being male,
- having a parent who was or who has been a problem gambler,
- being separated or divorced.

Those who have significantly higher rates of problem gambling than the general population also experience:

- unemployment,
- poor health and housing,
- low educational qualifications

Social Problems

A vulnerable urban centre such as Manchester, would, contrary to attempts to convince us otherwise, find its already fragile fabric under increasing strain. Such a region will not benefit from the placement of a further drain on resources. The minimal claims of regeneration and employment creation are far outweighed by the long-term damage a super-casino could inflict on one of the most deprived areas of the country, especially considering the resources which would need to be ploughed into tackling the fall-out of social problems.

There is a close correlation between gambling and other addictive activities, such as drug and alcohol abuse.

According to the BMA report, problem gambling is often co-morbid with other behavioural and psychological disorders, and there is frequently a link with alcohol or drugs as a way of coping with anxiety or depression caused by gambling problems, which conversely may trigger the desire to gamble. Measures would need to be put in place to

² Manchester City Council website

³ Griffiths and Delfabbro (2001) and Griffiths (2006)

deal with the detrimental effects which would undoubtedly result from a decision to place a super-casino in this region.

In the UK problem gambling is very closely linked to people getting into serious personal debt

A recent YouGov survey showed not only that serious personal debt is considered the number one social problem in the UK but also that serious personal debt is one of the main causes of family breakdown. The Debt Working Group of the Social Justice Policy Group has outlined in forensic detail both the level and detrimental effects of rising personal debt in the UK, particularly for low socio- economic groups. We believe that installing a super- casino in an area of relative deprivation will cause levels of personal debt to spiral to unprecedented levels in Beswick, causing serious damage to family stability in the UK.

There is clear evidence from the experience of other countries that installing a super- casino can often lead to vice and degeneration in the neighbouring communities. Historically prostitution, organised crime and gang violence centre around casinos, leading to degeneration not regeneration.

Most Vulnerable-the Young

There is clear evidence to suggest that the young are most severely affected by problem gambling.

The BMA report suggests that age is a determining factor. Groups most likely to experience problems with casino-based gambling were single, unemployed males, aged under thirty. **Adolescent** gambling in the U.K is a grave cause for concern, with one study's findings illustrating that gambling was highly correlated with other potentially addictive activities such as illicit drug taking and alcohol abuse.⁴ The nature of addiction means that these cumulative risk factors are more likely to be present, and that those who are most vulnerable are most likely to be susceptible to the resulting harms. The BMA report points to a number of studies which highlight a figure of 5-6% of pathological gamblers among adolescent fruit machine gamblers, a figure which it says is two to three times higher than that identified in the adult population. A further study cited by the BMA report demonstrated that around 4% of all juvenile crime in one UK city was slot-machine related, based on 1,850 arrests in a one year period.⁵ The BMA report concludes that "young people are clearly more vulnerable to the negative consequences of gambling than adults." Once again, it is the least protected element of society whom we place at the most risk.

Conclusions

Availability of opportunities to gamble and the incidents of problem gambling within a community are known to be linked. The potentially hazardous threat that a super-casino would pose, is reinforced by research indicating that the most problematic type of gambling in Britain

⁴ Griffiths and Sutherland, 1998

⁵ Yeoman and Griffiths 1996

is associated with games in a casino. The placement of a super-casino in this area could have devastating social consequences.

We have a duty to exercise a greater social responsibility to our most vulnerable members than such an action would imply.

28 March 2007

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