**Ladbrokes Campaign**

Dear Ms Marsh,

I am a Marketplace Manager at Ladbrokes in South London, overseeing 4 shops and 19 members of staff.

My colleagues and myself are all concerned about the misleading campaign against betting shops which does not reflect the genuine experience of people in the industry, and the potential impact of a change in stakes and prizes on gaming machines.

In many of our shops these machines account for around 50% of the shop’s income and given that a large number of shops are marginal contributors, any further limits on these machines will almost certainly lead to shop closures and the loss of many jobs.

Our customers enjoy playing gaming machines and the vast majority play for a short time and spend relatively small sums of money.  However some of our customers have higher incomes and enjoy staking at a higher level.  This is not an indication of a problem, as a problem gambler will gamble on all sorts of different products and may operate at many different stake levels.  A game such as roulette gives about 97% of its stakes back to customers in winnings so it is impossible for someone to lose the sort of money that I’ve seen mentioned such as “£18,000 per hour”. There is no evidence that a change in stake would have any impact on problem gambling.

While it is not our role to tell people how much they should spend we do closely monitor what happens inside the betting shop – and any signs of stress, agitated behaviour or distress would prompt an interaction from staff and an inquiry as to whether the customer needed any help or whether they would like to take a break. Each shop keeps an Intervention Log detailing every such incident or conversation that takes place. Many of our customers are regulars and our shop staff know their usual staking behaviour well. We also have a good Self Exclusion scheme for those who recognise they have a problem. We clearly display leaflets and posters about Gamcare and how to get help if needed. We can also monitor and switch off machines from the counter if we see somebody behaving unusually or changing their spending habits.   Importantly we also constantly review our approach to seek areas of improvement.

Betting shops on the High Street offer a safe environment, and our customers use other types of retail while visiting the shop. Lots of our shops open in vacant premises and provide vital rents and rates as well as jobs. We are already licensed and regulated and further restrictions on product will hand an instant advantage to online operators. Unfortunately if any negative decisions were taken on machines, we are likely to end up with even more empty premises and a continuing decline of High Streets.

On behalf of my shop teams I would therefore ask that stakes and prizes are left as they are.

 Yours sincerely