

Written submission by Mr Barney Ray (agent) on application 20/01326/FUL: 11 – 13 Market Place, Newbury

The Covid-19 global pandemic is an unforeseen crisis that has decimated town centres, leaving many vacancies in its wake. Tens of thousands of stores have been closed, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of jobs across the country. The recent Use Classes Order Amendment has introduced Class E, which seeks to introduce flexibility into our commercial centres by reducing regulations. While the proposal does not explicitly involve the new Class E, it must be acknowledged that the Government's approach is one of pragmatism. It seeks to remove unnecessary use-class restrictions, giving the best chance of achieving an economic recovery.

It is recognised that there have been several objections from the public in relation to the application. These are primarily based on concerns around gambling and noise. I set out as follows the ways in which these perceived concerns have been addressed and justified.

Firstly, regarding the gambling concern: the current lawful use of 11-13 Market Place is as a betting shop (*sui generis*), meaning that if this application is refused, the premises can legally trade as such without the requirement for planning permission. The proposed adult gaming centre (AGC) comprises a softer form of gambling, with strict safeguards in place to ensure the health and wellbeing of its customers in line with guidance from the Gambling Commission. Your attention is drawn to the Applicant's Operational Brochure, which sets out the host of measures taken to ensure responsible operation.

Secondly, regarding the noise concern: I would also like to draw Members' attention to the noise assessment and lack of objection from Environmental Health and Thames Valley Police, both of whom were consulted. The assessment concludes that a 24-hour use will be acceptable in noise terms, subject to minor internal alterations. By virtue of its central location and well-managed operation, there are not considered to be any risks from noise to nearby residents, thus facilitating a harmonious co-existence.

In summary, this is a fantastic opportunity to bring a vacant property back into use, during a difficult period for the economy, similar to that which is currently lawful and not to the detriment of the area. We would therefore urge members to take a pragmatic stance, as have the UK Government, in granting planning permission for the proposed use.