

## **Short statement on the merits of Blackpool's Case for a regional casino: Creating a World Class Resort Destination**

1. Government at national, regional and local levels has concluded that in Blackpool there is a conspicuous and urgent need for economic and social regeneration and a unique opportunity to achieve this through regional casino development. The physical consequences of decline are apparent in the aged and tired resort infrastructure; the lack of major investment by existing local stakeholders; and the failure to attract appropriate investment in new and existing attractions. This decline is reflected in some of the worst indicators of deprivation and disadvantage in the UK<sup>1</sup>. Blackpool's need for regeneration is overwhelming.
2. Faced with an unsustainable, tourism-based economy - in steady but not yet terminal decline - Blackpool has embarked on a radical and ambitious programme to re-invent the town as an all-year-round, world-class resort destination. This has one purpose: to recreate the prosperity to make Blackpool a better place to live.
3. To address this need and create a sustainable economy capable of delivering all-year-round jobs and prosperity, Blackpool has forged over the last six years a radical physical and spiritual transformational programme supported by all local, regional and national stakeholders and reflected in policies, strategies and statutory plans. From the beginning the key catalyst has been first, a single resort casino and then later, a cluster of resort casinos delivering a wide range of entertainment, conferencing and convention facilities; 4- and 5-star hotels; high-quality restaurants and ancillary retail. The vision being an all-year-round, weather-independent, high-quality entertainment complex, which will stimulate investment from existing stakeholders such as Leisure Parcs (owners of the Tower, the Piers, the Winter Gardens amongst others) and the Pleasure Beach, as well as attracting new investors, creating an entertainment offer that fits in and compliments the business and activity of the resort.
4. Whilst other alternatives that might provide this catalytic impact were considered and pursued none were forthcoming; indeed other than through this route there has been no interest in investing in Blackpool for decades. There is no other viable option for this town. This is a major differentiating factor from all the other competing areas, each of whom have a range of alternatives, and none of which have the existing cluster of businesses and activities which would be transformed through this single catalytic action. As the UK's top location for mass tourism and mass entertainment, Blackpool is the uniquely right place for a regional casino as evidenced by other resort casino destinations around the world. Plans to tackle the issues and develop this vision are well developed, costed and overwhelmingly supported by the public locally and nationally.

### **Test of Social Impact**

5. Blackpool has the characteristics of a city population with the second densest built environment outside of London and an urban population across the Fylde coast of 260,000. It has some of the most disadvantaged and deprived communities in the country. With an urban population of this nature and constrained within tight boundaries, the social impact (for good or ill) of a regional casino can be easily and reliably measured and impact assessed in a city location.
6. As a leisure destination attracting 90% or more of visits to the casino complex from outside of Blackpool (70% of visits to Blackpool are from outside of the north west) net economic benefits to Blackpool will be maximised.
7. Blackpool will use a unique range of existing intervention mechanisms to test, resolve and monitor social impacts, supported by excellent local academic institutions. It has unique expertise, in association with police and social services, in dealing with a hedonistic culture. It is

---

<sup>1</sup> See section 1.4 of Blackpool's submission to the Casino Advisory Panel, March 2006

far advanced in developing a specific set of plans and services to protect its' vulnerable residents, and visitors, from the dangers of problem gambling.

### **Willingness to License**

8. Blackpool has unparalleled public and organisational support for its proposals, built over six years of strategy development, consultation, discussion and debate. Support in Blackpool includes all parties on the Council with the plans approved by full Council four times - most recently in March 2006 when Councillors endorsed Blackpool's bid and draft Licensing Policy Statement with all-party support and no votes cast against. All three party leaders on the Council offer their wholehearted support for the proposal. Support extends to all local authorities in Lancashire, the Lancashire Economic Partnership, the Northwest Development Agency, the North West Regional Assembly, the Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board, the Lancashire Constabulary and Blackpool Primary Care Trust, the local federation of schools and colleges and members of both houses in Parliament. Blackpool is also the nation's favourite choice for a regional casino<sup>2</sup>.
9. The Blackpool bid is the product of a multi-agency Casino Steering Group comprising the above-mentioned partners and other local public and private sector interests. The Blackpool Local Strategic Partnership has endorsed the bid.
10. The anti-gambling lobby locally is loud but not strong. This voice - which is present in all gambling jurisdictions around the world – has inserted a healthy check and balance into the debate locally and has ensured that the assessment of potential economic and social impacts are properly assessed. Political resolve in Blackpool to license is firm and crosses political boundaries. It will remain constant irrespective of the political make-up of the Council.

### **Social Impact and Community Benefits**

11. Adverse social impact of casino development is expected to be minimal and hugely outweighed by positive economic and social impact. However, Blackpool has also:
  - Been developing public education, awareness and treatment programmes.
  - established a benchmark position on gambling prevalence and problem gambling across the Fylde Coast<sup>3</sup>.
  - commissioned an independent Social Impact Assessment<sup>4</sup>.
  - agreed a draft Statement of Licensing Policy including development of best practice social responsibility programmes
  - developing the first services for problem gambling in the resort (with Gamcare) as part of its strategy for *Gambling Harm Reduction*<sup>5</sup>
  - is using its Local Area Agreement to ensure that local people benefit
12. Blackpool will exhort maximum community benefit from regional casino development because it will take place on a site largely in public ownership. The regeneration payment will be directed to the construction of a new national conference and exhibition facility. Blackpool will use the resources flowing from this proposal to develop specific initiatives, negotiated with the

---

<sup>2</sup> Populus poll July 2006 for Blackpool Council

<sup>3</sup> Blackpool Residents' Survey, IPSOS/MORI, for Blackpool Council, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Social Impact Assessment of a regional casino in Blackpool: specification. Blackpool Council, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Problem Gambling Harm Reduction Strategy– provision of services and programmes in Blackpool. Blackpool PCT 2006

successful operator, as part of the competitive scheme appraisal and operator selection process. It will target assistance to vulnerable local neighbourhoods. It will use casinos as a catalyst for mixed-use development that will recapture old markets and develop new ones, maximise regeneration, job growth and wider business improvement. Blackpool will also use the business rate uplift and operator contributions to develop a Community Regeneration Fund to benefit local communities.

## **Regional Context**

13. Blackpool is the only shortlisted location with complete and unambiguous regional support. It is the priority location with both the North West Development Agency and North West Regional Assembly:
  - The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) 2006-2009, submitted for Ministerial approval, identifies Blackpool as a key Transformational Action and a regional asset in urgent need of regeneration.
  - The draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) policy W8, submitted to Government in January 2006, identifies Blackpool as the regional priority for casino-led regeneration over other areas that have other opportunities for regeneration.
  - The Central Lancashire City Region Development Programme (CRDP), part of the Northern Way strategy, fully supports the bid as does the Lancashire Economic Strategy.
  - The Borough's Local Development Framework (LDF) incorporates the CLQ planning brief as a supplementary planning document.
14. The Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) has prioritised Blackpool for regional casino development, committed long-term financial support to delivery of the Masterplan and (jointly with Central Government) established the Urban Regeneration Company, ReBlackpool: the only URC in the country with a remit to deliver casino gambling as a keystone to its wider regeneration strategy.

## **Regeneration and Economic benefits**

15. The PION model of economic impact for the regional casino in Blackpool quantifies the expected benefits the casino and conference centre would bring: an estimated 2500 to 3400 jobs and between 3.8% and 5.8% of the total GVA (within the range £62.0m to £96.4m) together with between £200m to £450m of capital investment and between 4.2m and 5.5m visits per annum. The associated social and environmental benefits will bring dramatic improvement to the quality of life in many of the town's deprived communities. Development of the casino is the key catalyst for investment elsewhere in the resort.
16. Working with key partners Blackpool will ensure that these economic benefits are passed to the town's people. By combining the resources of the Regional Gaming Academy, based in the Blackpool and Fylde College, the Casino Training Alliance and the New Blackpool Enterprise Centre (currently being constructed) local access to new casino job opportunities will be enhanced.
17. Blackpool's business community overwhelmingly support the regional casino proposals recognising that without it the long-standing and inexorable decline in visit numbers and stays will continue, impacting on their very survival. Only a tiny minority have expressed fears about

potential displacement effects. These have been assessed in the economic impact model<sup>6</sup>. The regional casino will increase visitor numbers and annual turnover to the benefit of most existing businesses by stimulating much needed investment in existing attractions and the creation of an all-year-round resort with new investment.

### **The Conference Leisure Quarter (CLQ)**

18. Blackpool's proposed regional casino site is a 23-acre (9-hectare) brownfield site already identified for casino development in the Blackpool Masterplan and designated in the adopted Blackpool Local Plan. Deliberately located in the heart of the resort core, this is the optimal location to attract visitors approaching from motorway or airport, and can readily serve the regeneration of the town centre, surrounding attractions and deeply deprived wards. Close to dense concentrations of holiday accommodation and a market of 10m adults within a 2-hour drive time, 16m within a 3-hour drive time, it has a direct high-level connection to the M55 and national motorway network. There has been no commercial interest in this site for thirty years but the CLQ will set new quality standards in a vibrant, entertainment experience rooted in the seafront tradition
19. Respectful of the Ministerial statement issued in December 2005 Blackpool has deliberately avoided linkage to a casino operator. A competitive process will be launched immediately following approval to license, so that Blackpool derives maximum economic and social benefit for the town. Blackpool has maintained regular dialogue with a full range of international and UK operators.

---

<sup>6</sup> PION Economics' impact model suggests that 7% of customers will be generated locally, 33% within the region and 60% from outside the region; that non-gambling visits to the casino will account for 20% of all visits and that the proportion of visits made by new visitors could be between 55%-70% of all visits