# Slot machine firms target UK’s poorest areas as calls grow for tighter regulation



Slot machine companies in the UK are increasingly focusing their business strategies on the nation’s most economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, a trend exacerbated by a growing number of "adult gaming centres" (AGCs). According to recent investigations, the number of these venues has surged by 7% since 2022, fuelling concerns about their impact on vulnerable populations. The profits from these establishments are often funnelled to wealthy, overseas owners and private equity firms operating with offshore financial structures.

The findings reveal a stark reality: approximately a third of the 1,452 AGCs reviewed are located in the poorest ten per cent of British neighbourhoods, with over 50% situated in the most deprived areas. This geographical concentration is particularly pronounced in seaside towns, traditionally associated with amusement arcades, but is alarmingly evident in other economically challenged towns, like Middlesbrough and Hull, which host a significant number of AGCs.

These shifts have led prominent figures, including Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, to advocate for greater regulatory powers for local councils, aiming to control or limit the establishment of new AGCs. He expressed that these venues often exploit vulnerable individuals in communities already facing considerable challenges. “It’s time we were honest about what AGCs really are,” Burnham stated, pressing for urgent legislative changes to ensure local authorities have the power to curb their proliferation.

Addiction specialists have echoed these concerns, citing evidence that highlights the addictive nature of slot machines—identified as one of the most harmful gambling products in recent health surveys. Prof Henrietta Bowden-Jones, the national clinical adviser on gambling harms at NHS England, remarked that these venues, particularly those operating around the clock, are designed to entice players to gamble for extended periods, often leading to devastating personal and financial consequences.

The financial implications are significant. AGCs took in more than £530 million from gamblers in the last reported year, illustrating the scale of their operation and the potential societal costs. The share of profits tends to divert away from local communities and funnel into the hands of the affluent few. For instance, the UK division of Admiral Slots, owned by Austrian billionaire Johann Graf, reported substantial profits and dividends that starkly contrast the financial struggles of the areas in which they operate.

Supporting this narrative, a recent analysis found that the UK’s most deprived areas have over ten times the number of betting shops compared to wealthier regions. More than a fifth of all gambling outlets, including AGCs, are situated in the poorest neighbourhoods, where communities are particularly susceptible to the perils of gambling addiction.

The calls for reform are gaining traction. A coalition of 36 councils and several mayors have urged the government to amend existing gambling legislation, stating that the current framework is inadequate for protecting these communities. Local leaders emphasise that without reform, the likelihood of exacerbating social inequalities only increases.

Furthermore, private equity ventures, such as those affiliated with Morgan Stanley, have entered the AGC market, raising additional concerns about the ethical implications of profit-driven motives prioritising remuneration over community welfare. While the arcades trade body Bacta claims that its members are committed to social responsibility, the growing evidence suggests there is a pressing need for better regulation and oversight.

In summary, the rise of AGCs and their concentration in the UK's poorest areas present a complex issue that intertwines economic hardship, regulatory gaps, and corporate accountability. As more local leaders and addiction experts rally for legislative change, the call for a reassessment of how gambling establishments are licensed and regulated grows ever more urgent.

### Reference Map

1. [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/18/slot-machine-firms-uk-poorest-areas-andy-burnham)
2. [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/18/slot-machine-firms-uk-poorest-areas-andy-burnham)
3. [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025/04/02/councils-and-mayors-urge-government-to-give-them-power-to-block-betting-shops)
4. [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/aug/23/uks-most-deprived-areas-have-highest-number-of-gambling-outlets-report)
5. [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/mar/12/people-from-poor-uk-areas-more-likely-to-be-high-risk-online-gamblers-study)
6. [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-58300899)
7. [[7]](https://www.southampton.gov.uk/news/article/calls-for-urgent-gambling-reform/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/18/slot-machine-firms-uk-poorest-areas-andy-burnham> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/18/slot-machine-firms-uk-poorest-areas-andy-burnham> - An article from The Guardian reveals that slot machine companies are targeting Britain's poorest neighbourhoods, with a 7% increase in the number of 'adult gaming centres' (AGCs) since 2022. These venues are disproportionately concentrated in deprived areas, prompting concerns from addiction experts and calls from politicians, including Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, for councils to have the authority to prevent new sites from opening.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025/04/02/councils-and-mayors-urge-government-to-give-them-power-to-block-betting-shops> - ITV News reports that 36 councils and two mayors across the UK have written to the government calling for urgent reform of gambling laws. They express concerns over the proliferation of slot machine and betting shops on high streets, particularly in deprived areas, and seek greater powers to prevent new premises from opening.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/aug/23/uks-most-deprived-areas-have-highest-number-of-gambling-outlets-report> - A report from The Guardian highlights that the UK's most deprived areas have more than 10 times the number of betting shops compared to the most affluent parts. The study, commissioned by the Standard Life Foundation, found that 21% of gambling outlets are in the poorest tenth of the country, while only 2% are in the wealthiest areas.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/mar/12/people-from-poor-uk-areas-more-likely-to-be-high-risk-online-gamblers-study> - The Guardian reports on a study indicating that individuals from deprived areas are more likely to engage in high-risk online gambling. The research found that gambling firms generate the majority of their revenue from the 5% of accounts that incur the largest losses, with a higher prevalence of risky gambling behaviors in economically disadvantaged communities.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-58300899> - BBC News reports that a study by the University of Bristol found that a fifth of all gambling premises in the UK are located in the poorest areas. The research also revealed that betting shops are 10 times more likely to be found in deprived towns than in affluent areas, with Glasgow, Liverpool, London, and Middlesbrough having the highest number of betting shops per capita.
7. <https://www.southampton.gov.uk/news/article/calls-for-urgent-gambling-reform/> - Southampton City Council, along with over 35 other local leaders and campaign groups, has called on the government for urgent reforms to gambling laws. They argue that current legislation is outdated and fails to protect communities from the harms associated with gambling, particularly the proliferation of betting and slot machine shops in high streets.