
TO THE PEOPLE OF LONDON

Look around you. Something is slowly destroying the quality and character of our neighbourhood.

The people who live, work and play in Soho and Chinatown are proud of our ability to attract millions of people to visit our restaurants, shops, bars, clubs, pubs, theatres and historical features.

But there is a threat posed by the number of bookmakers in our area, and the casino-style gambling in them.

Up until a few years ago the local 'bookies' were places where you could put a casual bet on the horses, and were a welcome part of the community. Currently there is an application being considered by Westminster City Council to open a tenth bookmakers in Chinatown, which we don't want. But it seems the Council is all but powerless to prevent it.

Because of a loophole in the law, bookmakers introduced gaming machines - they're called Fixed Odds Betting Terminals - where you can now bet £100 a spin on slots and casino games. That's 50 times more than any other slot machine on our high streets. Even in the West End's highly supervised casinos you're only allowed £5 a go.

These machines are dangerous because they encourage problem gambling and crime and disorder. One in eight FOBT players uses payday loans to fund their gambling. And 80% of players staking the average £13.40 per spin exhibit problem gambling characteristics. Because these FOBTs bring in so much money the bookies have opened more shops and trade often from 7am to late in the evening.

The result is inevitable, with a huge number of people addicted to gambling and the problems this causes. Local charities are finding it a strain, helping people with their addiction and the outcome of unrestrained gambling. There is also clear evidence FOBTs are used to launder money. We're calling on the Government to remove the casino gambling element from betting shops and bookmakers. The Government continues to turn a blind eye and appears to swallow the fanciful figures and excuses cooked up by the big Bookmaker PLCs.

In Soho and Chinatown we don't want any more bookmakers - there are more than enough. Look around you.

We would also like the Government to stop pretending it doesn't know FOBTs are a real and growing problem and, at the very least, to drop the staking level on FOBTs to £2 a spin. That way it becomes a game and not a road to anti-social behaviour and problems in the community.

Signed by

Cindy Hacker, Trustee, **Chinese Community Centre**. Edmund Yeo, Chairman, **Chinese Information and Advice Centre**.

Leslie Hardcastle OBE, President, **The Soho Society**. The Rev Simon Buckley, **St Anne's Church, Soho**.

Colin Bennett, Chairman, **Leicester Square Association**. Joffy Conolly, Headteacher, **Soho Parish School**.

Father Paul Walsh, **The Church of Notre Dame de France**. The Rev Alan Carr, **St. Giles-in-the-Fields**.

The Rev Vincent Aun, **Chinese Church in London**. Jo Weir MBE, Chair, **Covent Garden Community Association**.

Dr Stephen Ng MBE, Chinese Concern Coordinator, **Islington Chinese Association**. Bibi Lynch, Presenter, **Soho Radio**.

Ken Wright, Managing Director, **The Phoenix Artist Club**.

Dick Laurie, **Musician and former Editor of the Soho Clarion**.

Tony Shrimplin, Chair, **MoSo - Museum of Soho**.

Tim Skene, Drop In Manager, **London Jesus Centre**.

Adam Wiles, Head of Property Asset Management, **Gascoyne Holdings Ltd**.

Neil Drinkwater, Administrator, **West End Community Centre**.

Jackson Ng, **Lawyer**. Pastor Lanre Olagoke, **Art Alive Trust**.

Joseph Wu, Advisor, **British Chinese Project**. **Chinese Welfare Trust**.

Murad Qureshi AM, **London Assembly, GLA**. **Conservative Friends of the Chinese**.

Chinese For Labour. **Chinese Liberal Democrats**.

