

Jane Bransby
Secretary to the Casinos Advisory Panel
Department for culture, Media and Sport
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22nd December 2005

Dear Ms Bransby

CASINO DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EAST MIDLANDS

Thank you for your letter of 11th November in which you explained the role of the Casinos Advisory Panel in advising the Secretary of State on locations for casinos. We are pleased to respond to your invitation to share our initial views with you.

As the Regional Development Agency for the East Midlands we are keen to ensure that the selected locations reflect our own priorities for economic development and regeneration, and be located in areas which would most benefit the local economy, offering real and lasting regeneration benefits in terms of economic, social and environmental regeneration. To this end we have been working to encourage developments which best secure these objectives.

Regional Casinos

As you rightly state in your letter, a regional casino will be a major development, offering clear potential for regeneration. It would be expected to be part of associated leisure attractions which would mean it would have the critical mass to make a real difference to an area's economic prosperity.

Over recent years we have been working closely with a wide range of partners through an extensive network of relationships, both within this country and overseas, to discuss the scope for casino development in our region. We have found that operators are very receptive to pursuing developments in our region. We feel that if the right locations are selected then the benefits to the regional economy can be considerable, through improved employment opportunities, supply chain linkages for local businesses and increased spending in the local economy as a result of visitor numbers.



Based on our current knowledge of casino development proposals the development which best fits the objectives for regeneration is the proposal by Raven Leisure Limited for the Birchall Estate near Chesterfield.

Raven Leisure Limited, the land owner wishes to develop a regional casino as part of a large scale leisure development, sometimes referred to as 'the Ecodome', comprising a hotel and woodland lodges, a waterpark, an exhibition and conference centre, and a golf course and country club. It has already received outline planning permission for a leisure centre development. The developer now wants to pursue a regional casino proposal as a part of these development proposals.

The Birchall Estate is a former open-cast mining site on the outskirts of Chesterfield. It therefore accords with one of the key priorities for regeneration in the East Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy, namely to respond to the concentration of economic, social and environmental problems associated with the decline of the coal industry. It is also located within a short distance of the Peak District National Park.

In December 2005 we commissioned an independent report to consider the market potential and economic impact of a potential location for a regional casino in the East Midlands. We have attached a summary of the report to illustrate the nature of the development proposals and the consultant's conclusions. We would particularly like to draw your attention to paragraphs 3.16 And 3.17 which state:

"There are a number of other casino development proposals that emda are aware of to date. As part of this exercise, emda have requested a brief comment on whether Birchall Estate provides the best opportunity for the region in terms of attracting a regional casino license. In our opinion, Birchall Estate certainly represents the most developed proposition in comparison to other proposals identified within region, with a viable masterplan detailing the concept and having financial backing."

EMDA's tourism development body, East Midlands Tourism (EMT) agreed the following statement in support of the development at its board meeting in February:

"East Midlands Tourism, emda's tourism development body, supports the ambitious proposal for the Birchall Estate which includes a range of exciting tourism-related facilities for both leisure and business use. The proposal for a 21st century entertainment resort could significantly raise the profile of the region, both nationally and internationally. The project has close fit with EMT's strategy to encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more when they are in the region. The scheme includes the potential for a major casino which could fit well with other elements of the development."



Therefore, based on our current understanding of the range of development proposals we would like to commend to you the proposals at the Birchall Estate, near Chesterfield as a suitable candidate location for a regional casino.

Large and Small Casinos

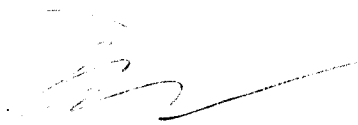
If the development at the Birchall Estate is not successful in being selected as a preferred location for a regional casino, and the developer were to come forward with a proposal for a smaller casino on the same site, then we would need to consider how its impact and regeneration benefits compared with other development proposals in the region.

However, in cognisance of national and regional planning policies we accept that there may be a case for locating a large or small casino in an urban setting, either in close proximity to a town centre, or within a regeneration zone, where a casino could help to ensure that associated development was facilitated.

EMDA works closely with a number of regeneration agencies in the major urban areas of the region who are developing and implementing regeneration strategies. It is conceivable that proposals may come forward for a casino development, and if this were to happen we would need to evaluate their respective benefits, as we have already done for the Birchall development.

We hope you find these views helpful. We would be more than pleased to discuss them with you in more detail in the New Year, and if you wish to see sites for yourself, host a visit. Please contact me if you would like to find out more information either about the Birchall site, or other sites in the East Midlands.

Yours sincerely



David Wallace
International Director

