

Southampton and its surrounding estates and suburbs have always had a high presence of gambling premises.

From bookmakers, adult gaming/arcades, shops selling lottery tickets and scratchcards, bingo halls, casinos and public houses with fruit machines, it is easy to see that the ability to gamble, or be surrounded by gambling in a city the size of Southampton is without doubt inevitable. And, with online gambling, one of the most common and popular ways to gamble, you are able to have a casino in your living room, gambling has never had such a dominant presence.

Over the 25 years that I gambled in and around Southampton the landscape has differed from time to time with more bookmakers visible from 2004 until 2019 when fixed odds betting terminals dominated bookmakers and became commonly known as the crack cocaine of gambling.

When the ability to stake £100 a spin, then reduced down to £50 was removed from these premises due to the extremely harmful nature of this type of gambling, and a £2 cap was put in place bookmakers began to close many shops uk wide.

But there are still many bookmakers in Southampton and its surrounding area. For instance three in Totton, two in Hedge End, four in Shirley, Portswood has three, Woolston 2, and there are lots in Southampton Central.

But many of the shops on the estates have closed, for instance Corals on Windermere Avenue Millbrook, Ladbrokes on Rownhams Road, Coral in Fair Oak, Ladbrokes in Sholing, and many more, all due to FOBT machines not making those shops the profit that were before being capped.

My concern since then is the rise in arcades/adult gaming premises opening up in Southampton. They operate identical machines to the ones used in bookmakers, capped at £2 stakes but with identical slots to bookmakers with £500 top prizes.

These slot machines can still take hundreds of pounds off a player quickly so they're a very addictive and Powerful gambling type.

The first ever arcade I used to play fruit machines on which is in Shirley high street is still there nearly 40 years since I first gambled there, so gambling premises aren't going anywhere.

The biggest issue for me is the actual framework within all gambling premises to protect customers from gambling harm. And not just vulnerable customers who are already addicted to gambling but every single person who enters their premises.

The need to verify identity, age check, financial checks should all be in place from day one as it is still too easy to allow somebody to literally spend hundreds or thousands of pounds before checks are made to consider whether this customer should be restricted or prevented from playing.

Gambling should be a fun as a trip to the cinema, bowling or perhaps the theatre, and not a trip into a world where the mental health of that person who leaves a gambling shop feeling anxious, upset, possibly even suicidal because they have lost all their money, but the protection for customers still isn't there.

Feedback from within the lived experience community is that some operators are more robust in checking in with customers, identifying and excluding customers and carrying out financial checks on regular punters, but this seems to be the exception.

I was invited to Admiral Casinos safer gambling convention in Leeds in October 2023 and my argument that is that there is no such phrase within their sector or gambling due to their lack of customer care and responsibility.

I do of course accept if somebody goes for a day at the races and placing a few bets is just part of a day out, or placing a few regular affordable bets each Saturday at the bookies can be fun and harmless, but too many people go way beyond that and are not stopped.

So , in summary if there were fewer premises, and all existing premises were checked regularly to ensure that they are following their code of conduct and policies to protect customers from gambling harm, it would make a difference in Southampton.

Many thanks

Bryan Dimmick

Southampton Resident

Lived experience of gambling harm.