

17 October 2006

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

Dear Ms Rounce

At the Examination in Public held in Blackpool on 8 September, Professor Crow invited participants, to which I was one, to write to the Panel with additional information they were unable to present on the day due to the line of questioning. As the Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board represents the voice of tourism in the sub-region and is the Northwest Regional Development Agency's main delivery agent for developing and promoting the visitor economy in Lancashire and Blackpool I would like to make the following points.

Regional and Local Context

The RDA's Chief Executive, Steve Broomhead, in his remarks at the EIP on behalf of the Agency was unequivocal in supporting Blackpool's case as the preferred location in the Northwest for the regional casino and the Northwest Regional Assembly representative similarly followed suit. 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 an **"attack/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."**

The Tourist Board's Board meeting held on 19th May 2006 endorsed that view as did the Lancashire Economic Partnership – the sub-regional economic partnership - in a letter to you dated 5 September, 2006. In our opinions, a regional casino in Blackpool would secure the Town's future, and fits superbly with the existing entertainment and tourism offer that the resort already has a national and international reputation for, as well as boosting the resort's attractiveness to potential new visitors so that Blackpool can again become a world class tourism destination. With the new license, Blackpool would be a destination for gambling attracting 90% of casino visitors from outside the local area. This will maximise economic benefits for the town's communities whilst minimising social impacts.

In the new Visitor Economy Strategy for the sub-region published within the last few days (copy enclosed), which is a 10-year blueprint looking to maximise the benefits of the visitor economy to the regional GVA, Blackpool's 21st Century World Class Resort concept is the main focus of economic growth. The resort's major investment proposals are equally well documented in the Lancashire and Blackpool Destination Management Plan 2006 – 2007 representing its place as the dominant player and the key economic driver for the sub-region's tourism spend.

Need for Regeneration

In 2004 Blackpool represented over 30% of the sub-regional tourism spend figure of £2.4 billion. Not surprisingly, the importance of Blackpool's economic performance to the wider Fylde Coast is significant too. Therefore a strong and vibrant Blackpool is crucial to the sub-region's overall visitor economy and to the Visitor Economy Strategy's target of £3 billion tourism spend by 2016. 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.

Statistically, the Lancashire and Greater Manchester sub-regions account for almost 60% of the regional tourism spend of £10.5 billion – the Lake District in contrast is only 11%. This area appears top of the job league table in the region with almost 51,000 jobs dependent on tourism – over 50% in Blackpool. Of the regions 5,700 serviced accommodation establishments 31%, i.e. 1,786 establishments are in Blackpool alone. In terms of bed spaces this represents 60,000. So the positive economic impact Blackpool's regeneration would have on all the County of Lancashire and the wider Northwest region cannot be overstated and clearly dovetails with the 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"**

In marketing terms, as well as being designated as an **"Attack Brand"** to reflect its regional, national and international reputation, the resort is also a themed champion for 2 of the 5 winning themes the Tourist Board uses to market the area to potential visitors, e.g. Family Fun and Night-Time Buzz. The Tourist Board works jointly with Blackpool Council on print production, holiday exhibitions and travel trade promotions to maximise the benefits and minimise the costs. Incidentally, LBTB spends 25% of its overall marketing budget on the resort's £750K TV marketing campaign – a partnership of public/private sector operators and businesses.

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 conclusion, as I was unable to personally make a contribution at the Blackpool EIP. I should appreciate if the above points, and those made in earlier communications with the Secretariat could be taken into account when the Casino Advisory Panel carries out its deliberations. You may wish to note that the Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board is a significant public/private sector strategic partnership for the sub-region with a membership of 15 local authorities, including the County Council, 2 unitary authorities – Blackpool Council being one – and 12 district councils, together with 260 commercial members.

Yours sincerely

MIKE WILKINSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE