

8 August 2006

Ms Kate Rounce
Casino Advisory Panel Secretariat
DCMS
2 – 4 Cockspur Street
LONDON
SW1Y 5DH

Dear Ms Rounce

EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC FOLLOWING BLACKPOOL'S SHORTLISTING FOR A REGIONAL CASINO

I would like to personally participate in the examination in public in Blackpool on Friday, 8 September 2006.

As Chief Executive of the Lancashire & Blackpool Tourist Board Ltd (LBTB), I represent the collective voice of tourism in the sub-region, to which Blackpool is the dominant player. The Tourist Board is charged with developing and promoting the visitor economy in the County and is the main delivery agent in the sector for the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA). As the RDA has unequivocally stated Blackpool is their preferred location in the Region and LBTB at its Board meeting held on 19 May, 2006 wholeheartedly endorsed this view. A casino in Blackpool would secure the town's future, fit superbly with the entertainment and tourism offer that the resort already has, as well as boost the resort's attractiveness to new visitors so that Blackpool can again become a world-class tourism destination.

As a brand Blackpool is regionally, nationally and internationally known and as such the NWDA in its regional tourism strategy – **the Strategy for Tourism in England's Northwest** – classifies the resort as a "**development**" brand as part of its star brand approach to marketing the region's tourism product. The Agency also regards the Blackpool Masterplan as one of six **signature projects** listed in the strategy focusing on its ambition to develop "**casinos, world-class conventions and top entertainment.**"

At a sub-regional level its revival is prominently featured in the Lancashire and Blackpool Visitor Economy Strategy (VES), which is a 10-year blueprint, looking to maximise the benefits of the visitor economy to the gross added value (GVA) of the sub-region. The positive economic impact Blackpool's regeneration would have on all of Lancashire and the wider North West Region cannot be overstated and dovetails with the Lancashire & Blackpool Tourist Board's overall aim "**to revitalise and reposition the visitor economy in Lancashire and Blackpool so that it is more productive and sustainable by working in partnership**".

By 2016 the VES predicts in its vision that "**Blackpool will be transformed into a world-class visitor destination and appeal to increasingly affluent and discerning visitors.**" In the spatial context Blackpool is seen as the major economic driver for the sub-region's visitor economy – this fact also being recognised in the recently drafted Lancashire Economic Strategy (LES). The LES has identified a set of six strategic headline economic priorities including Blackpool 21st century destination and tourism as two distinct areas.

The Lancashire and Blackpool Destination Management Plan 2006 / 2007 documents the work

currently being undertaken in the resort in the **Major Visitor Investment Proposals** highlighting its Hounds Hill Shopping Centre, New Promenade and Sea Wall, Central Corridor, Southern Gateway, St John's Square, Talbot Road, Stanley Park and **tramway** improvement – work either completed or redevelopment in progress. Add to this impressive list the casino development would bring between £200 to £450 million of capital investment and between 4.2 and 5.5 million extra visits annually to the town and the regenerative effect is obvious. Blackpool would be a destination for gambling that would attract 90% of casino visitors from outside the local area, many staying overnight. This will clearly maximise the economic impact for the town's communities whilst minimising the social impacts.

Blackpool's seaside history is another unique selling point for the resort and the Council has just been instrumental in establishing a Heritage Forum that officially launched the Blackpool Heritage Strategy 2006 – 2010 on 21st July 2006 at the Grand Theatre – the home of the National Theatre of Variety. The popular seaside holiday is something of global importance that originated in Blackpool and coupled with the impressive heritage assets, Tower, Piers, Winter Gardens, Pleasure Beach, Grand Theatre, Promenade, Stanley Park, Illuminations and Trams these will help to make the case to Government for World Heritage Site status.

Whilst leisure visitors are an important factor in the town's local economy the business tourist is even more lucrative – spending double that of a leisure visitor and in the case of conference delegates extending the season to the shoulder periods in Spring and Autumn. In this context the development of the Blackpool International Airport as the fastest growing regional airport in the UK is playing its part in the Town's revival plans. York Aviation LLP have been commissioned by the Lancashire Economic Partnership to assess the significance the airport will have on the casino development and achievement of the Master Plan for Blackpool as part of a wider social and economic study of the Airport's development.

As I am sure you are already aware Blackpool has the UK's only Regional Gaming Academy at the Blackpool and Fylde College which has already become a national centre for excellence for education and training in gambling. This will help ensure that local people, especially the local communities surrounding the conference-leisure quarter, benefit from the 2,500 to 3,400 new jobs that will be created from this development. I chair the NW Tourism Sector Skills and Productivity Alliance and LBTB lead on skills and productivity issues for all five North West Tourist Boards therefore I am extremely encouraged by the way Blackpool has linked worklessness with the casino development proposal.

In summary, LBTB would wish to make the case for Blackpool to the forthcoming examination in public based on the points made in this submission, together with the Board's letter of support from the Chair, Lesley Lloyd, dated 20 June 2006 and sent to Jane Bransby. Blackpool's ambitious plans to develop a conference leisure quarter, incorporating a casino, four star hotel, leisure and retail complex has to be applauded and demonstrates the importance to the domestic holiday market of the traditional British seaside resort.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on telephone number 01257 226600 if you require further clarification on any of the points I have made above.

Yours sincerely

MIKE WILKINSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE