



Amusement Centres

The purpose of this Advice Note is to give general guidance to intending developers, their professional advisors and agents. It is designed to provide advice on the planning criteria to be applied when an application for this form of development is being considered. It should be stressed that the note is not a specific statement of Departmental policy but rather one of advice and guidance.

Each application or appeal is treated on its merits and the application of the guidance given to a particular case is always a matter calling for judgement.

Any legal views stated in this note have no statutory force and should not be relied upon as an authoritative interpretation of the law.

A list of other current notes in this series can be obtained from [Divisional Planning Offices](#) or from the Planning Service's Headquarters.

1. This note deals with the planning questions that arise on proposals to establish amusement centres, however described, whether or not they comprise coffee bars, bingo halls and other amusements as well as pin tables and video games. Casinos or premises used for gaming may provide forms of gambling which are illegal. Planning applications for development which comprises illegal activity cannot be entertained.
2. The development of an amusement centre, whether by new construction or by the material change of use of existing premises, requires planning permission. In addition some centres may also require a licence under Section 31 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1934 i.e., premises used for singing and music or public entertainment. The two forms of control relevant to some amusement centres are quite distinct and should not be confused. The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1934 is concerned firstly with public order and secondly with safety of premises used for public entertainments. Planning permission on the other hand is concerned with matters relevant to the development and use of land. District Councils have wide powers under The Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 to control and abate nuisances arising from noise and litter. These are problems often associated with amusement centres. As such matters can have an affect on the amenity of an area they also fall for consideration under the planning code.
3. The factors which call for consideration on a planning application for an amusement centre are its effects on the amenity and character of its surroundings, and its effects on road safety and traffic flow. The latter merit special consideration where the premises front on to a busy traffic route or are near an awkward road junction, or are so sited that many visitors arriving on foot will have to cross a busy road or use an inadequate footway. The highways effects will depend to some extent on the activities to be carried on. For example, large concentrations of people at the beginning and end of bingo sessions held at an amusement centre would have a different effect from the same number of people arriving and departing over a longer period.
4. The effects on amenity and the character of the surroundings are more diverse. They will usually depend on the location of the proposed amusement centre in relation to other development, its appearance, the kind of amusement to be provided, the noise likely to be produced and the hours of operation. As regards the location, amusement centres are not normally acceptable near residential property nor are they good neighbours for schools, churches, hospitals, or hotels. They are out of place in conservation areas or other places of special architectural or historic interest, except perhaps where these cover a really wide area. In areas where one amusement centre may not be out of place, it would be permissible to take into account the effect of larger numbers on the character of a neighbourhood.
5. In towns where there is no provision for areas for amusement or entertainment, amusement centres are usually best sited in districts of mixed commercial development. In areas where shopping is the predominant use, the likely effect of the development on the character of the shopping centre is relevant. An important consideration will be whether an amusement centre would break up an otherwise continuous shopping frontage; and although this can be mitigated by attention to the design of the facade and entrances, it may nevertheless be a serious objection in some shopping streets.

6. The *kinds of amusement* offered will determine the number of people visiting the centre at any one time and the likelihood of crowding and disturbance. As noted earlier, sessional events such as bingo cause greater concentrations of people at certain times than casual forms of amusement.
7. *Hours of opening* are important in some cases. An amusement centre may be disturbing to occupants of nearby property if it stays open late in the evenings and at weekends. One which is only open during the day may, in certain areas, be more acceptable than one which stays open late at night. These matters are, however, relevant only insofar as they affect proper planning considerations, e.g., amenity.
8. *Noise*. Amusement centres are often noisy. Although it may be possible to minimise noise by sound proofing and by limiting the area open to the street, the amount of noise likely to be caused directly or indirectly and its effects on nearby development should always be taken into account in considering the siting of an amusement centre. This may, however, be of less consequence in an area where there is already considerable noise from other sources, including amusement and sporting activities. Some activities, such as shooting galleries, are particularly noisy.
9. *Conditional Permissions*. It is sometimes reasonable to give permission for an amusement centre subject to conditions regulating the form of construction or the use of the premises. Examples of conditions which may be imposed for the reasons given above - in addition to any others that may be necessary - are a prohibition of shooting galleries or the playing of games of a sessional character; a restriction on the times during which the premises may be open to the public; or a requirement that certain works should be carried out to control the emission of noise, such as sound proofing walls or ceilings and requiring external doors to be self-closing.