

Our Ref: NG/JW/2312.01
23 December 2005

Ms Jane Bransby
Secretary to the Casino Advisory Panel
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2 - 4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5D

Dear Ms Bransby

Casino Advisory Panel consultation on research and scoping exercise

We have noted from your website that you consulted interested bodies (including Regional Development Agencies) on the above exercise in a letter dated 11 November 2005. Unfortunately the Agency does not appear to have received a letter therefore I trust that you will still be in a position to take our submission into account in the event that it reaches you after the 31 December 2005 deadline.

In October 2004 the Northwest Regional Development Agency, in partnership with the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA) and Government Office for the North West (GONW), appointed Pion Economics to conduct a study to assess the economic regeneration and tourism benefits of potential casino developments in the region. The aim of the study was to inform the Agency's position for working with partners and to assist the NWRA in the development of a casinos policy within the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy.

Stage 1 of the study (Market Analysis) assessed the generic economic benefits of regional casinos and collated information about known casino development interests in the region. Stage 2 of the study (Scenario Development) tested the relative economic, regenerative and tourism benefits of various scenarios of casino development in the NW, based largely upon those known development interests identified in Stage 1.

As part of this work those Local Authorities and casino operators with an interest were invited to contact the appointed consultants. Through this process it was determined that the main interests for the development of regional casinos in the North West were located in Manchester, Trafford, Salford, Blackpool and Liverpool. In addition, interests for large casinos were registered for St Helens, Southport, Manchester and Blackpool.

The consultants' view was that *"If economic, tourist and deprived groups are weighted equally, Manchester and Blackpool are ranked at roughly the same level with Liverpool in third position, Trafford and finally Salford"*.

As only one preferred candidate location can be identified for the regional casino pilot it follows that the only possible contenders are Blackpool and Manchester. A justification for each can be offered in terms of regeneration. In Manchester a regional casino would generate localised regeneration, in the context of a diversified

and generally buoyant economy. In Blackpool a regional casino would help to restructure a much less diversified and weaker economy, which in the consultants' view *"is continuing to struggle against entrenched decline"*. The consultants' concluded that *"in these terms it is difficult not to assign a higher priority to Blackpool"*.

The study was completed in June 2005 and was considered by the Agency's Board in July 2005. I enclose a copy of the consultants final report. Based on the study recommendations, the Board resolved that the Agency support Blackpool as the North West's preferred candidate location for the regional casino pilot. The Agency has subsequently worked with the NWRA to secure a supportive strategic policy context within interim draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West. We understand that the regional casinos policy contained within the interim draft RSS has already been shared with you as part of the NWRA's submission.

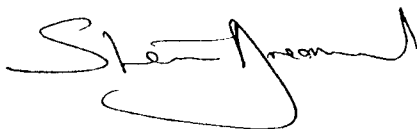
The strategic context for the regeneration of Blackpool has now been further strengthened as a result of the finalisation of the Northwest Regional Economic Strategy (RES) 2006 which has now been submitted to Ministers (copy attached). The RES has been produced as a result of a huge consultation exercise (page 10 refers) and is a document owned by the Northwest region as a whole, being signed off by 25 key regional stakeholders who have been fully involved in both its preparation and finalisation (page 4). The RES contains 45 transformational actions which are essential to achieve the step change required in the Northwest economy. One of these (number 48, page 35) is to implement the Blackpool Masterplan, including Blackpool as the priority for regional casino development in the UK.

The Masterplan envisages contemporary resort casino environments as an intrinsic part of the resort core. They are considered key to an all year economy, the development of a quality entertainment destination of national and international significance, and a step change in visitor numbers and resort wide turnover. The Agency has demonstrated its commitment to the regeneration of Blackpool through the establishment in February 2005 of the ReBlackpool Urban Regeneration Company. In addition, the delivery of the Blackpool Masterplan is one of two top priorities in the Central Lancashire City Region Development Programme.

On this basis the Agency strongly supports the identification of Blackpool as the single regional casino pilot, and would urge the Panel to recognise its strategic significance and do the same.

I trust these comments are of assistance but if you wish to discuss any matter further please contact Nick Gerrard, Head of Strategy and Policy (Nick.Gerrard@nwda.co.uk Tel 01925 400150)

Yours sincerely



Steven Broomhead
Chief Executive