

Quakers

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The Secretary,
Casino Advisory Panel,
Dept. for Culture, Media and Sport,
2-4, Cockspur Street,
London.
SW1Y. 5D

10 August 2006

Dear Madam,

Newcastle City Council- Casino bid

I refer to the bid submitted on behalf of Newcastle City Council (NCC) for short-listing for a casino under the provisions of the Gambling Act 2005 and understand that local authorities have now been given until 14 August 2006 to re-submit evidence to the panel. I presume that the same courtesy will be extended to objectors and accordingly submit this objection on behalf of Newcastle Quakers.

The NCC casino bid is incidental to its proposal for the development of a Regional Convention Centre and some of the claims made appear to relate to the Convention Centre and not to the proposed casino. It is not clear from the bid document whether the public consultation exercise included a specific enquiry relating to the inclusion of a casino within the Convention Centre and therefore the levels of support claimed must be open to question.

The primary criterion requires that locations satisfy the need for the best possible test of social impact. The NCC bid, we would submit, fails, in that it will not significantly impact on the unemployment situation in the area, currently 8,000 out of an adult working population of 119,000 or approx. 7% (1). Recently announced redundancies will add to this, significantly. The bid appears to be over optimistic in terms of job creation within the casino, which we estimate might be of the order of 40 to 60, the majority of which would probably be at the minimum wage level.

The NCC bid states that there are already four casinos in Newcastle, two of which appear to have opened recently; further analysis shows that there are 217 gambling establishments within the city limits.

The bid also states that there were **104 NEW** referrals to the problem gambling agency between April and December 2005 indicating that there is already a significant increase in problem cases. A new and larger casino would undoubtedly add to this and require

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additional servicing. The bid is silent on this and we would pose the question 'Who would fund the need for the additional servicing which might require a funding level of ~~£~~250,000-~~£~~500,000 p.a. on a *de minimus* basis of ~~£~~2,500 per case.

The NCC bid states that there will be a partnership between Gamcare and NECA which it is claimed, will 'mitigate the risks' of problem gambling. NCC also state that it will ensure that problem gambling is addressed by making this a criterion for the competitive tendering process. The thinking here appears to be in terms of prevention rather than advice/support/treatment once a problem has developed.

We would have wished to see a reference to debt advice and support as well as acknowledgement of the needs of younger people (who tend to show higher levels of gambling debt) and the special measures necessary to assist them.

The NCC bid acknowledges that there is limited evidence about what can be achieved through education and public health campaigns. There are clear gaps in NCC thinking here e.g. how to assist *the families* of problem gamblers- an aspect much neglected.

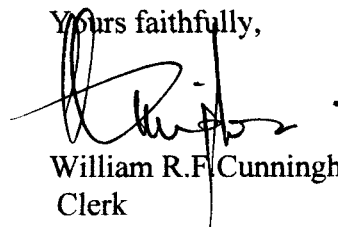
The NCC bid states that it will try to prevent casual gambling but it does not say how this will be done, and as the proposed site is near areas of high deprivation, experience tends to suggest that casual gambling will increase, as there tends to be a higher rate of casual gambling among the more disadvantaged groups and consequently we might anticipate higher levels of problems. Regional casinos may have **1,250** slot machines and this is one of the most problematic forms of gambling.

The government has recently expressed concern over the level of personal borrowing; the Newcastle/Gateshead area has been identified as having a high level of informal borrowing through door step lending, often at extortionate rates of interest. We are concerned that the addition of another casino close to that area would exacerbate this problem. Again the bid is silent on how and to what extent this would be addressed.

The attempt to present these casinos as a 'civic virtue' we entirely reject. The attempt to make a profit out of the inevitable loss and possible suffering of others is the very antithesis of 'love thy neighbour'.

We ask that the Newcastle City Council bid be rejected on the above grounds and that no consent or approval be given to it, either on a regional, large or small casino basis, as defined in the Act.

Yours faithfully,



William R.F. Cunningham
Clerk

Newcastle Preparative Meeting

(1) Government Office NE